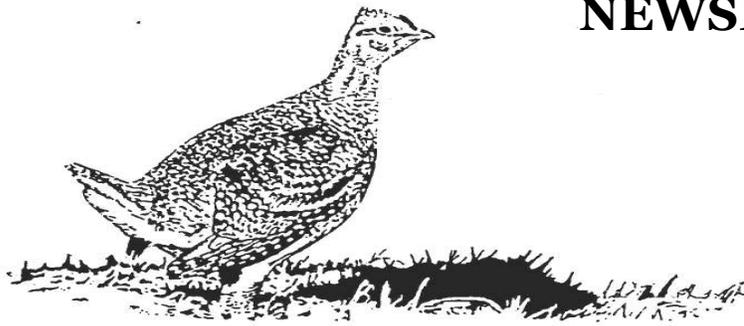


# WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 68 Summer 2013

## JOINT ANNUAL MEETING OF MINNESOTA AND WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETIES

by Jim Evrard

The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs) and the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) had a joint meeting on Friday and Saturday, April 26 and 27, 2013, in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center, Grantsburg. Approximately 50 people attended the successful meeting.

The morning session on Friday was a series of technical presentation featuring sharptail genetics, habitat management plans, and research results. Following a catered lunch, WDNR staff conducted a guided bus tour of Crex Meadows highlighting various brush prairie habitat management techniques. A social hour preceded a catered dinner in the Crex Center.

The meeting resumed Saturday morning with less technical, more popular presentations featuring sharptail management efforts in both Minnesota and Wisconsin. Following another catered lunch, both societies conducted separate business meetings. The meeting officially ended in mid-afternoon and those attended headed back to their homes in their respective states.

President Dave Evenson called the WSGS business meeting to order at approximately 1:30 p.m. Eight of the nine board members were in attendance along with two members, both Crex DNR staffers.

Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard gave the Treasurer's Report – the checking account balance as of 04/29/13 was \$7,676.61 and the CD balance as of 10/16/12 was \$2,571.00 for a balance of \$10,267.61. Jim also stated that the 2012 Financial Report and past meeting minutes were published in past newsletters.

Significant 2013 expenditures were \$4,000 to the U.S. Forest Service, Chequamegon National Forest, for sharptail habitat work in the Riley Lake Wildlife Area; \$432 for 48 new WSGS caps; and \$160 for four recognition plaques for those involved in the recent State of Wisconsin DNR and Burnett County Forest land trade. Evenson presented plaques to DNR's Pete Engman and to Sue Clausen, spouse of outgoing Natural Resources Board Chair, Dave Clausen.

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A profit of \$210 for the WSGS was realized from the joint meeting. The art print raffle grossed \$795 with Mike Vogl of the Milwaukee area winning the Owen Gromme print, John Klesewski of Amery, the Balzer print, and Rodney Cole of Bloomer, the King print. Congratulations to the lucky winners.

Our financial obligations include a \$5,000 pledge for land acquisition in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area and a \$1,000 pledge for a habitat management grant for the Pershing Wildlife Area. We raised \$3,850 for the Namekagon Barrens land, leaving a balance of \$1,150 we would have to take from our checking account.

*Continued on page 7...*

## FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

You've probably heard of the guy who claimed he'd never been wrong. Oh, there was that time when he had thought that he had been, but it turned out that he was mistaken. That's a little bit like my story for today.

Back about 1990 I was negotiating the DNR lease for the Namekagon Barrens with the Burnett County Forestry Department. It was challenging. There were those who thought it should be planted to trees, and others who were willing to dicker, but wanted what I felt was a dear price for not foresting it. I was a relatively new convert to the world of sharptails and barrens, but had read my history and knew that The Barrens were long standing, that Hamerstoms and others had stood for them decades earlier, and that the Barrens should exist, simply as an ecological example of the best of Wisconsin.

In my naiveté I thought that this would likely be the last lease necessary, that surely in another 25 years everyone would have the ecological awareness that both parties would easily agree that the Barrens should remain forever. But here's where my lead-in story enters. During the remainder of my career I realized that ecological awareness wasn't coming that fast, and I despaired over the fact that someone would have to go through the re-leasing process, and hopefully come to agreement.

But in fact I wasn't wrong after all. For the past half dozen years or so, there has been a willingness on the part of the DNR and Burnett County Forestry to try to make sense out of the land ownership of both parties. It started with a swath of Burnett County land between Crex and the Kohler-Peet barrens, and grew to a land trade that included parts or all of several wooded DNR Wildlife Areas, and the Namekagon Barrens. So, there will not be another lease for the Namekagon Barrens. Even better, there is a possibility that the Barrens may be able to expand, if all goes well with grants and fund-raising.

At our joint meeting with Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society in April, WSGS presented plaques of recognition to Pete Engman, Wisconsin DNR, Jake Nichols of Burnett County Forestry- these two were our on the ground folks, and to Dick Steffes of Madison DNR Real Estate and Dave Clausen, past Chair of the Natural Resources Board, two folks who got the deal done.



### 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

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

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

## **WSGS INPUT IN DNR's SHARP-TAILED GROUSE COMMITTEE REDUCED**

by Jim Evrard

An edict recently came down from the DNR Secretary stripping DNR retirees of the right to vote on issues within DNR's wildlife species committees.

Some time ago the DNR's Wildlife Bureau created internal committees to advise the Wildlife Policy Team (Madison staff) on issues relating to wildlife species. The committees were made up of DNR staff from throughout the state.

Later private citizens, mostly representing private 'partner' conservation groups and college/universities, were added to the species committees. And these private citizens were given the right to vote on key committee issues.

As WSGS officers, DNR Retirees Dave Evenson and I were invited to become members of the DNR sharp-tailed grouse committee and we actively participated in committee business. I believe that our involvement has contributed to the recent DNR efforts to prevent sharptails from disappearing from Wisconsin.

However, evidently some politicians apparently felt DNR retirees were a threat and wanted to reduce or eliminate our input. They want to prevent DNR retirees and university personnel from voting on issues in the species committees, but still allow other private committee members the right to vote. Private 'partner' groups would be given one vote in the committee and since the WSGS is a partner organization, we still have one vote rather than two votes (one from Dave and one from me) that we formerly had.

In my opinion, the ordered 'restructuring' of the species committees is another example of the Governor gradually and subtly stripping away the involvement of citizens in state government (especially those opposing his viewpoints) and giving more power to a select minority that support him. A very small group of 'sportsmen', through the Hunter's Rights Coalition (HRC), are able to change hunting and fishing laws directly through the Wisconsin Legislature without significant public involvement and input. Members of the group include the Wisconsin Bear Hunter's Association Inc. and the Wisconsin Chapters of the Safari Club International.

In 2005 the HRC hired a professional lobbyist, Robert Welch, to guide their pet bills through the Legislature (both houses are controlled by the Governor's political party). Welch's lobbying business began in 2005 (the year after he lost his Republican senate seat) and the same year as the creation of the HRC. Interesting coincidences?

### **WSGS WEBSITE**

The WSGS website, "[wisharptails.org](http://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 me at the WSGS address.

## **EVENSON MEETS WITH DNR's SHARPTAIL COMMITTEE**

by Jim Evard

WSGS President Dave Evenson attended a May 20<sup>th</sup> DNR Sharp-tailed Grouse species committee meeting. Since Dave represents a DNR "partner" (the WSGS), he is still able to attend the meetings and vote on issues after an edict from DNR Secretary removed retired DNR and University of Wisconsin biologists from the species committees as voting members. Dave sent me the highlights of the committee meeting for our newsletter.

The 2012 Wisconsin sharptail harvest was only nine birds, four from Unit 2 and five from Unit 8!

There were 200 permits available for Unit 2 and with only four birds killed, the hunting success rate was only 2%! This was the area that had the massive clear-cutting in the 1990s due to the jack pine budworm outbreak. Sharptails in that unit erupted, responding to the newly created habitat. Since then the area has been reforested through natural succession and pine plantations. The sharptail population in that area gradually declined until only 28 dancing males were counted this spring (2013).

Unit 8, primarily the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area, had 35 permits and five sharptails were reported killed, a 14% success rate. However, the number of displaying male sharptails increased from 40 in 2012 to 54 this spring.

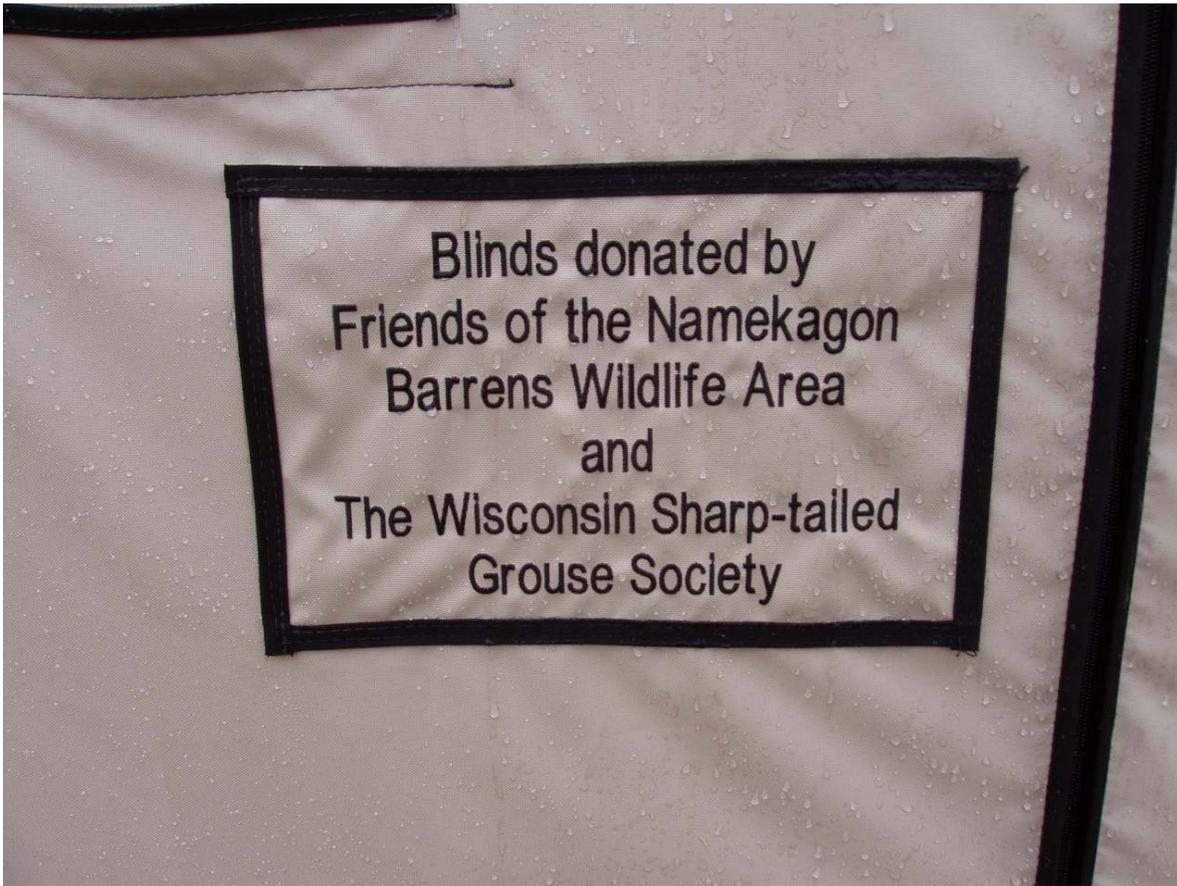
Spring census estimates were available from some areas. The number of males in the Crex Meadows WA dropped from 24 in 2012 to 14 this year. Sharptails in the Douglas County WA were stable at 25 in both 2012 and 2013. The number of Pershing WA dancing males increased from 3 in 2012 to 7 this year. Unmanaged land in Rusk County had 25 cocks in 2012 and 29 birds this year, a slight increase.

Based upon a new statistical analysis of Wisconsin sharptail numbers, DNR Upland Game Bird Ecologist Scott Walter thought that the sharptail harvest might have some impact on the small sharptail populations. To me, this seems to be a reversal of an earlier analysis by Scott Hull, former Upland Game Bird Ecologist and presently a DNR research scientist with sharp-tailed grouse responsibility.

Based on the information presented by Walter and the relative small numbers of sharptails in Wisconsin this year (except for the Namekagon Barrens), the committee voted 9 to 1 to close the 2013 sharptail hunting season. However, the sharp-tailed grouse remains a game bird and the hunting season could reopened in the future if their population increases.

In other committee action, Scott Hull announced that he secured funding for hiring 4 technicians for a period of 10 weeks each spring for 3 years to census sharptails in the state. The lack of uniformity in sharptail censusing in terms of effort and techniques has been a problem in the past. The 9,000-acre Germann Road wildfire in Douglas and Bayfield counties this spring has created an opportunity to possibly document the colonization of the burned area by sharptails since it was formerly part of the jack pine budworm outbreak.

I personally agree with retaining the status of the sharp-tailed grouse as a game bird in Wisconsin with the possibility of someday again hunting the bird. However, I'm not convinced that hunting as we have had in recent years impacts the sharptail populations. Management areas where the birds have not been hunted for years have not responded with an increasing population; Crex Meadows is a prime example. By contrast, sharptails in the Namekagon Barrens have been hunted recently and their population is apparently increasing. In fact, there was a total of 72 displaying sharptails counted in Unit 8 this spring (54 in the Namekagon Barrens and 18 in the Unit 8 portion of the Douglas County Wildlife Area), nearly three times the number of displaying cocks in a management unit needed to trigger a limited permit hunt.



Jim Evrard standing near one of the new Sharp-tailed Grouse viewing blinds at Namekagon Barrens, donated by WSGS and the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens.



## NAMEKAGON BARRENS LAND ACQUISITION FUND

by Dave Evenson and Jim Evrard

In the last newsletter, Dave Evenson described a new effort for the WSGS to support Wisconsin sharptails. Dave discussed an opportunity to expand the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area by 25 per cent by contributing funds to buy 1,478 acres of private Lyme-St. Croix Forest land adjacent to the east border of the Namekagon Barrens. Against the price tag of \$1,064,000, The Conservation Fund has secured a half million and there is a strong likelihood of Wisconsin Stewardship Fund matching that. The gap became \$64,000 that needs to be raised by the end of 2013.

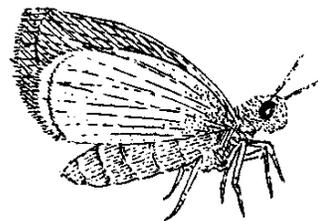
Nancy Cristel, Namekagon Barrens DNR Manager asked the WSGS for \$5,000 to \$10,000, and frankly, we didn't have it in our treasury. Within the past year we donated much of our funds (\$10,000) to projects for sharptail management work at the Riley Lake, Namekagon Barrens, and Crex Meadows wildlife areas. The WSGS Board felt we could provide \$3000 toward this request from our 'treasury', but it left us with only a slight cushion for operating the organization. So we have now launched a campaign to raise at least an additional \$2,000 for the Namekagon Barrens expansion.

Dave and Shirley Anne Evenson initiated the campaign with a donation of \$1,000, which was subsequently transferred to the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens to be used as a challenge grant for their land acquisition fund.

A generous anonymous WSGS member made an offer of a challenge grant, matching up to \$1,000 in additional donations to the Namekagon Barrens fund! There was a good initial response from our membership. Chet Anderson donated \$1,000! Including his pledge, at the time this newsletter went to press, we have raised \$1,895 in addition to the \$1,000 initial pledge.

Contributors to date in addition to Anderson and the anonymous donor include Tom "Ziggy" Ziegeweid\* (\$100), Jonathon Wilde (\$100), Jim Evrard\* (\$100), Barry Stanek (\$100), Dan Wilson (\$100), John Probst\* (\$100 pledge), Herb Behnke (\$50), Al O'Leary (\$50), David Ballman (\$30), Ron Eckstein (\$25), James Spaeth (\$25), Alan Jabar (\$20), Terry Retzlaff (\$15), John Probst\* (\$15), Richard Ayres (\$10), and John Clemetson (\$10). Keep those donations coming in!

\*WSGS Board Members



### PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Check the date on your mailing label and please renew your membership if it has expired or is about to expire. The WSGS is a small organization and depends heavily upon membership fees to continue the struggle for the sharp-tailed grouse and its habitat in Wisconsin. Our membership fees are low compared to most conservation groups and support all-volunteer members who serve as your board of directors and do the work of the society.

## **PARTNER: NORTH AMERICAN GROUSE PARTNERSHIP**

By Jim Evrard

The WSGS has been a member of the North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) since 2007. The NAGP was created in 2000 by a group of mostly western U.S. and Canadian biologists working with four grouse species (sage grouse, greater prairie chicken, lesser prairie chicken and sharp-tailed grouse).

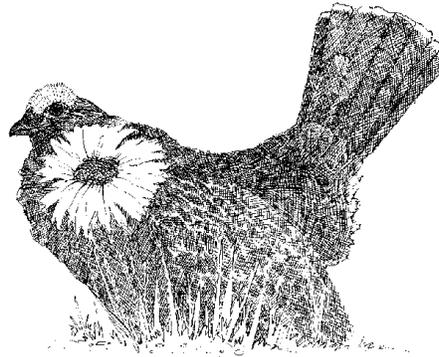
The WSGS decided to join the NAGP as a supporting member since Wisconsin is one of only two states (the other being Michigan) east of the Mississippi River that still can count sharptails as part of their native fauna. The WSGS Board thought that developing and maintaining a good relationship with western 'sharptail' states would be valuable in the future.

The NAGP has three broad objectives for grouse conservation. The group wanted to get involved on the state (1) and federal (2) levels of grouse conservation and in education and public relations (3) championing the various grouse species.

I have a few copies of the NAGP's glossy full-color magazine called "Prairie Partnership News". The magazine contains a series of interesting articles about a wide variety of issues relating to the western grouse.

There are species status reports; federal Farm Bill implications; grouse habitat management and even stories about other North American grouse including the Attwater's prairie chicken, an endangered species now found only in Texas; the blue grouse and the spruce grouse. There was even an article about the WSGS, written by Dave Evenson and me, in a 2004 issue of the Prairie Partnership News.

The continued membership of WSGS in the NAGP will help insure that Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse will have national representation.



### ***... Annual Meeting continued from page 1***

After some discussion, a motion was made, seconded, and passed that would transfer the Evenson \$1,000 pledge to the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens to be used as a challenge matching grant to solicit donations from their membership. That would mean the WSGS would have to take \$2,150 from the checking account to complete our \$5,000 pledge, providing no additional donations were received.

Evenson announced the WSGS Board uncontested election results - Dave, Tom Ziegeweid, and Bruce Moss were re-elected to another three-year term on the Board. The election of officers did not take place.

There was a general discussion, led by Ed Frank, about meeting in Michigan to learn about their sharptail management plans.

The 2013 Summer Board Meeting will tentatively take place from noon to noon on Thursday and Friday, July 11 and 12 in the USFS Perch Lake Campground north of Drummond.

The business meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/PO Box \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to volunteer for:  
\_\_\_\_\_ Board of Directors  
\_\_\_\_\_ Bird Censusing  
\_\_\_\_\_ Newsletter articles  
\_\_\_\_\_ Annual Meeting  
\_\_\_\_\_ **Electronic Newsletter (by email)**

Enclosed:  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Dues (Regular - \$10, Supporting - \$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)  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Contribution to Namekagon Barrens land acquisition fund

Total Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

**«City» «State» «ZIP»  
«Address»  
«First» «Last»  
«Expire»**