

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 72

Summer 2014

2014 SHARPTAIL STATUS AND HUNTING PERMITS

by Jim Evrard

DNR Upland Bird Researcher Scott Hull provided the spring 2014 displaying male sharptail counts and overall they were a bit encouraging.

In 2013, 124 males were counted in managed areas and that number remained essentially the same (125) this year. Numbers dropped in the Crex Meadows WA from 14 to 5, but that was based on only 1 early census where 3 censuses are recommended. The Moquah Barrens WA comparable numbers were 3 in 2013 and 4 in 2014. Pershing WA had 7 in last year and 5 this year. Apparently there was no census in the Kimberly-Clark WA in 2013, but 3 were counted this year. Reported for the first time this year were 10 cocks counted on the "Barnes Barrens Management Area" compared to 8 in 2013.

The Douglas County WA had little change with 23 cocks counted this year and 25 last year. Numbers from Riley Lake WA dropped from 25 birds in 2013 to 19 this year. A bright spot was the Namekagon Barrens WA where the number of displaying cocks increased from 42 in 2013 to 56 this year.

In non-managed lands throughout the sharptail range in Wisconsin, the number of cocks found this spring increased 86%. Unit 9 birds dropped from 9 in 2013 to only 1 this year. However, the number of birds flushed in Unit 2 nearly doubled from 29 last year to 54 this year. In the unmanaged Rusk County area, the number of sharptail cocks observed declined from 22 in 2013 to 12 this year.

Following the spring surveys, the DNR Sharp-tailed Grouse Committee met and based upon the spring counts, decided not to issue any hunter permits again this year. They continued their efforts to retain the mechanism for again issuing hunting permits if sharptails ever regain numbers to justify hunting. From a hunter's view, this is preferable to closing the sharptail hunting season since it would be difficult to again reopen the season with the recovery of sharptail populations.

In my opinion, if the number of sharptails cocks counted next spring (2015) in Unit 8 and in Unit 2 are well above the number of cocks (25) needed to initiate a hunting season, then a conservative, limited number of hunting permits should be issued.

Apparently, the cock sharptail I shot in 2012 in the Namkagon Barrens WA did not have the one "magic gene" that would lead to the demise of the species in that area since there were 40 cocks counted in 2012 before I killed the bird and 42 cocks in 2013 and 56 in 2014 after I removed the bird from the gene pool. The possibility of removing the "one magic gene" by hunting has been used as the reason to close the sharptail hunting season despite sharptail numbers in some units being above the threshold to allow hunting.

Table of Contents

Sharptail Status-----	p.1
From your President-----	p.2
Research Study Begins-----	p.3
Annual Meeting-----	p.4-5
Board Meeting Minutes---	p.6
Moquah Barrens Tour-----	p.7

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

Money. Follow the money. Show me the money! Where one's heart is there also is his treasure. All these adages, songs, sayings talk about reality of life on this planet.

I always think of WSGS as being a small entity, pretty darn successful at influencing policy by our knowledge and our willingness to take stands, testify, write letters in support of our favorite bird and its habitats. I don't think of us as any money-generating behemoth (we aren't), but I realize that it takes a bit of money to step up and be recognized at the table.

At our annual meeting in April we asked the recipients of our small grants program to give a short report on how things had gone with their projects. We heard from Mike Bablick about Riley Lake roller chopping and clearing, Tom Doolittle about Moquah Barrens plans, Jay Wanner about how our grant fit into Pershing's large federal grant for land clearing, Nancy Christel about blinds, invasive plant control and new land ownership at Namekagon Barrens and Steve Hoffman about multiple projects over the years at Crex Meadows.

Steve's presentation gave me cause to think- he said that over the years WSGS has donated \$18,000 to Crex projects. He went on to point out how our money is doubled and quadrupled, as it used for match for other grants. This isn't unique to Crex; all the other projects also like partners and more often than not our money and grass roots support goes towards matching a larger granting agency that really wants to see local support.

A week later, May 1, I got to stand among the crowd at the celebration of one of the largest sharptail acquisitions ever- 1,400 acres added to the Namekagon Barrens. Talk about leveraging your money! On this \$1,060,000 project, The Conservation Fund, Wal-Mart's Acres for America, The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program funded the first million. They then looked to local groups to find the last \$60,000. I'm pleased to say that WSGS was able to raise \$5000 toward that need, as did Friends of the Namekagon Barrens. Perhaps you read in the press about this happening, and if you did you saw our organization prominently mentioned.

How else could I finish a column like this other than to say- pay your dues, step up a level if you can, be ready to donate again as the next project comes on line. Thank you.

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



RESEARCH STUDY BEGINS

by Jim Evrard

A new DNR research project was initiated this spring when Michael Hardy, a PhD candidate began work to learn more about the distribution and population viability of Wisconsin prairie chicken and sharp-tailed grouse. The research will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Scott Hull, DNR-Madison and Dr. Benjamin Zuckerberg of the UW-Madison.

Hardy is a native Californian and earned his BS and MS degrees at the University of California–Humboldt. He is assisted by Darrell Johnson, from Dorchester, Wisconsin who holds a BS degree from the University of Wisconsin – River Falls and Tamathy Stage, who was raised in Pennsylvania and New York and earned a BS degree from Iowa State University. She has also begun a master’s degree program at Antioch University in New England.

Both prairie grouse species have experienced a drastic decline in numbers in Wisconsin due to tremendous habitat loss. Wisconsin prairie grouse habitat is now highly fragmented, preventing adequate genetic exchange between the remnant prairie grouse populations.

A prairie chicken (an officially ‘threatened’ species) population remains in central Wisconsin and there are two areas where sharptails (‘species of special concern’) are still found in northwest Wisconsin’s sandy Northwest Pine Barrens (Burnett, Douglas, and Bayfield counties) and a heavy-soil area in Taylor, Rusk, and Price counties. A remnant population of sharptails might still remain in central Wisconsin.

The general objectives of the new research project are to assess the distribution and long-term population viability of the prairie grouse under various land management and climate change scenarios.

The research might also help delineate habitat corridors between four managed ‘core’ properties (the Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens, Douglas County, and Moquah Barrens wildlife areas) in the Northwest Pine Barrens to assist in genetic exchange between sharptails still existing in those isolated management areas.

Beginning this spring, Hardy and his assistants attempted to locate all the sharptail leks in the Northwest Pine Barrens using “occupancy surveys”. From April 1 to May 23, 117 roadside survey routes were visited three times to locate the leks or dancing grounds. The route is driven in the early morning hours with stops spaced half a mile apart. At each stop, the sharptail ‘counter’ stops the vehicle and gets out and listens for a set amount of time. All sharptails seen or heard will be recorded on maps for follow-up visits where researchers and volunteers will attempt to count the sharptails using the leks through observations and flush counts. This work is designed to continue in 2015 and 2016.

In my opinion, this type of research is long-overdue. Spring sharptail censusing has not been standardized and the effort uneven, especially in the past. When I started in the DNR in the 1970s, some sharptail management areas were not even censused. Sharptail management is now more of a science, not an art.

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 me at the WSGS address.

2014 WSGS ANNUAL MEETING

by Jim Evrard

On a cool, gloomy Saturday April 26th that began with snow, President Dave Evenson called the meeting to order at approximately 1 PM in the Douglas County Wildlife Area Field Trial Building. Other board members present were Mike Cole, Jim Evrard, Paul Kooiker, Bruce Moss, John Probst, John Zatopa and Tom Ziegeweid. Ed Frank was absent due to a medical problem. Twenty-four members were present along with 9 guests. The Board met earlier in the day and arrived several hours prior to the board meeting to warm the building from a temperature of only 34 degrees with wood, propane and electricity!

Secretary/Treasurer Evrard gave both the Secretary's and Treasurer's reports. Minutes of previous Board and Annual Meetings were printed in the WSGS newsletter along with the annual financial report. As of 4/21/14, the check book balance was \$6,124 and the CD value as of 10/16/13 (the renewal date) was \$2,609 for a total net worth of \$8,733 less the expenses of the annual meeting (\$44.48). Net profit from the annual art print raffle was \$725.

Dave announced that Mike Cole was elected and Jim Evrard and Ed Frank were re-elected to the WSGS Board. Thank you Ashly Steinke for standing for election.

Dave also presented WSGS Member and WDNR wildlife biologist Nancy Christel a plaque for her efforts to expand the Namekagon Barrens through the acquisition of more than 1,400 acres of land with money from the Conservation Fund. The Conservation Fund used \$500,000 from Walmart's Acres for Wildlife Program and \$500,000 from the Wisconsin Stewardship Program along with other funding, including \$5,000 from the WSGS, to buy the land that was given to the State of Wisconsin to be added to the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area.

The WSGS Board decided to create a new membership category for conservation organizations with an annual fee of \$25. The three existing friends groups will be encouraged to maintain a WSGS membership to promote communications. The board also decided to offer free newsletters to high schools within the Northwest Pine Barrens and to colleges and universities with Northwest Pine Barrens connections.

DNR sharptail managers stated that due to the late spring and poor weather, no prescribed burning had been accomplished to date and only a few sharptails have been counted.

Dave went on to describe WSGS activities during the past year. This included meeting jointly with the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society; expressing our concern over the lack of prescribed burning on Crex Meadows to the Natural Resources Board and to DNR forestry staff in NW Wisconsin; attending the Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting in Crookston, Minnesota; providing funding for habitat work in the Riley Lake Wildlife Area (\$4,000) and in the Pershing Wildlife Area (\$1,000). Dave also announced that the WSGS Board decided to pledge \$2,000 for land acquisition in the Douglas County Wildlife Area (i.e. the "Bird Sanctuary").

The assembled group then broke to sample the delicious goodies and coffee provided by the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary.

Following the break, a new sharptail research project was presented by PhD candidate Mike Hardy. He and his two assistants plan to survey the Northwest Pine Barrens for three years to find sharptail leks and distribution. Again, due to the poor weather only very preliminary information was available at this time.

WDNR wildlife biologist Bob Hanson also made a power-point presentation of his plans to guide the development of a habitat management plan for the Northwest Pine Barrens to provide corridors linking the sharptail management areas from Crex Meadows in the south to Moquah Barrens in the north.

Jane Anklam and Bruce Moss followed with a presentation of the project to form an umbrella group for the three existing “friends” groups to promote communications and an educational program on the value to barrens habitat.

Jane and Bruce were followed by presentations by sharptail managers on their accomplishments during the past year, especially those projects funded by the WSGS.

The formal meeting ended by drawing for the framed art prints. WSGS Vice President Tom Ziegeweid conducted the drawing with help from Tom Dollittle’s grandson, Quinn. Print winner John Zatopa donated his print to the FOTNB for use as a fund-raiser in their annual meeting. Tom and Quinn also conducted the door prize drawings where everyone present won a door prize. The formal meeting ended at 5 PM. with a social hour followed by a catered dinner at 6 PM.

About a dozen or so hardy WSGS members met early the next morning for a car-caravan tour of the Germann Road wildfire area northwest of Barnes. Despite the cool, gloomy and wet morning, the group was treated to a geological learning experience led by WDNR Forestry Supervisor Jay Galleger. After a joint breakfast following their return to Solon Springs and the end of the 2014 WSGS Annual Meeting, the group returned to their respective homes.



Sharp-tailed Grouse at Crex Meadows WA ~Photo by Jim Williams

WANT TO BE A NEWSLETTER WRITER?

by Jim Evrard

Recently a WSGS member asked if we would be interested in stories for the newsletter about hunting sharptails in Wisconsin. My answer was YES! If anyone would like to write an article about anything involving Wisconsin sharptails, please submit it to me at the WSGS address. There is no compensation for submitted articles, but you can join the ranks of WSGS volunteer writers like Dave Evenson, Tom “Ziggy” Ziegeweid and me.

MINUTES OF SUMMER WSGS BOARD MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The WSGS held their summer board meeting on July 15, 2014 in the historic McNeil's Farmhouse on the Brule River. The building is next to the McNeil's Bridge, made famous by the late Wisconsin writer Gordon MacQuarrie. Mike Cole, Dave Evenson, Jim Evrard, Ed Frank, Bruce Moss, John Probst, John Zatopa, Tom Ziegweid and Dave Clausen and guest, retired DNR wildlife biologist Fred Strand, were present.

President Evenson called the meeting to order at 1:00 PM. Secretary/Treasurer Evrard gave the Treasurer's Report: The check book balance was \$6,536.75 and the CD balance was \$2,609.25 for a total of \$9,146. The only obligation is the \$2,000 pledge for land acquisition in the Douglas County Wildlife Area. Strand gave a progress report on the fund raising drive for the "Bird Sanctuary" land. An additional \$20,000 needs to be raised to complete the fund drive.

Evenson, Evrard and Ziegweid were re-elected by unanimous consent for the offices of President, Secretary/Treasurer, and Vice President.

Evenson discussed the concept of forming a tri-state (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan) sharptail group. Apparently the DNR is negative towards the concept and it appeared there was little WSGS Board interest. Evrard will contact Jodie Provost of the Minnesota DNR to see what was discussed at a recent conference call that he missed.

DNR's research project was discussed with concern that the spring census technique needs to be changed to make it more effective based on the relatively poor results from this spring's census effort.

After some discussion it was decided to hold the 2015 annual meeting in the Red Cliff Casino Hotel north of Bayfield with emphasis on the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area (MBWA). Clausen will contact the Hotel to reserve a block of 10 rooms and a meeting room for Saturday, April 25. It is hoped that Tom Doolittle, Wildlife Biologist for the Washburn District of the Chequamegon National Forest would give us a tour of the MBWA on Sunday morning April 26, perhaps involving WSGS members in conducting a sharptail census of the wildlife area.

A discussion of the critically low number of sharptails in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area resulted in plans to ask the DNR to investigate using the student prescribed burning students from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to help in the burning at Crex and elsewhere.

Also discussed was translocating sharptails to Crex Meadows and Moquah Barrens where sharptails numbers are dangerously low. An idea was expressed to ask DNR's Scott Hull to review the sharptail translocation literature. Strand also suggested that the federal government which manages the Moquah Barrens might encourage the DNR to take some action. It was agreed that if we wait much longer, we will lose the sharptail populations (and their unique genes) on both ends of the Northwest Sands.

Moss gave a progress report on forming a loose umbrella group (the Friends of the Northwest Sands) to communicate with the three existing friends grouse for the Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens and Douglas County wildlife areas and encourage the formation of a friends group for the Moquah Barrens. Moss, Evenson, Evrard, and Jane Anklam met and developed three potential projects (a DVD to be hopefully developed by Jim Hoefler, Dale Bolke, Moss, and Evrard, a brochure written by Evenson, and a power point presentation put together by Anklam for use by nonprofessionals to educate the public about pine barrens).

Also discussed was an auto tour of the Northwest Barrens from Crex Meadows to Moquah Barrens and a need to develop a group of wealthy, influential barrens supporters much like was done for Wisconsin's prairie chickens.

Frank asked about the problem of the DNR not yet finally approving the 20,000-acre industrial forest easement on the south end of the Brule River State Forest and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service delay in approving the proposed land trade between the DNR and Burnett County. It was suggested to contact the DNR and the USFWS to determine the delays. State and federal politicians might also be contacted to ask them to use their influence for a timely conclusion of the two problems. The Burnett County Board Chairman might also be contacted to ask him to contact the DNR.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM.

MOQUAH BARRENS TOUR

By Jim Evrard

In late June, Tom Doolittle, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Wildlife Biologist, gave a group of barrens enthusiasts and supporters a tour of the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area (MBWA). The group included representatives of the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary, Friends of the Namakagon Barrens, Friends of Crex, and officers of the WSGS. Several persons were members of two or more of the groups and are also involved in forming an umbrella group, the Friends of the Northwest Sands.

The MBWA lies within the Washburn District of the Chequamegon National Forest in the Bayfield Peninsula. Doolittle recently became the Washburn biologist after the retirement of Scott Posner. Posner was the wildlife biologist when the wildlife area boundary was expanded to include 14,000 acres and included more active management than in the past. Doolittle continued the active management, burning 2,500 acres under controlled conditions this past spring.

The auto caravan tour began at the scientific area on Forest Road 236 north of the crossroads community of Ino on US Highway 2. The past spring's controlled burning was very apparent from the site where the tour began. Doolittle explained the planned an active management program of controlled burning, timber sales, mowing, and hand clearing to improve the habitat for open-loving wildlife including the "flagship species", the sharp-tailed grouse. This summer the work will focus on clearing areas around present and historical sharptail leks or dancing grounds.

Tom went on to say that he plans to open a corridor to the west to encourage the movement of sharptails to and from the MBWA and an area where sharptails still persist on the red clay soils of old agricultural land. The corridor could be created along an electric transmission line from the national forest through a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fish hatchery. Also included would be some potential Kirtland Warbler (an endangered species) habitat in a young jack pine stand in the Bayfield County Forest.

The MBWA basically runs east and west and Doolittle envisions a series of connected openings bordered by pine savanna. We examined some of the savanna that have and are being created but I thought there were too many trees left following a timber sale and those trees were spaced in a regular pattern looking like a city park. The savanna might be more attractive to open-loving wildlife if there were fewer trees and they were more naturally clumped rather than in spaced rows.

Doolittle stated that the management plan for the MBWA is up for review in the near future and those preferring more open barrens habitat could make their feelings known at public meetings and in written comments.

The tour group of "friends" also suggested forming a "Friends of the Moquah Barrens" could also provide support for Doolittle's plans for the wildlife area. I was impressed by the Doolittle's accomplishments in the few months he has been the Washburn UDFS Wildlife Biologist. His plans are impressive. Tom ended the tour by stating he has just seven years before retirement and would like to see the MBWA again supporting healthy populations of barrens plants and animals (including the sharp-tailed grouse) when he retires.

TO ERR IS HUMAN

by Jim Evrard

Please contact me at the WSGS address if there is a problem with your address or your membership expiration date on your mailing label.

I try not to make mistakes, but I do and I learn about them when WSGS members contact me. We've changed our newsletter production procedures, now offering electronic (email) copies in addition to our mailed newsletters. The new procedures are saving about a third of the annual costs involved in producing the newsletters.

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

