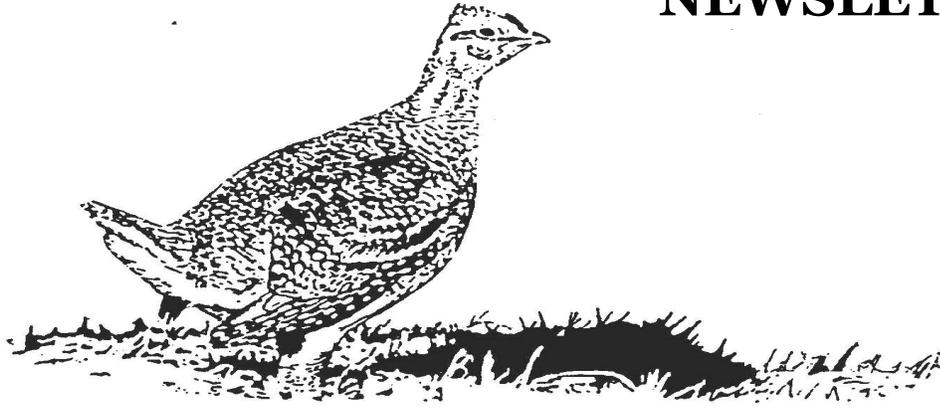


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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MALE WISCONSIN GROUSE SEEKS MINNESOTA FEMALE

by Thomas C. J. Doolittle, District Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Forest Service

This past April U.S. Forest Service biological staff from the Chequamegon-Nicolet National forest, in cooperation with many partners captured 101 Sharp-tailed Grouse from Marshall, Roseau and Kittson counties in northwest Minnesota. In total, 29 birds (13 hens and 16 males) were transported to Moquah Barrens in northwestern Wisconsin. The trapping crew deployed radios on five males and all were banded with white plastic leg bands with black numbers. This was our pilot year, and it was a learning experience for everyone.

The trapping only occurred on dancing grounds with 15 or more dancing males, and we could only capture 20% of the male count from a given dancing ground. We were also limited to areas that were not in conflict with Sharp-tailed Grouse research in northwestern Minnesota. We received permission to trap a location once it was surveyed by the local DNR wildlife manager and the location was reviewed as an area that would not be in conflict with ongoing grouse research. All this meant was there were a lot of moving parts to affect the project. This process, at the advice of Charlotte Roy, was very salable to the private landowners and assured minimal impacts.

The effort between the agencies and private partners was a reminder of what great things we can do together. Our colleagues from Wisconsin and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Red Cliff and Bad River Bands of Great Lakes Chippewa, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Minnesota and Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Societies, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (Refuges and Private Lands) all worked together to initiate the recovery of Wisconsin's most northern population of Sharp-tailed Grouse. However, the real jewel in the process was the cooperation of the private landowners in northwestern Minnesota. We not only received permission from the landowners but they aided in determining trapping locations and calling their neighbors to help get permission to trap on adjacent properties. The Forest Service has written thank you letters to each of them reiterating our appreciation for their help and stewardship for the resource.

As a pilot year this was our chance to meet landowners and our management colleagues in Minnesota as well as learn about the logistics to catch sharptails in their haunts within the northwestern counties. It is hard to express the gratitude that I have for the Minnesota Area and Assistant Managers who took time out of their precious spring schedules to provide dots on a map and answer a myriad of questions about sharptails in their management areas. In addition, the advise and support of Charlotte Roy, Jodie Provost, Bill Berg (MN DNR emeritus) and Paul Telander was instrumental in getting the project on the wing. And yes, Paul, Bill, Jodie and Charlotte were spot on – catching those hens is much tougher than it looks.

On the early spring of 2016, Moquah Barrens Management Area was down to one last active dancing ground with only two attending males so any addition of bio-mass to the population was critical. The result of this year's release I would express with guarded optimism since we moved only 13 hens. As said above, catching hens is tough!

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

Probably you've heard of the term, ecotourism. In fact, most of the people reading this probably have been ecotourists at times – we've traveled to places to see nature and learn more. Anyone who sits in a sharptail blind, or participates in a crane count fits this category (many of my hunting and fishing trips end up this way – I watch nature and learn something and bring home few, if any, birds or fish).

Most tourists, as they are driving through our northern closed-canopy forest, will automatically look out the side window when they see an opening in the trees – it could be an upland opening, a lake or bog or sometimes just a creek or maybe even a wide driveway. After becoming tunnel-visioned, seeing only so far as the dense roadside forest, we certainly like to take a longer view and who knows what kind of critter you might see.

It is in this context that groups are developing auto tours, helping tourists to learn about the lands they are driving through. Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens, Moquah each have a tour of their own. Each of these focuses on the property itself. The newest project in the making is a bit different, as it addresses a broader landscape.

For a couple of years now, representatives from the Friends of Crex, Friends of the Namakagon Barrens, Friends of the Bird Sanctuary and WSGS, have been meeting occasionally in a group known as the Northwest Barrens Working Group. No dues, no officers, and I'm not even sure that's the name most would call us. Our mission is to help citizens and decision-makers realize the wonders of Wisconsin's great Northwest Sand Barrens.

This group has published a photo book and a brochure so far and we're starting down the road towards an auto tour of the Northwest Sands. Initial thoughts were to develop a tour from Polk County's Sterling Barrens north to Bayfield County's Moquah Barrens, but it became obvious that very few tourists would undertake such a trek. We settled on an area in the heart of the Northwest Barrens around and including the Douglas County Wildlife Area, known locally as the Bird Sanctuary.

Jane Anklam of the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary took on the task and this week I saw her first draft of the tour. It stretches from the north end of the Namekagon Barrens north to Mott's Ravine State Natural Area in the Brule River State Forest, including a tour through the Douglas County Wildlife Area itself. Lots of writing and rewriting remains, but we hope the end results is that tourists automatically look out their vehicle's side windows as they come to a big open area and see and understand the value and beauty of the Northwest Sands.

Thank you, *Dave Evenson*



THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) is a private, nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of the sharp-tailed grouse and its habitat in Wisconsin. Questions about the WSGS should be directed to the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840.

WSGS OFFICERS

President: Dave Evenson
Vice President: Tom Ziegeweid
Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Evrard

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

Board Members:

Mike Cole Ed Frank
Paul Kooiker Bruce Moss
John Probst John Zatopa

Newsletter Compositor: Kim Wheeler

...Wisconsin Grouse continued from page 1

However, most of the transplanted birds have stayed in or near the management unit after their initial release. One male potentially flew 29 miles south of the Moquah Barrens, joining two cocks and a hen on a dancing ground in Douglas County. Greg Kessler, WDNR, observed the white banded bird during one of his dancing ground surveys. Yellow bands and blue bands were placed on sharptails in that area six years ago so it could be a faded band on an exceptionally old bird or one of our released birds.

Of the five radioed males, none are definitively on the air as of June 15. There were two known mortalities by raptors. One transmitter has been fading in and out and two have been off the air with unknown outcomes. If these birds were in their normal homeland habitats, we would expect 60 percent to perish within a year. Therefore mortalities are a given, with a higher risk to a newly relocated group of birds. Even with that being said, there are a number (>15) of released birds still alive in Moquah, and we are hoping for some reproduction. Further surveys in late season and next spring's dancing ground surveys will end the first chapter of this story.

In late May during our big burns, flocks of up to seven birds were flushed by staff and a number of singles and doubles were also flushed. Biological staff have observed two different hens coming into males on the Moquah dancing ground, and at least three different males were observed with the Moquah males. Who by the way, were quite rude to their Minnesota counterparts, likened to a playoff game between the Packers and the Vikings. However, within a few weeks the males were welcomed as long as they did not act like males. We have also flushed birds from historic dancing grounds so occupancy of maintained historic sites was encouraging.

The risk in this pilot effort is not getting sufficient numbers for the long term, but we likely thwarted off an extirpation event in a management area that Aldo Leopold surveyed in the late 1920s. The effort showed us that they all don't leave and that brushland birds from flat lands of northwestern Minnesota on the short-term can adapt to rolling barrens. We also learned that late afternoon releases allow birds to settle in and cue into a new area since they have a short time prior to roosting after their release. They were also released on an active dancing ground and could hear the local birds dancing in the early morning hours. This epiphany was a product of logistics and not the plan. In scientific terms, this project is about much wet paper you can throw at a wall to see how much will stick. Well, we know some of it does stick, so the challenge will be about moving a sufficient number of hens over the next few years with the least amount of impact. I came away from the project with 27 recommendations on how to get there, and again like wet paper some will stick by the consensus of opinion.

As I move on as the project lead, the baton will be passed over to my friend and Forest Biologist Dan Eklund (another grousophile). Matt Bushman will act as my replacement, and Matt has a long term commitment to the management of Moquah Barrens and knows the resource intimately. I know under their watch that the discussion will be good, and the sharptails will persist in Moquah Barrens. The funding through the USDA Joint Chiefs Initiative and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is in place for next year, so it's about garnering the support for a full scale trapping effort in 2017. I hope to volunteer on the project next year and in subsequent years in my travels to and from Alaska. My sincerest thanks to all. It's has been a hoot!!

(Editors Note: This lengthy article appeared in the Summer 2016 issue of The Minnesota Sharptailer, the newsletter of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society.)



SUMMER BOARD MEETING

by Jim Evrard

President Dave Evenson called the board meeting to order at 1:20 p.m. at the home of Jim Evrard in Grantsburg. Board members present were Mike Cole, Evenson, Evrard, Paul Kooiker, Bruce Moss, John Probst and Tom Ziegeweid. Members absent were Ed Frank and John Zatopa. Guests were Councilor Dave Clausen and DNR Upland Game Bird Ecologist Mark Witecha. The meeting opened with self-introductions of those at the meeting.

The board election was held with the present officers, President Evenson, Vice President Ziegeweid, and Secretary/Treasurer Evrard reelected by unanimous consent.

Evrard then gave the Secretary/Treasurer's reports. The minutes of the past annual and board meetings were printed in the past WSGS newsletters. As of July 6, the WSGS checking account balance was \$6,243.74, the CD value as of October 16, 2015 was \$2,643.00 for a total of \$8,886.74. Evrard was also notified that the U.S. Bank checking account will gain \$20 for a mistake the bank had made on a 1/14/13 deposit! Evrard also said that he received word that the \$3,000 pledge made to the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary was cancelled due to failed negotiations to buy land to add to the Douglas County Wildlife Area.

Evrard also said that \$32,329.10 from the U.S. forest Service had passed through the checking account to pay bills associated with the sharptail translocation project in the Moquah Barrens. Evrard also cautioned that we should attempt to stay under the \$50,000 limit of income so the IRS could not use that limit to boost the WSGS into a higher bracket status and make tax reporting more difficult.

Evenson led the discussion on grant requests. Pershing Wildlife Area Manager Mark Schmidt had indicated he was planning to submit a request for \$1,500 for prescribed burning, but no formal request was received. Schmidt will be told to submit a completed grant request form.

Crex Meadows Manager Steve Hoffman submitted a grant request for \$2,000 to help pay for firebreak construction to create a barrens corridor between Crex Meadows and the Kohler-Peet Barrens in the newly acquired former Burnett County forest. That request was approved with the understanding that the \$2,000 be paid in two payments, \$1,000 in late 2016 and the final \$1,000 in early 2017.

Moss then discussed a request from Ed Frank who was unable to attend the Board meeting about paying the travel expenses for several persons to travel to Michigan's UP to study the apparently successful sharptail habitat management program there. A discussion followed with the decision that the Michigan biologist in charge of their program instead be invited to our 2017 annual meeting to speak about the program with the understanding that the WSGS would pay for his travel costs.

John Probst brought up the concept of taking easements on private land to protect the little private-land sharptail habitat that remains. A long discussion then took place on federal farm programs, commodity prices, etc. Easements could be part of a federal Natural Resources Conservation Services project.

It was decided that Tom Doolittle be given a WSGS award in 2017 for his efforts in the sharptail translocation project in the Moquah Barrens. 2016 award winner, Mike Bablick of the U.S. Forest Service, should receive his plaque at a USFS meeting today.

It was also decided that our annual meeting will take place at the Heartwood Conference Center between Minong and Webb Lake on Saturday and Sunday, April 22 and 23, 2017. Evrard will follow through on his contact with a quote of \$99/room. A Sunday morning tour of the Namakagon barrens will be offered.

Evrard was directed to follow up on the possibility of printing the Jim Hale booklet with help from Kim Wheeler.

Moss reported that Jane Anklam, a member of the Friends of the Northwest Barrens, is working on tour plans for the region.

Evenson said that the third and final Lyme/St. Croix forest easement was approved by the DNR. Ed Frank represented the WSGS in this effort.

Mark Witecha gave a report on the recent DNR Sharptail Committee meeting attended by stakeholders with Jim Evrard representing the WSGS. The meeting decision to issue only 25 hunting permits in Unit 8 (also the total for the whole state) was greeted with concern by the DNR Wildlife Policy Team. Mark stated that the formula now used to calculate hunting permits needs to be improved. Much discussion took place including Ziegeweid who commented that rather than hunt 'surplus' birds in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area, those birds could be translocated to other management areas.

It was decided to investigate obtaining Citizen Based Monitoring funds for 2018 sharptail censusing in the Moquah Barrens (it is too late for 2017 money). It was also thought that the WSGS could fund a part of the spring 2017 sharptail census in the Moquah Barrens, perhaps involving students for Northland College.

The fall WSGS Board meeting might take place on the Brule River in the McNeil Lodge sometime between September 6 and September 16. Moss will investigate.

Ziegeweid brought up the possibility of focusing on pheasants in the Fish Lake Wildlife Area and with Pheasants Forever paying for food plots throughout the area. His proposal was not favored by the Board.

The adjourned at 4 p.m. for a social and a cookout on the Evrard Patio.

FIRST NOTICE – 2017 ANNUAL MEETING

The 2017 WSGS annual meeting will take place on Saturday and Sunday, April 22 and 23, 2017 at the Heartwood Conference Center located on STH 77 between the villages of Minong and Danbury. The sharp-tailed grouse management area featured will be the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (NBWA), located nearby in the far northeast corner of Burnett County.

The Heartwood Center is located in 700 acres of private woodland surrounding two lakes and the Namekagon River. The Heartwood Center was a former corporate retreat, composed of two luxurious lodges, duplexes and cottages. This is definitely not a 'ma and pa' resort!

The annual meeting will be from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. in the Eagle Lodge Conference Center adjacent to the Eagle Lake Lodge. Following the formal meeting, there will be a cash-bar social in the Center's bar and dinner will follow in the Center's restaurant with those dining ordering from the menu.

A tour of the NBWA will take place early Sunday morning. Following the tour, we will return to the Heartwood Center for breakfast, ending the 2017 annual meeting.

Lodge room rates are \$99 per room and cottage rates are \$189. Those attending the meeting need to call the Conference Center and make their own room reservations. Call toll-free at 800-577-4848 or call 715-466-6300, Fax 715-466-6306, Email at "heartwoodconferencecenter.com". Their address is N10884 Hoinville Rd., Trego, WI 54888. Ask for a free brochure describing the Center. More information will be provided in future newsletters.

WSGS BOARD ELECTION

The terms of WSGS Board Members Mike Cole, Ed Frank, and Jim Evrard expire in 2017. Nominations are being sought for three-year terms for the three positions. Any member interested in serving on the WSGS Board and any member wishing to nominate fellow members to the board, please write WSGS Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard or call 715-463-2446 or email at grouse.7067@gmail.com.



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WORDS OF PRAISE

No, the words aren't religious, but are words in occasional notes we receive from members.

One of latest notes came from Bill Berg, a retired Minnesota DNR biologist who had MDNR sharp-tailed grouse responsibilities and is active in the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS). Bill served as a MSGS mentor when the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) was formed in 1980.

Recently Bill sent this note when sending money for our WSGS art print raffle:

“Hey Jim,

Unsure if I will make WSGS [meeting] it is the same weekend as MPCS [Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society] in W. Minn. I hope to do some sharptail searching at Moquah for Tom Doolittle in a week or two.

I really like what WSGS is doing, and how you're doing it. Job well done!

~Bill Berg”

Another ‘Thank You’ came from Steve Hoffman, DNR Manager of the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Wildlife Complex in Grantsburg.

“Members of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

Thank you very much for your donation of \$1,000 to the Crex gift account. This money will be used for sharp-tailed grouse habitat work on Crex. With the county land trade finalized there is a lot of work that can be done! Thank you.”

~Steve Hoffman, Crex property manager”

Long-time WSGS member, retired DNR Forest Ranger Barry Stanek, included a note when he recently renewed his WSGS membership. Stanek, who lives near Gordon wrote:

“I did see about the same number of birds on the leks this spring as in other years. I had a great fall hunting in both the DCWA [Douglas County Wildlife Area] and NBWA [Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area]. Saw about 40 birds in 4 days of hunting. Glad to hear that you are seeing more on Crex. I expect there will be a good increase in the “27”[Highway 27]/Germann Fire Road] area, but I haven't spent much time over there to verify that.”

Another long-time member, Jay O'Connell wrote:

“This quick note is in response to Dave's “if you're doing any good” [column] in your last newsletter. I can't believe how much you guys do in your retirement for wildlife and sharptails. I really believe if it wasn't for W.S.G.S. the birds would really be in trouble in Wisconsin. I see a little daylight now. Most of you worked your whole life in the outdoors and to follow up in retirement with so much time in wildlife management is very admirable.

I'm near retirement myself but a little worn for the wear, oh what the heck I'm decrepit! I still get out to hunt, albeit a little more slowly, and thankfully your work may keep that going . . . “

WSGS MEMBERSHIP PROFILE

by Jim Evrard

The WSGS has been in existence for 25 years and I thought it might be interesting to look at its membership profile. As of April 2, 2016, the WSGS had 162 members down from a peak of about 200 some years ago.

Where do the members come from? As would be expected 137 (85%) are Wisconsin residents. Minnesota is home to 13 members followed by Michigan, Illinois and Washington, each with 2 members and a single member each from New Hampshire, Georgia, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho and California.

Most members (75%) want their newsletters sent by mail while the remaining 25% receive their newsletters electronically.

Of the 162 members, 6 are life members either by paying for a life membership or providing an important donation to the WSGS. These life members would include Louie Raymer, Ruth King and Buzz Buzzell who donated artwork for the annual WSGS Art Raffle, an important source of income for our group.

We also provide courtesy memberships (i.e. newsletters) for 15 politicians, government personnel and other persons who play an important role in the management of sharptails and their habitat in Wisconsin.

That leaves 141 members who pay dues to support the WSGS and our programs. It was difficult to separate members by their dues levels since the WSGS Board approved increasing the costs of the basic memberships in late 2015, so the dues levels reflect both 2015 and 2016 dues structures.

However, 4 members paid \$100 dues, 20 paid \$50 dues, 17 paid \$30, 33 paid \$25, 27 paid \$20, and finally 40 paid \$10 dues. The basic \$10 dues were increased to \$20 in 2015 as were some other dues levels. Membership dues are the largest income source for the WSGS.

It would be great if all members renewed their memberships promptly, but that is not the case. Currently two-thirds of the members have paid their dues in a timely fashion, but the remaining third are 'dues delinquent' (22 members—1 year, 7 members—2 years, 3 members—3 years and 2 members—4 years). Members whose dues are 5 or more years delinquent are dropped each year from the membership roles.

SUPPORT THE WSGS – BUY A CAP

We still have a small supply of embroidered tan and blaze orange caps for sale. The front of the cap features a colorful dancing sharp-tailed grouse under the black letters, WSGS. A strip of camouflage cloth covers the lower half of the cap and extends around the outside edge of the cap's bill. The size of the cap can be adjusted using a sturdy Velcro closure.

The cost of the cap is \$15 (shipping free) and can be ordered by using the renewal form on the back page of this newsletter. Please indicate the color you desire.



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL - The first line in your mailing label is the expiration date of your membership. Renew your membership if it has expired or is about to expire. Dues are the main source of income for our small all-volunteer organization.

Name: _____
Street/PO Box _____
City: _____ State: _____
Zip: _____
Phone: _____

Would you like to volunteer for:
_____ Board of Directors
_____ Newsletter articles
_____ Other

WSGS WEBSITE, "wisharptails.org", describes our goals and objectives, projects, members of our board, membership, contact information and electronic copies of recent newsletters. Those members wishing to receive their newsletters electronically should check the appropriate line below when renewing memberships.

Email: _____ _____ Electronic Newsletter

Enclosed:

\$ _____ Dues (Regular - \$20, Supporting - \$30, Organization/Business - \$25, Contributing - \$50,
Sustaining - \$100, Sponsor - \$200)

\$ _____ WSGS Logo Decal (\$1.50) (Dues are fully tax-deductible)

\$ _____ Four-color Cloth Patch (\$3.50)

\$ _____ Tan or blaze orange Cap (\$15 – indicate color choice)

\$ _____ King sharptail limited edition print (\$60) (all prices include postage and handling)

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AND RETURN THIS APPLICATION TO:
Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840

