

Columbia County Success from the Field

Returning Habitat to the Land

Background

In the rolling farmland of Cambria, Wisconsin, Jason Givens, owner and operator of Lighthouse Kennels, has been raising and training world class hunting dogs since 1996—one of the dogs under his training won a national field trial championship in 2003. Along with Springer and Cocker Spaniels, Jason also raises and releases around 1,200 pheasants, 500 quail, and 500 chukar partridge per year on his 120-acre property. Driven by the need to provide habitat for his released birds and a natural environment to train the hunting dogs, Jason has been restoring pasture and cropland to mixed species forest and tallgrass prairie.

Program Successes

Starting in 2017, Jason began partnering with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Columbia County to create bird habitat. “To create game for the dogs, I have to create the habitat,” explains Jason. Through the Conservation Stewardship Program, seven acres of trees have already been planted on the property and more acres are planned for the future. By using a diverse mix of trees and shrubs including bur oak, Northern red oak, white oak, chokecherry, hackberry, American hazelnut and blueberry, the released birds are provided the habitat and food sources they need to establish stable populations. Neighbors noted through Jason’s efforts, local populations of pheasants have been on the rise—several miles away. Through the assistance the NRCS gave to plant several thousand trees, a direct improvement in local wildlife has been realized. “It’s a rewarding experience to work with a landowner who has a genuine interest in improving his land,” stated Elizabeth Dawson, NRCS Soil Conservationist.

Future Plans

With the help of the agency, Jason hopes to continue planting his land back into native forest and oak savanna to provide natural habitat and environmental stability. As Jason put it, planting trees and forests is about leaving the land better than you found it, “In 50 years, after you’re gone, people won’t remember you, but if you plant a forest you leave a legacy.”



Elizabeth Dawson (L), NRCS Soil Conservationist, and Jason Givens (R) discuss the growth of a recent tree planting and make plans for future habitat restoration.



One of the dogs-in-training patiently waits for instruction as Jason prepares to release quail from their shelter.

