



AFTER THE SMOKE CLEARS

Diversify your pheasant habitat

By Aaron Kuehl

Jake Vancil

Covered in fire protective Nomex, face blackened with soot, you guzzle down water and survey the ashen remnants from a hard day eating smoke and putting fire to your favorite patch of grass. Will your habitat management efforts end here, or will you go beyond maintenance to bolster your habitat?

Habitat managers know well the benefits prescribed fire can have on old, degraded grasslands: it helps control unwanted weeds, maintains plant species diversity, creates open spots for new growth and chick mobility and adds plant nutrients. Many are content with these improvements,

setting back plant succession a few years, keeping the trees at bay. But, how about taking your grassland to higher level?

One of the great benefits of a prescribed fire is that it leaves behind an ideal seed bed. Now is the time to inter-seed your project to achieve greater plant diversity because the more diversity the more insects, which chicks need to grow. Diverse habitat also provides better structure for nesting, brooding and winter cover.

It doesn't take much, one to two pounds of seed per acre will make a significant difference in diversity and structure. Be sure to include native annuals and biennial flowers that establish

quickly and bring an immediate flush of color to your project while providing pollinating insects needed food.

Disperse your interseed mix across the entire project or experiment in strips, along the edges or in patches. Progressive managers might also use this opportunity to do a bit of strip disking or targeted herbicide application to set back aggressive grasses and give other species a chance to establish themselves.

Today there are fewer acres for wildlife than ever before, so make every acre count. Think Habitat! 🦋

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