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PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AND RETURN THIS APPLICATION TO:

Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840

**WSGS**

**102 East Crex Avenue**

**Grantsburg, WI 54840**



**WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY**

**NEWSLETTER**

Number 84

Spring 2017

**VACANCY AT MOQUAH BARRENS – SHARP-TAILED GROUSE WANTED**

*Brian Heeringa, U.S. Forest Service Biologist*

**(Editor’s Note:** The project to trap sharp-tailed grouse in northwest Minnesota, transport them to the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area in Bayfield County, and release them to bolster the native sharptails is the largest project that the WSGS has been involved with in its 27-year history. The project is the brainchild of Tom Doolittle, former wildlife biologist of the Washburn District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

Doolittle envisioned the project as a partnership between the U.S. Forest and Fish and Wildlife Services, the Wisconsin and Minnesota Departments of Natural Resources, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Red Cliff and Bad River Bands of the Ojibwa Indians. The translocation project is funded primarily with federal dollars from a Great Lakes conservation and restoration fund.

The primary role of the WSGS in the project was to serve as the financial ‘officer’. Federal funds are transferred to the WSGS account and in turn, the WSGS pays the project bills. Actual WSGS contributions to the Project are the expenses and time spent in the financial dealings plus some additional volunteer help. Progress in 2016 was reported in an article written by Doolittle in the WSGS Newsletter No. 81, fall 2016 issue.)

Something is happening in northern Wisconsin that hasn’t happened in a long time. People are coming across sharp-tailed grouse in locations where they haven’t been seen in years! Thanks to a translocation effort lead by the US Forest Service, sharp-tailed grouse are again moving into areas that have been left vacant due to struggling population. Along with several partners, including the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF) kicked off the second year of the 2-3 year trapping and translocation project that began in 2016. As many of you may already know, last year 29 Minnesota sharptails were released on the Moquah Barrens located on the Washburn Ranger District of the CNNF in NW Wisconsin. Monitoring through the summer and fall of 2016 showed that the transplanted birds were adapting to their new home, but some of them, unfortunately, were killed by predators or simply seemed to disappear. All of the release birds received white numbered leg bands and five of the males also received radio transmitters to track their movements. As 2016 came to a close, three of the radioed birds had died from predation and two of them seemed to have vanished.

Prior to returning to Minnesota to begin our second season of trapping, early spring surveys on the Barrens revealed that some of the translocated birds survived the winter! In fact, they not only survived but these birds are holding their own on the dancing grounds against local Moquah birds! It may be too early to claim success, but it sure was encouraging to see the recently translocated birds showing up to at the dancing ground. Prior to the 2016 release, over the last several years of conducting spring surveys at the one known remaining active dancing ground only 2 males and maybe 1 female sharp-tailed grouse would show up. This spring we counted 6 males, with 2-3 attending females. Not large gains, but progress none-the-less.

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Encouraged by this we embarked on the 2017 effort with high hopes and a trapping team that was twice as big as the year before. Arriving in Karlstad, MN the week of April 17th, we were ready to add to the success seen last year. Over the two week period spent trapping in the areas surrounding Karlstad and Roseau and one week in the Baudette area, we were able to capture nearly 200 sharp-tailed grouse, and ended up moving 67 (22 females and 45 male) birds to the Moquah Barrens. As with 2016, the large majority (13 out of 15 sites) of the trapping occurred on private lands where we received landowner permission.

Prior to entering Wisconsin and being released on the Barrens, all the translocated birds were inspected by a veterinarian in Duluth, MN to ensure they were all healthy and in good condition for release. Now I know I breezed through the trapping part of the project pretty quickly, and having been there for the entire time I can tell you that it was an amazing experience to get to work with these birds up close and personal, but to be honest, I think what happened after the birds were released is the truly fascinating part. To start, all birds trapped and moved were released the same day of capture. This meant a long car ride, over six hours, prior to being released into their new home sometime between 3 and 5 pm. A “soft release” was used by which sharp-tailed grouse calls were broadcast to put the birds at ease and encourage them to linger at the release site rather than quickly flying out and away. In fact, this method worked so well that the playback calls attracted two of the local Moquah males and even some of the birds released in 2016! These birds showed up at almost every release and acted as the best welcoming committee anyone could have ever asked for.

As in 2016, all released birds received a white numbered leg band but this year they also received unique combinations of colored leg bands. A small subset of the birds (5 female and 5 male) received radio transmitters and were immediately monitored by a wildlife intern hired by the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. Radio telemetry tracking has shown us that birds have been sticking around the release site as well as the larger barrens habitat. However, it has also shown us that these birds move! In fact, though naïve to the landscape and only recently released, they have started showing up in locations that were historically occupied by sharptails. Their movements, both direction and distance traveled, are also showing us that they may not be quite as isolated as we thought they were! For example, 1 male picked up and moved over 17 miles (straight line) East/Southeast from the release site to hang around the grass fields near the Ashland Airport; 3 other males moved over 5 miles West of the release site to some agriculture fields; and a female moved about 16 miles Southwest of the release site to land managed by Bayfield County where she eventually laid over 10 eggs. We try to obtain at least one location on each bird per week, but these far ranging and often directionally opposite movements can be challenging. The female on eggs was being monitored to determine when hatching occurred, and as of this writing, 6 chicks have been observed with the hen. This is very exciting news as it is the first confirmed reproduction of our translocated Minnesota sharptails in Wisconsin. Other observations of note include several groups of sharptails being reported by members of the public, one 2017 banded male grouse was seen approximately 14 miles South/Southwest of the release site, and one of the 2016 radioed males that vanished has reappeared. Interestingly he is now one of our most frequently found birds. Monitoring will continue through the summer and into winter. Our hope is to get a better understanding of how these birds are interacting with their environment as well as perhaps what their seasonal movements are. With any luck, we will see some of these birds show up at the dancing ground next spring. Dare I say, maybe a new dancing ground will be discovered or perhaps a historic one revitalized?

Our overall project goal still remains to bring 200 new sharp-tailed grouse (100 female and 100 male) to the Moquah Barrens. By the end of the 2017 season, we have successfully released 96 birds. The feasibility of a third and final year of trapping to get as close to this goal is possible is currently being looked into by tribal, state and other partners. Whether another season of translocation happens or not, this project has largely proven to be wildly successful and have give the struggling Moquah sharptail population a fighting chance. All these efforts would not have been as successful as they are without the support of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. Thank you for your generous support, encouragement and expertise. We look forward to continuing to work with you in the coming year.

**WSGS WEBSITE**, “[wisharptails.org](http://wisharptails.org)”, describes our goals and objectives, projects, members of our board, membership, contact information and electronic copies of recent newsletters.

## WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY PROJECTS 2000-2004

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Project</u>
<b>2000</b>	\$1,000	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Barrens restoration in Burnett County
	\$500	Friends of Crex	Additional donation for Crex Wildlife Education Center
	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$50	Wisconsin Stewardship Network	Membership support
<b>Total: \$1,585</b>			
<b>2001</b>	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$50	The Nature Conservancy	Don Bronk memorial donation
	\$50	Jan Hewitt	Sharptail census
<b>Total: \$135</b>			
<b>2002</b>	\$2,000	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Barrens restoration in Burnett County
	\$100	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Mail survey to private landowners in Red Clay Project area
	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$50	Wisconsin Stewardship Network	Membership support
<b>Total: \$2,185</b>			
<b>2003</b>	\$500	2003 Prairie Grouse Technical Council	Meeting host
	\$250	Wisconsin Outdoor Alliance	Membership support
	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
<b>Total: \$785</b>			
<b>2004</b>	\$5,000	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources	Crex Meadows land acquisition
	\$600	Northland College	Two sharptail blinds
	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$50	Friends of the Bird Sanctuary	Membership support
	\$125	Wisconsin Wildlife Federation	Membership support
	\$250	Wisconsin Outdoor Alliance	Membership support
<b>Total: \$6,060</b>			

## EARLY SHARPTAIL MANAGER PASSES

*Jim Evrard*

Cliff Wiita, Park Falls, Wisconsin died on May 25, 2017 at the age of 87. Cliff had a long career with the DNR, retiring in 1995. He was responsible for creating two sharp-tailed grouse management areas, the Pershing Wildlife Area (WA) in Taylor County and the Kimberly-Clark WA in Price County. During his career, Cliff was also involved in the management of the Riley Lake sharptail management area located near Fifield in the Chequamegon National Forest. I had the good fortune of working for Cliff as his assistant while stationed in Park Falls and Medford in the early 1970s. I learned how to manage sharptails from Wiita. Most of my memories involved prescribed burning in Pershing and Kimberly-Clark and censusing sharptails in Pershing and Riley Lake.

However Cliff's true wildlife management preference was white-tailed deer. He was involved in managing deer during the deer "drought" of the early 1970s when a series of harsh winters decimated the deer herd in far northern Wisconsin. Being raised in the snow belt of northern Iron County, he understood why deer numbers plummeted during that era.

Cliff had no fear of defending the DNR deer management program. I could always tell when he was disturbed and excited when his program was criticized. He would stand and clear his throat repeatedly before explaining deer biology and management to the individual or group.

His experience of being a former Marine Corps and Wisconsin National Guard officer, did not affect negatively his role as my supervisor. He was very reasonable and gave me enough independence to carry out my responsibilities as his assistant. I credit him with being one of the two DNR supervisors who shaped my career.



Brian Heeringa assisted in measuring  
Sharptail wing length.

## 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	Board Members:	Mike Cole	Ken Jonas
Vice President:	Tom Ziegeweid		Paul Kooiker	Bruce Moss
Secretary/Treasurer:	Jim Evrard		John Probst	John Zatopa

Newsletter Editor:	Jim Evrard	Newsletter Compositor:	Lauren Finch
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## MINUTES OF WSGS BOARD MEETING

*Saturday, April 22, 2017, Heartwood Conference Center, Trego*

**(Editor's Note:** Minutes of the WSGS Board and Annual Meetings are published for transparency)

The WSGS Board met at 10 a.m. Board members present were: Mike Cole, Jim Evrard, Ed Frank, Paul Kooiker, Bruce Moss, John Probst, John Zatopa, Vice-President Tom Ziegeweid conducted the meeting in the absence of President Dave Evenson who was in Texas.

Guests included Mark Witecka, DNR Upland Ecologist, DNR Barrens Biologist Bob Hanson, Tom Doolittle, USFWS, Bob Dumke, retired DNR research biologist, Gary Dunsmoore, retired DNR Technician, and Ken Jonas and Fred Strand retired DNR wildlife biologists,

Jim Evrard gave the Secretary's Report. Minutes of the board and annual meeting are published in the WSGS Newsletter. Currently the WSGS has 148 paid members and provides 19 free newsletters to Life Members; individuals who have provided free substantial service to the WSGS; politicians in charge of Wisconsin Legislative natural resources committees; and Wisconsin sharptail managers who are not WSGS members.

The WSGS currently does not have a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens WA. There is a need for such a document similar to the existing MOUs between the WSGS and the Friends of Crex and Friends of the Bird Sanctuary.

Kim Wheeler leaving the DNR and some copier problems at the Crex Center has forced a return to a private printer possibly increasing the annual cost of producing the WSGS newsletter from approximately \$500 to \$1,000. Promoting more electronic newsletters would save money. WSGS members are encouraged to write articles for submission to the newsletter. Possible development of the Jim Hale booklet has been delayed because of Wheeler's departure.

Evrard also gave the Treasurer's Report. The 2016 Treasurer's Report was published in the WSGS Newsletter No. 83, Spring 2017. The checking account balance was \$7,642 as of 4/19/17 minus a \$932 balance of a 2017 USFS Moquah Barrens Sharptail Translocation project grant totaling \$6,204. The WSGS CD balance as of 10/16/16 was \$2,662. Nancy Christel, DNR Manager of the Namekagon Barrens WA submitted a grant request of \$3,000 for 2017-18 for habitat management and Steve Hoffman, DNR Manger of the Crex Meadows WA submitted a grant request of \$2,000 for 2017-18. Both requests were approved by the Board under the condition that half of the requests will be granted in 2017 and the balance in 2018 in the WSGS Tax Years of 2017 and 2018 and the DNR Fiscal Year of July, 1, 2017 – June 30 2018.

The board also approved Bruce Moss' request for up to \$300 from the WSGS to print copies of the booklet, "Northwest Wisconsin Barrens" produced by the ad hoc group, the Friends of the Northwest Barrens. The color photo-filled booklet will be distributed to foresters and others at a meeting that might influence the future of barrens in northwest Wisconsin.

Paul Kooiker also reported that he developed and submitted a grant application for \$1,750 from the DNR's Wisconsin Citizen-based Monitoring Partnership Program to fund a census of the Moquah Barrens WA sharptail population in the spring of 2018. The Student Chapter of the Wildlife Society at Northland College in cooperation with the USFS would conduct the census using partnership funds to possibly pay for travel costs and electronic calls to elicit responses by breeding male sharptails.

*(Continued on Page 4)*

A discussion then took place between board members and the audience about the impact on the proposed “realignment” of the DNR. Major concerns expressed were the impact on prescribed burning and sharptail habitat. Kooiker was concerned that the WSGS might have been too vocal and aggressive in the past about advocating prescribed burning. Others responded that the WSGS is the sharptail advocate in Wisconsin and prescribed burning is important for the continued existence of the species in the state. It was decided to table any response until more information becomes available.

The Board decided the WSGS summer board meeting will be held in the McNeil Lodge on the Brule River depending upon availability determined by Bruce Moss,

*Submitted by Jim Evrard, Secretary /Treasurer*

## MINUTES OF THE WSGS ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

*April 22, 2017, Heartwood Conference Center, Trego*

Vice-President Tom Ziegeweid, filling in for President Dave Evenson who was in Texas, opened the meeting at 1:10 p.m. in the Norway Pine Room in the Pine Lodge, Heartwood Conference Center, Trego.

Only 15 persons were present, the third lowest number since the annual meetings began in 1991. The highest number was 50 persons in Ashland in 2001 and the lowest was 10 persons in Grantsburg in 2013. The average attendance is 28 persons for the 27 annual meetings.

We would appreciate any suggestions for improving attendance at the annual meeting.

Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard gave the Secretary’s and Treasurer’s reports. Detailed descriptions of both reports are contained in this newsletter in the Minutes of the WSGS Board Meeting held earlier from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

There were 13 ballots cast (only 9% of the membership voted!) in the WSGS Board Election. Incumbents Mike Cole and Jim Evrard were re-elected and Ken Jonas was elected to three-year terms on the Board. Single write-in votes were recorded for Dave Clausen, Rodney Cole, Ashly Steinke, and Scott Walter.

Bruce Moss gave a report on the activities of the ad hoc Friends of the Northwest Barrens (NWB), consisting of representatives from the WSGS and the Friends of Crex, Friends of the Namekagon Barrens and the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary. The group is developing an auto tour of the NWB. In addition, Moss and Fred Strand asked the WSGS for financial help in printing more copies of a color brochure featuring the flora and fauna of the Northwest Barrens. The brochures would be distributed to foresters and other decision makers at an upcoming meeting of the Wisconsin Forestry Association.

Bob Hanson, DNR Barrens Biologist, and Steve Hoffman, DNR Crex Meadows Manager, plan to attend the April 30th annual meeting of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society in the St. Croix State Park. Apparently sharptails have begun to colonize recent large clearcuts and subsequent prescribed burns in the park which is only 3 air-miles from Crex Meadows. Hanson gave an illustrated presentation on the habitat work involved with the development of the Northwest Barrens Management Plan.

Tom Doolittle, now from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and formerly from the U.S. Forest Service, gave a quick summary of the project to capture and translocate sharp-tailed grouse from northwest Minnesota to the Moquah Barrens WA in Wisconsin’s Bayfield County (a summary of 2016 and 2017 project accomplishments is given in this newsletter).

Mark Witecha, DNR Staff Upland Bird Ecologist reported that 7 sharptails were harvested by the 25 hunting permit holders in 2016. Of the 25 permit holders, 24 returned surveys (19 hunters hunted using their permits and 12 of those hunters stated they had a “good hunt”). A new procedure is being developed to determine the number of annual hunting permits but will not be used until 2018. The DNR Sharptail species committee will meet in June.

Witecha reported on UW-Madison PhD candidate Michael Hardy’s, preliminary research results. Hardy and his crew surveyed 6,654 randomly-selected points in the Northwest Barrens for sharptail occupancy in three springs (2014, 2015 and 2016).

*(Continued on page 5)*

## SPRING SHARPTAIL NUMBERS

*Jim Evrard*

The winter of 2016-17 was not a good one for sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin’s managed properties. Preliminary numbers of displaying males showed a decrease of 18%, from 169 counted in the Spring of 2016 to 138 birds counted in 2017. It was decided at the June 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the DNR Sharp-tailed Grouse Committee not to issue any 2017 hunting permits due to the decline in spring sharptail numbers.

Of the eight managed properties that still supported sharptails, six showed fewer displaying sharptails this spring compared to last year. Only one sharptail could be found in the Pershing WA and none in the Kimberly-Clark WA. Two, the Moquah Barrens and Riley Lake WAs showed an increase in sharptails counted. Both areas are managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Moquah Barrens WA has benefited from the release of Minnesota sharptails this spring.

<u>Managed Areas</u>	<u>2010</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>Ave.</u>
Crex Meadows WA	20	16	24	14	5	16	25	22	18
Douglas County WA	36	42	25	25	23	31	24	14	28
Kimberly-Clark WA	11	na	8	na	3	4	6	0	5
Moquah Barrens WA	7	5	6	3	4	3	2	10	8
Namekagon Barrens WA	43	21	40	42	56	81	62	47	49
Pershing WA	14	9	3	7	5	3	3	1	6
Riley Lake WA	31	15	33	25	19	27	16	21	23
<u>Barnes Barrens MA</u>	<u>na</u>	<u>na</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>31</u>	<u>23</u>	<u>18</u>
<b>Total Managed Areas</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>144</b>



Hatched Sharptail nest of Minnesota birds transported to Wisconsin.



Newly hatched Sharptail chick.

## AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

**(Editor’s Note:** This article represents three versions of the MSGS Spring Fling written by three persons attending the event. Tom’s column is verbatim as I received it. Dave Evenson’s and Jodie Provost’s articles were edited to reduce duplications)

**WSGS Members Attend MSGS Spring Fling** by Tom Ziegeweid: On April 29th and 30th the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) held their Spring Fling at St. Croix State Park right across the St. Croix River from Crex Meadows. They have their meeting every other year and this one was special as it was their 30th anniversary.

Although St. Croix Park and Crex Meadows are really ‘close’ to each other, it was a good hike to drive around the square to get there. I was impressed with the size of the park, which is mostly woods, but one of the speaking points was the large-scale savannah restoration currently underway.

Beside myself, Dave Evenson, John Probst, Fred Strand, Bob Hanson and Steve Hoffman attended the meeting. Fred gave a very gracious ‘thank you’ to Minnesota for their generous gift of transplant birds. Bob and Steve were also on the docket of presenters with their connections with the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area and Northwest Sands of Wisconsin.

Saturday was pretty much filled up with various presentations from many experts concerning brush lands and sharptails. This Spring Fling was special for me as I got to see some old friends from years past.

MSGS has expanded their Board to include regional directors and extra helping hands. They had their first election this year also. Dave Pauly is their new president, replacing Roche Lolly who has been president from the getgo. Bill Berg and Roche did a very entertaining history of the development of MSGS with recognition to charter members also.

The food was really special; besides the rolls, coffee and sandwich bar, one of Dave Pauly’s friends, originally from Texas, cooked a B-B-Q with dry rubbed pork ribs that was out of this world!

**Minnesota-Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Spring Fling** by Dave Evenson: The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, the fore-runner of the other Midwest groups, Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse association and Manitoba’s Sharptails Plus, turned 30 years old this year and met for their Spring Fling in an unheated beautiful CCC-era lodge [Mess Hall of Norway Point Group Center] in Minnesota’s St. Croix State Park just across the St. Croix River from Crex Meadows.

Founding Fathers Roche Lolly and Bill Berg kicked thing off with a retrospective on how the whole thing started and some of the important accomplishments along the way. Paul Telander [MDNR’s Wildlife Chief] gave a presentation about Minnesota sharptails that included supporting a population capable of sustaining harvests of 30-40,000 birds. Charlotte Roy [MDNR researcher] gave an evaluation of current landscape connectivity for Minnesota involving analyzing DNA from 367 sharptails from the northwest counties and 84 from the east central colonies. Genetic diversity was high with some interchange between the two populations.

Other presentations involved Lindsey Shartell’s research determining radio-marked sharp-tailed grouse breeding habitat selection and Park Manager Rick Dunkley’s sighting of a single male sharptail in the St. Croix Park after extensive barrens restoration following a massive windstorm in the park [it is unknown if the sharptail came from Crex Meadows or east central Minnesota].

Evenson concluded by stating: “It was fun to attend this meeting with so many prairie grouse participants. WSGS thanks MSGS for “showing us the way” in our early years. While we’ve always known that the state line meant nothing to sharptails, in the last half-dozen years or so we’ve seen more and more awareness of the connectivity of the two states”.

**MSGS 30th Anniversary Celebration at St, Croix State Park** by Jodie Provost: About 60 people joined in the merriment {30th year anniversary}, ranging from original members and brushland managers to our youngest attendees, two sons of sharptail enthusiasts. .

Following presentations on sharptails [mentioned in Evenson’s article] and some associated wildlife species, the meeting moved into open floor time for managers and all interested to share updates on projects and populations in their work and home areas across Minnesota sharptail range, and discuss shaping the next 30 years. Our event ended with a delectable BBQ rib supper [enjoyed by Ziggy!], fundraising and socializing. Much thanks to all, \$2,882.44 was raised through Spring Fling for sharptail habitat projects.

Provost concluded by stating: “On Sunday morn, April 30, a small group convened for coffee and rolls, then toured the Park’s savanna restoration with Rick Dunkley and neighborhood sharptail habitat with Dave Pauly. MSGS genuinely thanks everyone that worked on and behind the scenes to recognize this special anniversary milestone”.

Only 86 or 1% of the 6,654 points were occupied by sharptails, mostly near established sharptail management properties and the Germann Road wildfire. The habitat occupancy was tied to disturbance (logging and fire). Electronic playback calls increased the effectiveness of the surveys.

Witecha also spoke about the ongoing DNR “re-alignment”. The DNR now has 25% less staff than it had in the recent past. Priorities are important in the face of fewer people and less funding. Barrens habitat is high (#1) priority for funding while cool-season grasses (Pershing and Kimberly-Clark WAs) has lower (#3) priority.

DNR wildlife management personnel will have less involvement in prescribed burning which is now a priority work item for the Bureau of Forestry including Fire Control (only 72 non-forestry DNR employees will still have burning credentials). Big projects like Crex Meadows will not be affected (i.e. will not lose employees or heavy equipment). However, this is a proposal at this time and will be refined in the future.

At the close of the business meeting, Ziegeweid presented Ed Frank, retiring Board Member, with a plaque commemorating his many years of service to the WSGS and a plaque to Tom Doolittle, USFWS, for his role in creating and initiating the Moquah Barrens Sharptail Translocation Project while employed as the USFS Wildlife Biologist at Washburn, Wisconsin.

Ziegeweid then held the raffle drawing for the framed sharptail art prints in the annual WSGS fund-raiser. Bob Dumke, retired DNR Research Biologist, won the Owen Gromme print; Bill Berg won the King print, and Mowry Smith III won the Buzzel print. Thanks to all who bought tickets for the raffle, our second-largest source of funding for the WSGS. Following the raffle drawing, drawings were held for door prizes for those in attendance. We then adjourned to the bar for the social prior to enjoying the evening dinner.

Seven hardy and not-too warmly-dressed WSGS members joined Nancy Christel, DNR Manager at 6:00 a.m. Sunday morning for an auto tour of the Namekagon Barrens WA. During the tour, it began to rain that turned to snow for a few minutes. We saw the area acquired from the Plum Creek Timber holding company that is rapidly becoming sharptail habitat (logging followed by controlled burning) under Nancy’s aggressive management. We did flush approximately 20 sharptails from a lek where a WSGS observation blind is erected.

We returned to the Heartwood Conference Center for a delicious breakfast buffet before returning to our homes and ending the 2017 WSGS Annual Meeting.

*Submitted by Jim Evrard, Secretary/Treasurer*



Male Sharptail fitted with radio transmitter.



Walk-in traps used to capture Minnesota Sharptails.