TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
U.S. SENATE

ON

"THE NEXT GENERATION OF BIOFUELS: CELLULOSIC ETHANOL AND THE 2007 FARM BILL"

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SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
BROOKINGS

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Dave Nomsen. I am the Vice-president of Governmental Affairs for St. Paul, MN based Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever and I reside in Garfield, MN. My primary duties involve supporting a strong framework of federal policies and programs supporting natural resource conservation that compliment our habitat-focused mission at Pheasants Forever. I am especially pleased to be here today in Brookings and to acknowledge my strong personal ties to SDSU. I received my M.S. Degree here in Wildlife Management in 1980 and spent a number of years afterwards as a member of the faculty of the Wildlife and Fisheries Department.

I am pleased to be here today to offer Pheasants Forever's thoughts on "The Next Generation of Biofuels: Cellulosic Ethanol and the 2007 Farm Bill." Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever's 700 chapters nationwide and 115,000 members complete on average more than 20,000 individual habitat projects annually in partnership with America's conservation minded farmers and ranchers. The vast majority of these projects are completed on private lands and involve grassland establishment and management, while complimenting the operations of America's working farms. Projects involve the establishment of nesting, brood rearing, and winter cover for pheasants, quail, and a wide array of wildlife. In 2006, PF spent more than $33.8 million completing 23,552 projects benefiting wildlife on over 460,000 acres. Since the organizations inception in 1982, PF has spent nearly $200 million to complete 4.4 million acres

of habitat work.

Senator Thune, a Spring 2007 report entitled Home Grown Energy Security - The Potential for Chemicals, Fuels, and Power from Prairie Grass and completed by the Great Plains Institute concludes: The research outlined in this report suggests that sustainably-produced biomass - particularly native prairie grasses well-adapted to the Great Plains - can make a significant contribution to our country's energy and material needs. I agree.

One of the potential fuels for the next generation of cellulosic ethanol was thrust into the national spotlight when in January 2006 as part of the State of the Union address; President Bush mentioned the word switchgrass. While many in our country were unclear about how this related to energy production, many of our nations' 2.5 million pheasant hunters thought of good wildlife habitat and pheasant hunting. Switchgrass is a very valuable native species in the diverse grassland habitat mix important to wildlife and pheasants in particular.

Over the past several years, many states; including Minnesota, North Dakota, and Kansas have experienced record high levels of pheasant harvest with populations not seen since the Soil Bank days of the 50s and 60s. There is no better example of what those harvests have meant to the heartland than here in South Dakota. In 2005, 174,217 hunters harvested 1.9 million pheasants contributing $153 million to the SD economy. The common element contributing to these record and near record harvest levels is the habitat impact of the successful Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Protecting the benefits of CRP for soil, water, and wildlife should be the starting point for discussion about future cellulosic biofuels programs.

By last summer, numerous proposals and media called for using land enrolled in USDA conservation programs, and especially the CRP for the production of biofuels. The outcry become so intense that Pheasants Forever and many of our nations' leading wildlife conservation organizations wrote to Committee members expressing our collective support for renewable biofuels in diminishing the Nation's dependency on fossil fuels. We expressed concern that in the rush to develop biofuel crops, we may inadvertently sacrifice many of the natural resource conservation victories achieved over the past two decades.

We asked that as you seek ways to promote biofuels that you carefully consider the impacts of increased stubble removal and diminished vegetative cover as they relate to wildlife, soil, water, and air quality; and investigate all proposals and facts regarding the use of land enrolled in conservation programs as a source of crops grown for biofuels production. We concluded that utilization of CRP lands for biofuels is premature. We simply don't have adequate research that supports use of CRP for biofuels as the best available option.

In the interest of continuing our dialogue about future generations of cellulosic biofuels let me offer several elements for discussion that will likely be important from a wildlife conservation standpoint:

Perennial vs. Annual. Perennial crops offer much more in terms of environmental benefits for soil, water, and wildlife conservation when compared to annually planted crops. In addition, perennial crops such as deep-rooted native warm season grasses offer benefits including

carbon sequestration important to offset global warming.

Harvest scenarios. Annual harvest regimes with complete plant removal offer limited environmental benefits. Scenarios where 50% removal is the goal can provide important wildlife habitat for resident species including ring-necked pheasants and white-tailed deer. Leaving stubble height of at least 12-15 inches may ensure adequate residual cover to attract nesting hens the following season, in addition to helping capture moisture for higher biomass yields. Also important is the timing of the harvest. Harvest after the nesting season can be critical for wildlife production.

Monocultures vs. mixed species stands. Monocultures of any grass are very limited in providing wildlife habitat whereas mixed stands of grasses and forbs or flowers can provide very valuable habitat for multiple species. Switchgrass grows in bunches and adding additional species of grasses and forbs can dramatically improve benefits for soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat.

"Sodsaver" or Non-cropland Conversion. Any land that does not meet the definition of cropland, as determined by the USDA/Farm Service Agency, converted from non cropland status to cropland should be made ineligible for any federal benefit, including but not limited to price and income support payments, crop insurance, disaster payments, conservation program enrollment, and FSA farm loan benefits. Remaining prairies provide tremendously valuable wildlife habitat and should not be converted for commodity crop or biofuel production.

Research and Development. Research and development funding should promote the next generation of biofuels and renewable energy technology based upon mixtures of grasses and forbs vs. monocultures. Goals should include fish, wildlife, soil, nutrient management, and water conservation. Conservation benefits from farm bill conservation programs should not be sacrificed or diminished.

Native grasses have deep root systems that can protect and enhance soil productivity while protecting and improving water quality. Wildlife benefits will depend upon species planted and management and harvest parameters. Landowners may receive revenue from the sale of biomass, carbon credits, recreational opportunities, and seed sales. Entire communities may benefit from sustainable next generation biofuels if wildlife objectives are built into the programs. On behalf of Pheasants Forever, I offer our organizations assistance to have a continued dialogue leading to conservation-friendly cellulosic programs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will be glad to address any of your questions or comments.