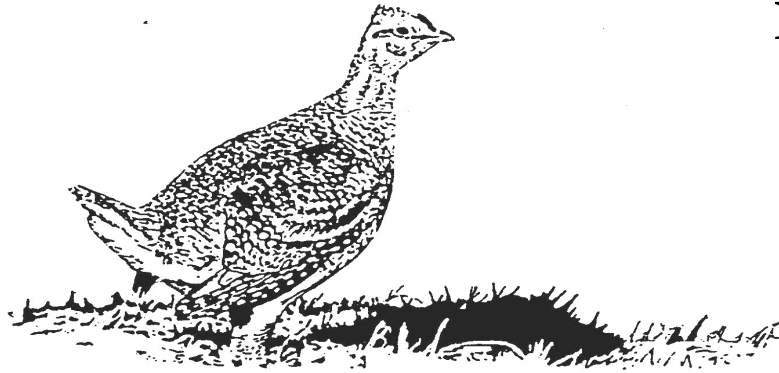


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 88

Winter 2018

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE HUNTING IN WISCONSIN – 2018

By Bruce Moss

It was 23°F, sunny and calm on the fifth morning of the Unit 8 sharp-tailed grouse season in Wisconsin – perfect weather to try for a trophy bird on what certainly would be a rare and terrific hunting experience. I was lucky enough to have drawn one of the 25 permits available for this year’s hunt. Slightly more than 200 people had paid the three dollars for a chance at a permit. Since many of us cannot help but try for a chance at a limited draw permit to hunt whatever the state is offering, I suspected that half of the successful applicants would never hunt. However, a chance to enjoy one of the best wildlife areas in Wisconsin with only my dog, Sophie, as company caused me to avoid the opening weekend.

My house is only 25 miles from the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (WA). A half hour trip through wild country got me there at 9:00 A.M. Sophie knew we were doing more than taking a walk because I carried my shotgun. She went wild running arcs in front of me hoping to find the quarry. I really was super excited about the hunting experience, but suspected flighty sharptails would not offer a shot. Therefore, I let her run faster and further than I normally would. She responded well to my whistle though, so I felt at least in the game.

A half hour into the hunt I headed toward a small clump of jack pine figuring that is where I would hide if I were a grouse. At the pines I went on the south edge and five or six sharptails flew out of the north side. This was actually pretty exciting since I really did not expect any flushes within gun range.

By 11:00 A.M. my 71-year-old body told me to take a break and try again after lunch. Nearing the truck, I walked by an old fox den and noticed a grouse track in the sand. Of course the track could be days old, but I got ready. Fifty yards later a lone bird flushed about twenty yards in front of me. All season I have been shooting too quickly and missing on my first shot. I repeated the act once again. Since I still had a shot in my other barrel, I took a farewell shot at the bird likely out of range. To my amazement it crumpled. I would not have found the grouse, as it was probably 30 yards from where I thought it should be, but luckily Sophie knew better.

The sharp-tailed grouse was a banded male captured in Minnesota and released in the Moquah Barrens WA on April 28, 2018. The bird had traveled from Bayfield County, north of Highway 2, to northeast Burnett County over the summer. It was exciting to have explicit information about my bird and be able to contribute more information on the fate of the introduced sharptails. However it was somewhat disconcerting to realize that a badly needed source of new genetic material into an isolated population of grouse was interrupted by this human predator.

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

By Dave Evenson

Seven decades ago, in 1948, Wallace Grange published a book entitled *Wisconsin Grouse Problems*. Four years later the Hamerstroms and Mattson published *Sharptails into the Shadows?* The nature of these titles, problems, and questions certainly reflected the tone of the times. Grange wrote:

“The sharp-tail in Wisconsin is certainly doomed [compared with prairie chickens] as a hunted species but is apt to persist longer as a rare species. It may conceivably survive another five decades, but *again in the absence of adequate management techniques* or widespread fire, it inevitably will go on the rare and non-hunted bird list.”

That era certainly was the first wake up call for prairie grouse in Wisconsin, and game managers (that’s what they called them) did wake up. Sharptail management areas were formed across the width of northern and central Wisconsin, and managers began developing those adequate management techniques. Prescribed burning, brush removal, disking, root-raking, all sorts of tools came into being. But it was a challenging process. Budgets, public opinion, and [plant] succession often were the enemies, and it took stalwart, maybe even bull-headed, managers to keep it up.

I’d argue that there was a second wake up call, not quite so neatly defined, but let’s pin it on Earth Day, 1970. More citizens and public administrators were realizing the values of diversity of landscape, not just for sharptails, but for all the flora and fauna they held. That understanding has continued to grow to the present.

Two decades later, WSGS was formed. If you remember our early years, many of those sharptail areas still had birds remaining. We held meetings in the Central Sands, at Black River Falls and a couple of times at Sandhill [Wildlife Area or WA], in the northeast at Florence, in the heavy soils of the north at Park Falls, Phillips, Holcombe, as well as in the Northwest Sands. Always it was our intent to encourage interest, help local managers and citizens in maintaining their habitat, and thus help their [sharptail] populations.

Now, almost three decades later, we find ourselves holding our meetings almost exclusively in the Northwest Sands. Thanks to the USFS (U.S. Forest Service) and some big bogs, the Riley Lake WA in the big woods still holds a [sharptail] population and in the northeast, the Spread Eagle WA continues to maintain unique barrens habitat, but can’t maintain a [sharptail] population without supporting areas. Otherwise, it’s pretty much up to the Northwest Sands [to maintain sharptails in Wisconsin].

I’m proud of those bull-headed managers in the DNR and USFS that found those adequate management tools, and had the moxie to defy Grange’s predictions and last at least a few decades longer. I’m proud also of this organization, and feel that we’ve played at least a part in educating, cajoling and helping with changing opinions. And I’m proud of the continuing enlightenment that ecologists, educators, administrators and citizens are showing. May it continue thus, and may people and sharptails continue to defy Grange’s predictions decades into the future.

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 Ken Jonas
Paul Kooiker Bruce Moss
John Probst Ashley Steinke

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

Newsletter Compositor: Lauren Finch

2018 SHARPTAIL HUNTING PERMITS

By Jim Evrard

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) is primarily a hunters group. Membership is open to all supporters of Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse, whether they hunt or not. Some members hunt sharptails, but not in Wisconsin. Other members simply like to watch sharptails and support their continued existence in Wisconsin. I believe that designating the sharptail as a non-hunted, protected, species would negatively influence the number of WSGS members and the continued support for the species and its management in the state.

Many of the WSGS Board members are retired DNR biologists who have managed Wisconsin sharptails in the past, and support the current process by which the DNR calculates the number of hunting permits to be issued annually. The formula uses the number of displaying males (25) in old deer management units to determine if the population is high enough to safely support harvesting a conservative number of sharptails. In 2017, there were no hunting permits issued even though the formula used to determine the number of sharptails that could be harvested indicated there was a harvestable 'surplus' in some management units.

This year when the DNR's Sharp-tailed Grouse Committee, largely active DNR biologists plus representatives of other governmental units and private non-profit conservation groups, met, they voted not to issue hunting permits again this year (2018). Dave Evenson, representing the WSGS and others in the minority, voted to issue a limited number of permits.

This negative decision was reached despite the fact that the formula used to calculate safe harvest numbers again designated that a harvestable surplus existed [Statewide in 2017, 138 displaying males plus some additional males in management Units 2 and 9 were counted and this year (2018) - 182 males were tallied].

The decision to issue no hunting permits was debated at the summer meeting of the WSGS Board and the board decided to appeal the decision to the DNR's Wildlife Policy Team. Board member Ken Jonas volunteered to write a letter to the policy team appealing the decision of the Sharptail Committee not to issue hunting permits in 2018. The letter stressed that there were enough displaying males in several areas to support a conservative, limited hunt.

As a result, the Wildlife Policy Team decided to issue 25 hunting permits for the area that was burned several years ago in the German Road Fire, a massive wildfire northwest of Barnes in Bayfield County. Considering past hunting success rates, approximately 5 to 7 sharptails would be harvested and another 2-3 birds might be shot at, hit, and lost.

The sharptail population in that area could be estimated at about 100 adult birds (49 males counted in the spring – given even sex ratios that would probably indicate about 49 hens also in that area). The nearly 100 adult birds in the spring should produce more than 100 young birds in the fall, for population estimate of roughly 200 sharptails.

A harvest of 10 sharptails would represent only about 5 percent of the population. This number will not materially impact sharptail numbers in that area since hunting tends to be compensatory, meaning that on the average about 30-50 percent of the sharptail population in an area dies each year, regardless of whether or not there is a hunting season.

Another reason for hunting sharptails in the German Road Fire area, is that most of the area has been replanted and/or naturally regenerated to pine that will result in a young forest within a few years, and sharptails will gradually disappear due to loss of habitat.

I hope that displaying male counts next year (2019) will allow continued, but limited, sharptail hunting in Wisconsin- a tradition that has existed for hundreds of years.

*Prescribed fire
at Moquah Barrens
2015*



MINUTES OF WSGS BOARD MEETING
September 12, Crex Meadows Visitor Center

Present: Dave Evenson, Jim Evrard, Ken Jonas, Bruce Moss; **Absent:** Mike Cole, Paul Kooiker, John Probst, Ashly Steinke, Tom Ziegeweid.

Those Board members present (**for the first time we did not have a quorum**) left at 10:15 a.m. for an auto tour of Crex Meadows after an introduction by Crex Manager, Kyle Anderson. The tour was led by Michelle Carlisle and Drew Hawley. We viewed the various management techniques being used to control and eliminate brush and trees (burning, mowing, roller chopping and herbicides).

At noon the group enjoyed a bag lunch at the Crex Rest Area in beautiful weather. Returning to the Crex Center, President Dave Evenson called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. DNR Northwest Barrens Biologist, Bob Hanson, gave the group a presentation on the progress of developing a base auto tour map of the Northwest Barrens by the ad-hoc Northwest Barrens planning group and a progress report on barrens management in the Northwest Barrens.

Secretary/Treasurer, Jim Evrard, gave the **Secretary's and Treasurer's reports**. The Secretary's Report will be printed in the WSGS newsletter so was not read. As of 09/11/18, the checking book balance was \$3,481.47. The CD balance as of October 16, 2017 was \$ 2,690.00 for a **net worth of \$6,171.47**. Evrard will investigate the possibility of finding a higher-yielding CD. A \$25 gift certificate was authorized for Lauren Finch who assists Evrard with the newsletter and other administrative work.

It was decided that approximately \$1,000 was available for sharptail habitat grants. The grant application form will be sent to the appropriate Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse managers. It was also decided to continue to support, as members, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, the North American Grouse Partnership and the Crex Meadows, Douglas County, and Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Areas.

Other Business: Artist Buzz Balzer donated an original oil painting featuring a sharptail portrait for fund-raising purposes. Balzer suggested reproducing the image on **message cards** that Evrard investigated with a Grantsburg printer. The WSGS received 50 cards that cost \$2.15/card w/envelope. More cards can be printed if needed. Possibilities for selling the cards will continue to be investigated. The Friends of Crex approved selling the cards in the Bog Shoe Gift Shop in the Crex Visitor Center. Evrard has the original painting.

The group approved to continue fundraising with the annual art print raffle (the license for 2019 has already been purchased). Evenson is trying to contact the person who printed the first **Ruth King prints**, and Dave has the original painting. The Board has authorized printing another 20 prints.

After learning of the 2018 spring **sharptail census** results, a proposal was made to write a WSGS position 'paper' on the potential for **hunting** the birds this fall where possible. The letter was developed by most of the board members and was presented to the DNR Sharptail Committee in early June by Evenson. The Committee voted 5 to 2 not to have a 2018 hunting season. **Then Jonas, with Board input, wrote a letter to the**

Continued on page 5

SUPPORT THE WSGS – BUY A CAP

We still have a small supply of embroidered tan or 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.



DNR Wildlife Policy Committee for their consideration of a limited hunting season this year. It was approved and 25 hunting permits for 2018 were authorized. Jonas and others also expressed concern about the high volume of dog training taking place on the Namekagon Barrens WA with emphasis on impacts on young-of-the-year sharptails.

Evenson and Evrard attended a meeting of the Northern Region forestry staff in Hayward and presented an **award** to those involved in the outstanding prescribed burning record in the spring of 2018. Evrard also wrote a column in the Wisconsin Outdoor News about the award.

Evenson announced that the U.S. Forest Service has enough money remaining in their project accounts to fund Alex Lehner in the fall, and possibly through the winter, to continue radio-tracking radioed sharptails in the Moquah Project. Evrard will continue to do the administrative work involved in the project.

Evenson wrote a letter in support of the USFS proposal for the Greenwood Vegetation Project, an intensive logging project in the area surrounding the Moquah Barrens WA, with the suggestion of more clearcutting to compliment the barrens management in the wildlife area.

The 2019 Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday and Sunday, April 27 and 28 at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center. A small registration fee will be charged so the numbers needed for meals and other activities will be known. More information will be available in the next newsletter. The tour will feature the aggressive habitat management plan recently initiated in Crex Meadows to return sharptail numbers to past levels.

Following the end of the Board business meeting (all decisions made are only provisional since a quorum of 5 members did not exist), the Board members present adjourned to the Evrard home for cool libations on the shaded patio. Evenson, Evrard and Moss ate dinner in a local restaurant and Evenson and Moss spent the night in the YCC youth camp cabins.

The following morning, Evrard guided Evenson and Moss to fantastic fishing on Mud Hen Lake with the group keeping 26 panfish (bluegills and pumpkinseeds to 9 inches and a 10-inch rock bass). Many small panfish and a few largemouth bass were released.



2019 ANNUAL WSGS MEETING

The 2019 Annual WSGS Membership Meeting will take place on Saturday and Sunday, April 27 and 28, in Grantsburg. The meeting will take place in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center. As in the past, there will be a WSGS Board Meeting at 10 a.m. Saturday morning followed by the business meeting, complete with a special presentation at 1 p.m. in the afternoon. The drawing for the art raffle and door prizes drawings will take place following the business meeting.

Overnight accommodations are available at the Wood River Motel (715-463-3541) in Grantsburg and, for the more hardy, in the Crex Youth Camp Facility where several small rustic cabins and two bunk houses are available for a nominal fee. Other motels are available in nearby Siren. The Saturday group dinner will be catered at the Crex Center. A social hour will take place prior to the dinner.

There will be an early Sunday morning bus tour of sharptail habitat work that is being restored to bring back the sharptail numbers that Crex had supported in the past. The abundance of wildlife, especially waterfowl and related birds, will add much to the tour. Crex staff will lead the tour. Some of the habitat restoration to be viewed has been funded with WSGS grants.

Coffee and rolls will be available prior to the tour in the Crex Mess Hall. Following the tour, the group will meet at a local restaurant for breakfast prior to returning to their homes, ending the annual meeting. A \$15 per person registration fee will be charged to cover costs of the catered dinner and social on Saturday early morning refreshments prior to the Sunday morning bus tour. Send your fees to the WSGS address in Grantsburg prior to the Annual Meeting

Also, the next newsletter (No. 89) will announce our sharptail art print raffle for 2019. The print raffle is the largest single source of funding for the WSGS. Newsletter No. 89 will be published in March.

NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR WSGS BOARD MEMBERS

The terms of three WSGS Board members Dave Evenson, Bruce Moss and Tom Ziegeweid expired in 2018. Nominations are being sought for three-year terms for the three positions. All WSGS members in good standing can be nominated either by themselves or by other members. Send nominations to:

WSGS
102 East Crex Avenue
Grantsburg, WI 54840

WSGS MEMBER NEWS

By Jim Evrard

Rodney Cole of Bloomer, Wisconsin died in early June from complications of a stroke. Rodney returned to Bloomer after retiring after 30 years with Oscar Mayer, Madison. He was an early member of the WSGS and attended WSGS events over the years. He was an avid outdoorsman to the point of being known as the “Old Guide”. A few years ago he generously donated art prints and other outdoor items he collected to the WSGS for our annual art raffle. He will be missed.

Noted prairie grouse researcher, **Dr. John Toepfer**, recently died from surgery complications. Toepfer, a student of the famed Fred and Fran Hamerstrom duo, has been involved in Wisconsin research and conservation efforts for Wisconsin prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse translocation projects elsewhere. While John was unconventional at times, few knew more about prairie grouse, especially the prairie chicken.

Dr. Richard Vogl passed on August 7, 2018 in his home in southern California at the age of 86 years. Dick was a native Wisconsinite, receiving a doctorate in plant ecology and management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the direction of John Curtis. Vogl did much of his graduate research at Crex Meadows, evaluating the effects of prescribed burning conducted by the first Crex Manager, Norm Stone. He documented the restoration of prairie plants at Crex after trees were cleared and the area prescribed burned. His brother and WSGS member, Mike Vogl, wrote about Dick: “*Prairie grouse rising in the vast barren sky was the vision that brought him great satisfaction*”.

Dr. Vogl wrote the following in his PhD dissertation:

“Sometimes man does not seem to recognize what is best ecologically for the land. Crex Meadows is an example of the land winning out despite all of man’s efforts to change it. Here man has had to learn to live in harmony with his land and to respect the inherent ecological principles of this sand country. The first surveyors called Crex Meadows ‘third rate, soil and timber worthless’, but now in terms of birds, plants and wildlife, Crex Meadows is of priceless value as one of the largest and most productive wild life areas in the state, serving multiple purposes and attracting thousands of visitors each year.”

WSGS Vice-President **Tom “Ziggy” Ziegeweid**, Eau Claire recently had an operation, correcting a problem with his spine and is recuperating. The medical procedure removed an arthritic bone spur from a disk and fused two vertebrae in his neck. He is improving, undergoing physical therapy this past fall. His medical problem prevented him from taking planned hunting trips to Thief Lake, Minnesota, the Crex Invitational Waterfowl Hunt, and South Dakota for sharptail and prairie chicken hunting. He is thankful that he’s an experienced road hunter so he’s not prevented from pursuing ruffed grouse and other game from his van using a “gimp” (his word choice) permit to be able to legally shoot from a vehicle under certain restrictions.

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.

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY PROJECTS 2009-2011

2009	\$2,550 Sharptail Genetic wing analysis \$251 Riley Lake WA Brush Cutting Party \$35 North American Grouse Partnership \$60 Wisconsin Wildlife Federation \$55 Friends of Crex \$50 Friends of the Bird Sanctuary \$30 Friends of the Namekagon Barrens	Sharptail research Habitat improvement Membership support Membership support Membership support Membership support Membership support
	Total: \$3,031	
2010	\$61 Riley Lake WA Brush Cutting Party \$35 North American Grouse Partnership \$60 Wisconsin Wildlife Federation \$55 Friends of Crex \$50 Friends of Bird Sanctuary \$35 Friends of Namekagon Barrens	Habitat improvement Membership support Membership support Membership support Membership support Membership support
	Total: \$291	
2011	\$102 Crex Meadows WA \$140 Volunteers \$84 Pershing WA \$35 North American Grouse Partnership \$60 Wisconsin Wildlife Federation \$55 Friends of Crex \$50 Friends of Bird Sanctuary \$30 Friends of Namekagon Barrens	Acquisition event Sharptail censusing Sharptail translocation event Membership support Membership support Membership support Membership support Membership support
	Total: \$556	



Photo by National Audubon Society

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL - For those receiving electronic newsletters, the coded expiration date of your membership is located on the first line of the mailing label following your name (example John Doe 02-15-19 , your name followed by the expiration date February 15, 2019).

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

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

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

