

2010-2012 Remote Game Bird Rearing Units Evaluation Executive Summary

Background:

In March 2010, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department), in cooperation with several sportsmen's groups and landowners, evaluated the effectiveness of remote game bird rearing units.

Outcomes:

2011- The Department ran 2 batches in 6 units (public and private lands). Birds were marked with colored elastomer and released at 4 weeks of age.

2012- The Department ran 2 batches in four units (public land only). Birds were toe clipped and released at 4 weeks of age.

Comparison of the two-year evaluation

Issue	2011 (1 st year)	2012(2 nd year)
Chicks purchased	2,400	1,660
Pre-release mortality	250	828
Birds released	2150	832
Marked birds returned	214	22
IDFG staff hours	702	200
Actual cost of personnel time and materials	\$34,000	\$14,310
Tech salary and materials Cost*	\$19,332	\$8,210
Materials only cost	\$6,076	\$4,563

*estimate using technician salaries to better reflect potential costs for a long-term program.

Lessons learned

- 1) Strict adherence to cleanliness of units and close monitoring of heat regulation is critical.
- 2) Toe clipping and restricting efforts to WMAs reduced expenses significantly.

Estimates of return-to-bag cost

We did not monitor survival of chicks post release or reporting rates of hunters utilizing the Wildlife Management Areas. The data provided in the report is based on defensible numbers in an attempt to foster discussion.

Costs of Bird-in-bag:

It was extremely difficult to determine the exact harvest return of marked birds. This table allows for discussion based on ranges of potential return. Potential return rates are calculated on the number of birds released:

Potential Return Rates				
	3.5% return rate*	25% return rate	50% return rate	70% return rate**
Bird-in-bag cost				
1 st year	\$258	\$36	\$18	\$13
2 nd year	\$283	\$39	\$20	\$14
Material Only cost				
1 st year	\$81	\$11	\$6	\$4
2 nd year	\$157	\$22	\$11	\$8

*Based on return rates from Nebraska study

**Based on estimated return rates for adult “put-and take” WMA roosters

Outcome Summary

This was an effort to compare the game bird rearing unit’s results to other pheasant release programs the Department conducts.

While there is some uncertainty on the exact cost per bird in the bag, the evaluation demonstrates that using rearing units is time consuming and mechanical failures can cause large losses of birds. Initiation of a permanent program of this size would reduce other activities of field staff.

The return rates do not appear to be sufficient or evenly distributed throughout the season to replace or efficiently supplement the traditional “put-and-take” WMA rooster program.

It does not appear that landowner attitudes on access or habitat changed significantly by having a unit on their property. Department staff did not receive any requests for assistance with HIP, USDA farm bill or Access Yes! from landowners during the evaluation period. It appears issues that are currently impacting habitat development (commodity prices, development pressures, etc.) are not overcome by the placement of these units.

The Department will still assist sportsmen’s groups who wish to continue this effort with quick issuance of needed permits and technical assistance on habitat development.