

Illinois counting its chickens

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A research scientist in Illinois wants to bring the state's prairie chicken population back to the level it was when Abraham Lincoln was alive.

Jeff Walk, who works for the Illinois Natural History Survey, believes it will only take 10 years to have a viable, self-sustaining population living in the open grasslands of Pyramid State Park, the Southern Illinoisian newspaper reports.

According to estimates, in Lincoln's day some 10 million to 15 million prairie chickens roamed the southern part of the state but their numbers soon dropped because of an agricultural boom that robbed them of grasslands.

"Pyramid is our best shot for establishing another population, because of its size," Walk explained. "It takes probably at least 5,000 acres of grassland in a small area. There are very, very few places in the state where we have those conditions."

Prairie chickens are members of the grouse family.

Donor birds would likely come from Nebraska, one of the few remaining states with a substantial prairie chicken population.

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