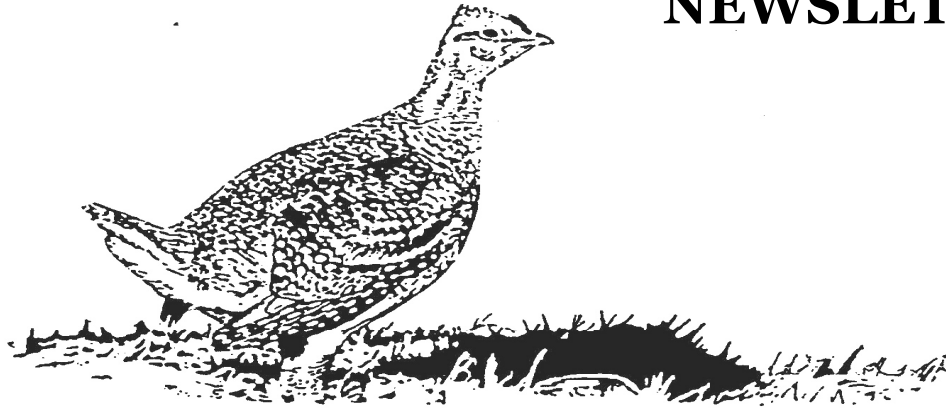


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 80

Summer 2016

SPRING SHARPTAIL NUMBERS

by Jim Evrard

I attended a DNR Sharp-tailed Grouse Committee meeting in Eau Claire in late May as a substitute for Dave Evenson who had a conflict. Dave and I had originally been members of the committee until new rules were instituted that only one person from each non-DNR agency or group could be a voting committee member. It was also politically interesting that college and university staff could continue to attend the committee meetings, but only as observers, not as voting members. Politics over science?

The committee met to discuss what was happening in Wisconsin's sharptail world and review spring counts of dancing sharptails cocks, the only method now available to estimate the size Wisconsin's sharptail population. A committee recommendation to the DNR administration would then be made whether or not to issue sharptail hunting permits.

The committee is made up of mostly DNR field biologists and Madison staff along with representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, Great Lake Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society.

The major issues reviewed and discussed included the Moquah Barrens sharptail translocation project; a recently completed DNR-UW Madison research project; the 2015 sharptail harvest and hunter surveys; and 2016 sharptail lek or dancing ground counts.

The spring sharptail counts resulted in 225 cocks counted statewide, down 9% from 248 counted in 2015. Counts on management areas dropped 4% from 184 in 2015 to 177 this year. Counts in unmanaged areas also dropped 25% from 64 to 48 cocks.

Managed areas that increased from 2015 to 2016 included the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area (WA) (16 to 25), Douglas County WA (31 to 34), Kimberly-Clark WA - (3 to 6) and the Barnes Fuelbreaks (19 to 31). Unmanaged areas that increased were Unit 9 (2 to 13) and Rusk County (9 to 10).

The only management units that met the threshold of 25 dancing cocks were Unit 2 (25 cocks), 8 (86 cocks) and Unit 10 (25 cocks). Since Units 2 and 10 counts were at the 25 cock threshold, it was decided to recommend not issuing hunting permits for those units. However, Unit 8 which includes the Namakagon Barrens Wildlife Area and about a third of the Douglas County Wildlife Area clearly met the 25-cock threshold.

After a lengthy impassioned plea from Nancy Christel, DNR Namakagon Barrens WA Manager, to close the season and not issue any hunting permits, it was finally decided by the committee to recommend 25 hunting permits for Unit 8, down from 100 permits issued in 2015. Since 2015 hunting success was 22% that would mean a 2016 'harvest' of only 5 or 6 sharptails out of a Unit 8 fall population that could be as high as 300-350 birds, a very conservative harvest.

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

What are we good for anyway? That's certainly not an elegant question, but it always is a pertinent one, perhaps especially now as WSGS is beyond its 25th year. Are we making a difference? Are we accomplishing anything?

As I look back on the years of this small organization, I continue to believe that we are making a positive difference for barrens and sharptails. We will never have the kind of money that the big conservation groups raise, but we never intended to. Advocacy remains our strong suit. Just looking through my files I come up with over a dozen decisions where we have weighed in during the past couple of years, land acquisition efforts, master planning decisions, land management decisions. Would these have occurred without WSGS? Probably many of them would have – we have a whole group of friends and organizations who share our vision. But I would advocate that even this group of friends and organizations is to some extent, part of WSG contribution. Over a quarter of a century of educating and persuading, a lot of people and organizations have caught on to the uniqueness and the fragility of the open barrens in Wisconsin and beyond.

In this past year WSGS has played an exceptional role in the USFS effort to translocate sharptails from Minnesota to Moquah Barrens. The Forest Service truly needed a private non-profit entity to partner with to make this effort come together. Perhaps they could have found another partner, but that question is moot – they found WSGS as the correct group to make it work.

Are we good for anything? I continue to believe that we are. The fact that you are reading this makes me believe that you think so too.

Thank you, *Dave Evenson*



Franklin's Ground Squirrel
~photo by Dale Bohlke

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 Layout/Webmaster: Kim Wheeler

MOQUAH BARRENS SHARPTAIL TRANSLOCATION PROGRESS

by Jim Evrard

In an earlier newsletter, the involvement of the WSGS in the U.S. Forest Service's sharp-tailed grouse translocation project in the Moquah Barrens was outlined. The WSGS agreed to be a partner in the project, mainly serving as the financial conduit for federal funds needed to pay project costs.

The procedure involved would be that Tom Doolittle, wildlife biologist for the Washburn District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (where the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area is located) would authorize project expenditures of the federal grant. Tom would summarize the invoices for various equipment and labor costs and send the total to me on a federal form. I would sign the form as the WSGS Secretary-Treasurer and return the form to Tom. Doolittle would then send the signed form to his financial people and they would electronically transfer the designated funds into the WSGS checking account. I would then pay the invoices from the WSGS checking account. So far, I've paid invoices totaling approximately \$31,240 with another \$1,100 anticipated.

The time that Dave Evenson, Fred Strand and I would spend in the project serves as the WSGS in-kind contribution to the project. No actual WSGS money would be involved except for the costs involved in postage and office supplies such as envelopes, copies, etc.

Through the cooperation of the project's partners (U.S. Forest Service, Wisconsin and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Bad River and Red Cliff bands of the Ojibwa Indians represented by a biologist from the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, and the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society assisted by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society), a group of sharptail 'trappers' journeyed to northwest Minnesota in April of this year to capture sharptails to move to the Moquah Barrens. The group was led by WDNR biologists who had previous experience trapping sharptails on leks (dancing grounds) in the spring.

The trappers were authorized by the MDNR to trap 100 sharptails (50 cocks and 50 hens) in each of two years, 2016 and 2017. However, they could only trap on leks having at least 15 cocks and then could only take 3 sharptails per lek.

Doolittle reported that the trappers captured 104 sharptails but released 71 males back onto the leks where they were captured and transported 29 sharptails (16 cocks and 13 hens) to the Moquah Barrens. With an anticipated easing of the trapping restrictions in 2017, it is hoped that more sharptails will be trapped and moved to the Moquah Barrens next year.

How have the released Minnesotan sharptails fared in the Moquah Barrens?

Five of the cocks released in the Barrens were fitted with miniature radio transmitters. Of the five cocks: one remains on the only lek found on Moquah this year with the last two 'native' cocks; one was killed by an avian predator; one had a faulty radio; one apparently left the Barrens but was possibly spotted nearly 30 miles south in the Germann Road fire area; and one is unknown, possibly another long-range dispersal. Two hens approached the cocks on the Moquah lek and two Minnesota cocks were accepted as lek mates by the two native cocks after some scuffling.

Doolittle also reported that while prescribed burning approximately 3,400 acres in Moquah this spring following release of the Minnesota birds, the burn crew reported "flushing, and seeing sharp-tails in flight. Singles, doubles, triples, and even a six plus group. Mike Bablick (recognized by the WSGS this spring for his sharptail work in the Riley Lake WA) saw birds on the 241 dancing ground last Thursday morning before one unit was ignited. Pretty late. From what I know at least 10 fire staff saw birds. This event has not been observed in more than a decade."

These encouraging words provide hope for the future of the Moquah Barrens sharp-tailed grouse.

2016 WSGS ANNUAL MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The 2016 annual meeting was held at the St. Croix Inn in Solon Springs on Saturday and Sunday, April 16 and 17. Twenty-nine persons were in attendance when President Dave Evenson opened the meeting at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

Evenson reviewed the events and progress of the past year. Highlights included the 2015 annual meeting at the Red Cliff Casino in Bayfield County; the Lyme-St. Croix Forest Forestry Legacy project's August celebration near Barnes to honor the conservation easement acquired by the State of Wisconsin on over 60,000 acres of industrial forest land in prime sharptail range; the approval of the Glacial Lake Grantsburg Master Plan complete with a habitat corridor provision; the Burnett County – DNR land trade; and the Moquah Barrens sharptail cooperative translocation project headed by USFS wildlife biologist, Tom Doolittle.

The meeting's program began with Bob Hanson, DNR Pine Barrens Biologist giving the group an update on his work to connect the managed sharptail properties in the Northwest Barrens. He is presently working on a "Five-mile Fire" barrens habitat corridor between the Namekagon Barrens and the Douglas County wildlife areas. Hanson also talked about the "Friends of the Northwest Barrens" and the proposed cooperative Minnesota-Wisconsin St. Croix River Watershed project.

Michelle Davolos, USFS Ranger for the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, explained their proposed "Greenwood" project that will surround the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area. This will involve clear-cutting large areas (640 acres) of old aspen and oak over a period of 3-9 years.

Nancy Christel, DNR Wildlife Biologist at Spooner then discussed the Northwest Barrens (Namekagon Barrens, Douglas County, and Totagatic River wildlife areas) Master Planning process. She also talked extensively about the Namekagon Barrens including the economic impact of the wildlife area in the region.

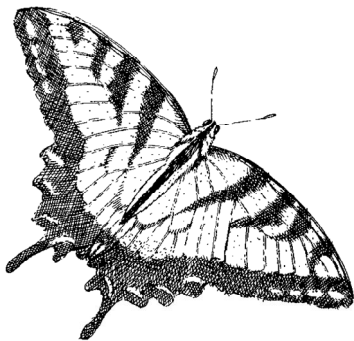
Finally Jane Anklam from the Western Wisconsin Land Trust and the Friends of the Northwest Barrens asked for help from the audience in the form of ideas for items and areas of interest in and around the Douglas County Wildlife Area to help develop a self-guided auto tour.

The results of the election for three WSGS Board positions were present board members Dave Evenson, Bruce Moss and Tom Ziegeweid being re-elected with a write-in vote for Ashly Steinke.

Evenson then presented long-time WSGS member and retired DNR wildlife biologist Larry Gregg with a plaque from the WSGS to acknowledge Larry's considerable contributions to the conservation and management of sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin.

The lucky winners of the 2016 signed, limited edition, and framed sharptail art print raffle were retired wildlife biologist Minnesotan Bill Berg who chose the winter sharptails in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area print by artist Buzz Buzzel. The second raffle ticket was drawn by Jim Nissen, another retired wildlife biologist from Minnesota, who chose the Owen Gromme print. The final ticket drawn was for the Ruth King print of a sharptail lek in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. Lisa Reid of Trempeleau, Wisconsin was the lucky winner.

Vice-President Tom Ziegeweid conducted the door prize drawings that ended the business meeting prior to the social and the catered dinner.



Tiger Swallowtail

Very early Sunday morning, a few hardy WSGS members left the St. Croix Inn and traveled east along CTH A towards the Germann Road Fire area to count the number of sharptails at 3 leks either within the fire boundary or adjacent to it. They were successful and returned, joining a several late WSGS sleepers at Solon Springs cafe for a group breakfast, ending the 2016 WSGS Annual Meeting.

SPRING BOARD MEETING

by Jim Evrard

President Dave Evenson began the spring 2016 WSGS Board meeting at 10 a.m. on April 16 in the St. Croix Inn, Solon Springs. All board members were present along with guest Greg Kessler, DNR Biologist, Brule.

Kessler gave the group an update on the Moquah sharptail translocation project. The cooperative project was going well with good support from local Minnesota landowners and U.S. Forest Service personnel supportive. The translocation crew is headquartered in Carlstad, MN. They captured and moved 8 sharptails to the Moquah Barrens (7 cocks, 1 hen) on April 15. The following morning, a banded hen from Minnesota was seen on Moquah lek (or dancing grounds) with “Burt and Ernie”, the two remaining native sharptail cocks in the Moquah Barrens. A third cock was heard nearby.

The project is a logistical nightmare due to restriction of removing only 3 sharptails from each lek. The crew consists of 6 to 8 Wisconsin DNR persons plus 6 U.S. Forest Service persons and 2 Minnesota DNR persons. The crew is capturing sharptails on private land now. Radio-tagging and blood sampling will be deemphasized due to recent research results show the detrimental effects of such work

Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard gave the Secretary’s report that was the minutes of the 2015 board and annual meetings published in recent WSGS newsletters. Evrard stated the 2015 Treasurer’s report was also published as the 2015 financial statement in a recent WSGS newsletter.

The WSGS checkbook account balance as of 4/16/16 was \$5,668.54 plus CD balance as of 10/16/15 was \$2,643.00 for a total of \$8,311.54. The only WSGS financial liability is a \$3,000 pledge to the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary for land acquisition. Thus far \$23,468.34 U.S. Forest Service funds have passed through the WSGS checking account as the WSGS part in the ongoing Moquah sharptail translocation partnership project. Current membership status and membership recruitment effort were also presented.

It was learned that dog trial aficionados tried unsuccessfully to block issuing of 2015 sharptail hunting permits in the Namakagon Barrens Wildlife Area.

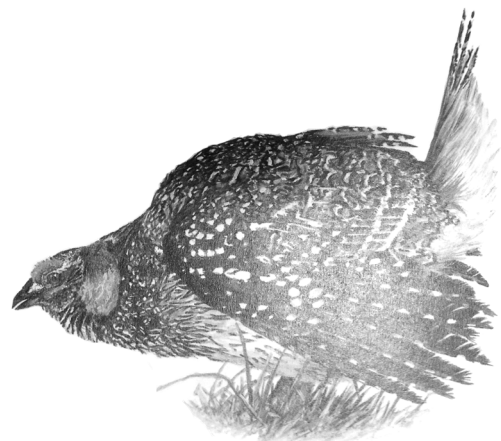
The Board decided to pursue developing a booklet edited by Evrard containing the writings of the late Jim Hale’s story about early Wisconsin sharptail research.

Evenson said the land trade between the DNR and Burnett County has finally been completed, but with little publicity. Perhaps the annual celebration of the Friends of Crex land acquisition efforts would be an appropriate time and place for publicizing it.

Evenson also said we have only 3-4 Ruth King sharptail prints remaining so it was decided that Dave should investigate the cost of printing more prints.

Ziegeweid reported that WSGS charter member Rodney Cole of Bloomer donated 4 wildlife prints (1 framed) of sharptails, ruffed grouse and prairie chicken. It was decided to offer the Roger Pruess sharptail as a silent auction item at the general membership meeting.

The summer board meeting to be held in mid-July in Brule was changed to Douglas County’s Totagatic Campground on the Minong Flowage.



AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

by Tom Ziegeweid

The Fort Pierre National Grasslands

(worth putting on your “bucket list”)

This fall will be my sixth hunt in South Dakota at the grasslands. The Fall 2015 photo is a picture of yours truly (left), plus Roche Lally, current MSGS President (center) and Joe Hapy, retired USAF colonel (right). This is our rest stop and lunch/watering hole. It is really a relief to sit down for an hour or so after you have spent the morning walking five miles.

Over the years as we got older, we learned to “hunt smart” and learned to read the cover. Prairie chickens really favor medium grass, not too sparse or too tall (found in riparian areas). This is why controlled grazing by ranchers who have private inholdings in the property is essential to chicken survival.

The sharp-tailed grouse that share this landscape with the chickens tend to gyrate towards a little thicker cover having low shrubs and bushes like buffalo berry.

South Dakota sharpies are the plains subspecies as opposed to our birds which are the eastern or bog subspecies. They have a little different look to them than ours do; and I once did a comparison on the markings on feathers of my mounted plains adult female with an adult female I shot in Wisconsin. There was a noticeable difference. Chickens outnumber sharps about five to one at present according to the biologist’s lek counts. This fluctuates over time. Sharps have been declining recently however.



Ziggy with two hunting companions in the Fort Pierre National Grasslands sitting in chairs with Ziggy holding a prairie chicken he killed. From The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, Winter 2016 issue

Even though we have learned to hunt smarter, this type of hunting is a numbers game. The more miles you walk, the more successful you will be. I figure over the long haul, I would walk four to five miles for each bird I bag.

Let's not forget the ring-necked pheasant population in the grasslands. There is a good population of pheasants there considering the rather minimal acres of pheasant cover. Where you find agriculture and cat-tails in the grasslands, you will find pheasants. Quite frankly I would rather go pheasant hunting here than in the eastern part of the state which is pricy and overrun with hunters from all over. Hunting on the grasslands is "free" unless you pay a modest fee to USFS for a camping permit (which you must have if you "tent out" on the prairie).

Non-resident license fees, including small game, game birds, coyote, and sand-hill cranes (no waterfowl) was \$125. You get two five day hunting periods. They cannot be concurrent. When you buy your license, you want to push your second five day period to the last five days of the season. You can "back up your five days" to an earlier date, but you can't move it ahead.

Some of our crew including the two guys in photo, go back for the last few days of December for their annual "iron man" hunt. Late season is good for trophy birds and you can get all three species.

We stay in a motel in Fort Pierre (suburb of Pierre) along the Missouri River. Large rooms, game cleaning and freezing facilities, popcorn, coffee and rolls are included in the rates. Motels are pretty reasonable in the area, but the last few years, the restaurants have gotten pricy to the point we go to the grocery store down the street and cook out in enclosed pavilion with gas grill, which is included with room.

You want to make reservations real early (March) in the year if you are hunting the first month of season. Later in the season the hunter numbers fall off quickly and you probably can get rooms.

Besides the great bird hunting, you will also enjoy the watchable wildlife and plant life. Some of the notable species we have seen are: golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, prairie falcon, burrowing owl, a gazillion western meadowlarks, numerous grass sparrows, prairie rattlesnake, prairie dogs ("dogs" and snakes live in close proximity), a few mule deer, pronghorn antelope, a modest duck population in stock ponds, gray partridge (rare but present) and lots and lots of prairie plants too numerous to mention.

We have met hunters from all over the U.S. Lots of cheeseheads and Viking's fans too! This is a great place to use your hunting dogs, especially pointers, or just your good ole' mutt.

And don't forget your tennis shoes! The ground is hard and dry for easy walking. I don't use hunting boots anymore.

For more information about this destination, call (715)834-2627. Till next time, *ZIGGY*

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

