

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

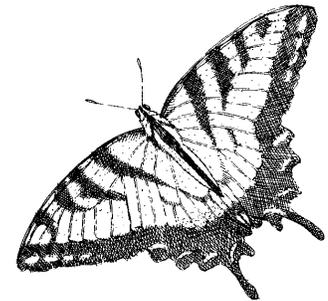
Habitat is what it's all about – we all know that. Here in the Lake States sharptails have a difficult time, since most human uses of the land are aimed at objectives that don't mesh well with prime sharptail habitat. In Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse exist in only a few places – in large dedicated management areas, in large salvage clearcuts due to budworm, wind, fire and on a few old-fashioned farm areas having a large grass base.

WSGS has long sponsored and promoted purchase or easement of lands that will be dedicated to favorable sharptail management. With our small budget we've kicked in for land acquisition several times at Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens and pledged towards the Douglas County Wildlife Area. More than that we have influenced and aided favorable land actions at the above areas, the Pershing Wildlife Area, and several easements on industrial forests.

As I write this, two major land deals that we have stood behind are not yet finalized. The DNR-Burnett County land trade agreement has been agreed to by both parties for two years, but is not yet finalized due to slow action by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This is the trade that will send wooded lands from the DNR to Burnett County as part of their county forest, will increase connectivity between Crex Meadows and the Kohler-Peet Barrens and will bring more of the Namekagon Barrens into state ownership.

The second phase of the DNR easement on the Lyme Timber Company's St. Croix Forest properties also dates back several years. This easement is in the heart of Douglas County's Northwest Sands. It is already is the best extensive sharptail habitat in the state, and can be better with more focused management.

The political winds seem to be against state land acquisition at present, which makes the WSGS nervous, with these two big deals unfinished. Rest assured WSGS will continue to use any resources we have to bring this story to a happy conclusion.



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 Ziegweid
Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Evrard

Board Members: Mike Cole Bruce Moss
Ed Frank John Probst
Paul Kooiker John Zatopa

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

Newsletter Compositor/Website Manager: Kim Wheeler

ART RAFFLE

The WSGS will again conduct a raffle for three, framed, limited edition, ready-to-hang-on-your-wall art prints depicting sharp-tailed grouse. Sharptail art is rare either as prints or as originals. The WSGS is offering three colorful prints by artists Owen Gromme, Buzz Balzer and Louie Raymer.



The Dean of Wisconsin Wildlife Artists, the late Owen Gromme's print, "On the Rise" depicts two flushing sharptails in typical Wisconsin habitat.



The Balzer print is on canvas and shows a winter flock of sharptails feeding on white birch buds on the edge of the Crex Meadows Refuge.



Louie Raymer's print depicts dancing male sharptails watched by sharptail hens in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area.

The raffle ticket is printed below. Those wishing to enter the raffle should place your name and address on the ticket stubs, detach the stubs, and send with your contribution to:

WSGS, 102 E. Crex Ave., Grantsburg, WI 54840

WSGS 2015 ART RAFFLE TICKET
 This raffle is being offered by the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
 102 E. Crex Ave.
 Grantsburg, WI 54840
Wisconsin Raffle License R0016707A-16013

The drawing will be conducted at 4:00 P.M., April 25, 2015, at the annual meeting of the WSGS in Red Cliff, Wisconsin. Ticket holders need not be present to win. Winners will be notified by mail or telephone. No prize has a value over \$500. Suggested contribution is \$10/ticket or \$20/three tickets. No contribution is necessary to be eligible for participation.

(Keep this portion for your records)

(Detach here and send with contribution or mark "no contribution")

Name _____	Name _____	Name _____
Address _____	Address _____	Address _____
_____	_____	_____
Phone _____	Phone _____	Phone _____

EASEMENT TAKEN ON SHARPTAIL HABITAT

by Jim Evrard

Phase II of the easement on the Lyme St. Croix Forest in Douglas County was approved by the Natural Resources Board (NRB) at their February 25th meeting and submitted on March 13th to the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance for their approval. They have 14 working days (until April 3rd) to act upon it or it automatically is approved. It is expected to be approved.

If approved, the State of Wisconsin will pay the forest holding company for development and public access rights to a large block of industrial forest land northwest of Barnes along STH 27 south of the Brule River State Forest. Also included in the easement was the requirement that the privately-owned forest land be managed by a 'shifting mosaic' by regularly clear-cutting large blocks of jack and red pine to benefit sharp-tailed grouse, upland plover, Kirtland's warbler and other wildlife requiring large relatively open habitats.

The cost of the easement is \$5,615,149 for 21,189 acres. Federal Forest Legacy funds will contribute \$3,750,000 to the total, leaving \$1,865,149 to be paid with state Stewardship funds. The total cost per acre for the easement was \$265 per acre with Wisconsin's share being \$88 per acre. The easement for Phase I of the project involved 44,678 acres that were acquired for a total of \$11,260,000 in June of 2012.

Easements cost much less than fee title and the land will continue to be actively managed for forest products, supporting the local and state timber industry while preventing the land from being sold, subdivided, and closed to public use. With the additional management easement, wildlife will benefit.

The Phase II easement land contains the bulk of the area that was hard hit by the jack pine budworm in the 1990s. A huge area was clearcut to salvage the trees dying from the disease, creating excellent habitat for sharptails. At one point, at least half of the sharptails remaining at that time in Wisconsin were found in this block of industrial forest.

There are still sharptails found within the Phase II easement area. It is hoped that the more "kindly" management of the land will allow sharptails to remain a part of that landscape and again allow limited hunting in the future.

The WSGS was active in supporting acquisition of the easement through the years. Mr. 'Rolling Barrens', WSGS Board Member Ed Frank, was particularly active submitting written and oral testimony to the DNR and the NRB. Thank you Ed for your tireless efforts.

WSGS WEBSITE

The WSGS website, "wisharptails.org", describes our goals and objectives, projects, members of our board, membership and contact information, and electronic copies of recent newsletters.

Those members wishing to receive their newsletters electronically should check the appropriate line on the back page of the printed newsletter when renewing memberships or contact us at the WSGS address.

FRIENDS OF THE NORTHWEST SANDS

by Jim Evrard

The WSGS helped form the Friends of the Northwest Sands (FOTNWS), an ad hoc umbrella group consisting of representatives from the WSGS, the Friends of Crex (FOC), the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens (FOTNB) and the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary (the Douglas County Wildlife Area) (FOTBS). Hopefully a friends group will soon be created to support and promote the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area and become another partner in the FOTNWS.

Dave Evenson represents the WSGS, Jim Evrard is the FOC representative, Bruce Moss represents the FOTNB and Jane Ankam is the FOTBS representative. The four persons are members of the Board of Directors of their respective organizations.

The group was formed in May, 2014 to help promote the idea of preserving and managing the rare barrens habitat that exists in the Northwest Sands stretching from Polk County in the south to Bayfield County in the North.

The FOTNWS began working on three projects that would help DNR Biologist Bob Hanson in his efforts to educate and influence the public and decision makers of the importance of the open barrens habitat in the Northwest Sands. First drafts of a colorful photo album depicting characteristic and rare barrens plants and animals has been developed in addition to a smaller brochure with the same educational message and a power point presentation designed to be shown to the public by professionals and volunteers. Final drafts of the three projects will be completed this year.

SHARPTAILS IN THE ARCTIC

by Olaus Murie

This article was contributed by WSGS Board Member John Zatopa. It is from a chapter titled, "A Winter in Eskimo Land", from the 1973 book, **Journeys to the Far North**, by Olaus Murie and published by American West Publishing Company.

"One day in late January I went through some swamps to "Mi Lord's Ridge." I was crossing one of those snowy 'plains', head down against the wind, when I became aware of grouse that were running around me, in all directions. These proved to be a flock of about eighteen sharp-tailed grouse, feeding among the scattered dwarf birches and paying little heed to me. The birds would run quickly, then stop abruptly at a little bush, picking away vigorously at the seeds or buds for a moment, only to scurry off to another bush. From time to time one or two of the hindmost would fly along and alight near the front of the band. They appeared very busy, although at times one or two would crouch awhile in the snow, possibly because of my presence. They all carried their tails straight up, and there was a low conversational "whistling" as they fed.

In such snow-covered "muskegs" I found a border of tamaracks, the small deciduous cone-bearing tree common to these places. Years later I found a few sharp-tailed grouse living in a limited tamarack woods in interior Alaska. Apparently the muskeg-tamarack environment is an agreeable home for the sharptail in the north country.

On the way back on this January day, as I plodded along on snowshoes, I came on the place where these grouse had spent the night under the snow. Each one had tucked itself away underneath, and the snow which had fallen that night and had drifted had covered it nicely. In the morning they all had simply pushed up and out and began feeding. That made me recall boyhood days in Minnesota, when very often prairie chickens would burst out of the snow at my feet when disturbed by my approach to their snug retreat. Willie Moore told me that the sharp-tailed and spruce grouse do not sleep under the snow in springtime when crusts form. But the ruffed grouse continues to do so, and some get frozen in by a strong crust. These birds have learned, as many outdoor people have, that in the cold of midwinter it is warmer under the snow blanket."



Male Sharp-tailed Grouse displaying. ~Photo by Kathy Java

WSGS BOARD ELECTION

The terms of WSGS Board Members John Zatopa, John Probst and Paul Kooiker expire in 2015. Nominations were sought for three-year terms for the three positions in Newsletter No. 74. Kooiker, Probst and Zatopa indicated they will stand for re-election. No other nominations were received as of March 15.

Paul Kooiker retired from the DNR in 2008 after serving as a wildlife biologist in Neillsville and Grantsburg. He was the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Work Unit Manager for 18 years and the area wildlife supervisor for Barron, Polk, Washburn and Burnett counties. Paul is a charter WSGS member and has been a Board member since 2009.

John Probst is a retired research biologist formerly employed by the U.S. Forest Service at their North-central Forest Research Center in Rhinelander. John has extensive experience with early successional barrens species, particularly the Kirtland warbler. A long-time member of the WSGS, John became a member of the WSGS Board in 2010.

John Zatopa retired as supervisor of the Rhinelander Water Utilities. He has been a WSGS member since 1995 and a member of the WSGS Board since 2005. John's other interests include prairie restoration and Trout Unlimited volunteering. He has used his bird dogs to cooperate in DNR woodcock and ruffed grouse censuses.

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BALLOT – WSGS BOARD (vote for three)

Paul Kooiker _____

John Probst _____

John Zatopa _____

Write in _____

**Bring to annual meeting or mail to: WSGS
102 E. Crex Ave.
Grantsburg, WI 54840**

AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

by Tom Ziegeweid



Hunting Season 2014:

I had a good fall bird hunt, bagging 40 various birds. Right now it is Friday, January 30th as I write this article about the recently completed upland game bird season. Actually tomorrow is the last day of ruffed grouse [ruffie] season, but I will not be out. Guns have been put away, it's cold, and I am in cooking mode.

Bird hunting was actually good this fall, but you wouldn't know it early in the season. Late was great! I bagged most of my birds from around deer season to Christmas.

Ruffed grouse hunting was bizarre this fall to say the least. During the first half of the season, I could hardly find a ruffie anywhere. Central Wisconsin was a bust! I never shot one ruffie there and only saw six birds in the Babcock/Mather/Necedah area all season. The DNR said the spring drumming count was down 53% there, which was a precipitous drop.

Some of the real good spots were Taylor County in the Mondeaux Flowage, Perkinstown and Rib Lake areas, on the edge and within the Chequamegon National Forest. I heard good reports of ruffs north and south of Highway 77 between Minong and the Namekagon Barrens also.

I shot one sharptail this fall at the Thief Lake WMA in Minnesota, believe it or not, out of a state goose blind with a load of BBB shot. We saw some sharptails in the Fort Pierre Grasslands in South Dakota and did not get one.

We had a good hunt for prairie chickens at Fort Pierre early in the season. I bagged four and missed four. There were a lot of pheasants out there this fall, even though it is mostly open grassland. If you find ag fields you will find pheasants. If I were to go to South Dakota 'pheasant hunting', I would go to the grasslands first. I don't think this area gets hit by swarms of hunters like the eastern part of the state.

I managed to bag four pheasants during and around deer season. Two were old big survivors and two were stocked birds. This was a pleasant surprise as I haven't seen a pheasant in the Meridean, WI area for years. But as usual I didn't get a deer this season.

After seeing the amount of wild turkeys I did this fall, I can safely say that last winter was hard on them. They were 'spotty' everywhere I went. We always see our usual 100-200 birds in Meadow Valley areas on opening weekend, but after that they really disappeared. Did get two juveniles though. That turkey I shot in the woods right next to the parking lot at the Pershing Wildlife Area office before our last WSGS Board meeting will go down in infamy!

Duck season was very mediocre wherever I hunted. Years ago I used to bag many more ducks and not as many upland birds. Now that has flip-flopped for me. There just aren't many ducks in Wisconsin after the first week or so. Want ducks? Hunt the Mississippi River or Green Bay or Ashland!

Enjoy the rest of the winter. This winter has been a welcome relief from the last two.

Until Next Time,

Ziggy

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Please check the date on your address label and 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: _____
Email: _____

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

_____ **Electronic Newsletter (by email)**

Enclosed:

\$ _____ Dues (Regular - \$10, Supporting - \$25, Organization/Business - \$25, Contributing - \$50,
\$100 Sustaining, \$200 Sponsor)

(Dues are fully tax-deductible)

\$ _____ WSGS Logo Decal (\$1.50)

\$ _____ 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

