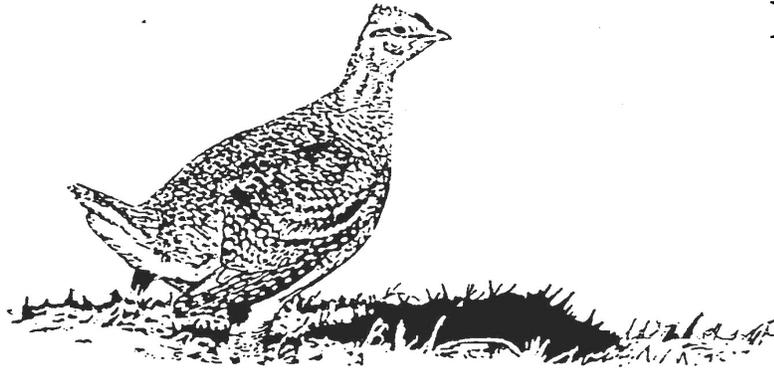


# WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 91

Winter 2020

## 2020 ANNUAL WSGS MEETING *1990-2020- 30 Years!*

The 2020 Annual WSGS Membership Meeting will take place on April 18 and 19 at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center, Ashland, Wisconsin. As in the past, there will be a WSGS Board meeting at 10 a.m. Saturday morning, followed by the business meeting with presentations at 1 p. m. in the afternoon. The drawing for the art raffle and door prizes will take place following the business meeting.

Saturday evening will find us at a social, and a Lake Superior traditional fish boil at a local park.

On Sunday morning there will be an early morning tour of Moquah Wildlife Area led by US Forest Service Wildlife Staff. We will visit the site where sharptails were released in the three year project, the newly occupied lek site not used by sharptails in decades and view the massive habitat work, both prescribed fire and mechanical, which has been completed in recent years.

Save the Date! More details will be available in the next newsletter or on our Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Website.

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### WSGS ON LINE

More people every day are looking at their screens for information. Last summer Mike Cole and Ken Jonas got us up on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Wisharptails.org/>. You can help by liking and commenting on stories as they are posted. And you can contribute your own sharptail related items, or links to other stories.

Kim Wheeler manages our website, <http://www.wisharptails.org/>. We need to get better at feeding information to her as well, and making that site more useful.

So, as everyone in the world says, like us on Facebook!

# FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

By Dave Evenson

One of the good things about getting to be an old man is that much of what is called history is something I've actually lived.

I'm not quite old enough to have had Aldo Leopold as a professor (although I was born before his death), but I did have a bunch of professors who had been his graduate students, so only one generation removed. In 1968, when I was in Basic Training in the Army, they allowed us to have one personal "thing" in our locker. My thing was a little book, not yet well-known in those days before first Earth Day, called A Sand County Almanac. That little book reintroduced me to the world of sanity on each Sunday afternoon, the only time the cadre left us alone long enough to read.

A few years later, as a green trainee wildlife manager I made the rounds of various stations around the state, and pretty much at each station, in the sand country especially, I'd find a copy of a little green book on the manager's shelf- Wisconsin Grouse Problems, by Wallace Grange. Again, the long time personnel in those offices had known Grange, and the book was not considered history, but just a few years ago. Those sand counties, central, northeast and northwest still could show you dancing sharptails.

One of the statements in Grange's book is his conclusion: *"The sharp-tail in Wisconsin is similarly doomed 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 it inevitably will go on the rare and non-hunted bird list."*

I take some pride that we've stretched that out to over seven decades now. I take pride in the small part I was able to play as one of many wildlife managers who developed and applied those adequate management techniques. And I take some pride that WSGS has been able to be active through those extra several decades, and educate, cajole, fund at a small level, some of the actions that have kept sharptails and sharptail habitat in the state.

Of course, I need to conclude with my obsession, Gordon MacQuarrie. While I didn't find him until late in life, his writings on hunting sharptails are so vivid and so enjoyable they can't be ignored. In his time, hunting "chickens," really sharptails, was not exactly commonplace- they had closed seasons at times (of course they had closed seasons on ruffed grouse and deer as well), but it was an expected part of a sportsman's joys.

I'm sorry to say no sportsman will be allowed to experience that joy in Wisconsin this year. I have to admit I voted with the majority as your representative on the WIDNR committee, although the WSGS Board has more recently looked at the data, and sent a letter to WIDNR expressing reasons why that decision was incorrect.

Let's all work together, WSGS, DNR, US Forest Service to see if we can't get another few decades of good management and good sharptail populations.

## 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: Ken Jonas  
Secretary/Treasurer: Ken Jonas

### BOARD MEMBERS:

Mike Cole      Robert Dumke  
Paul Kooiker    Bruce Moss  
Ashley Steinke

Newsletter Compositor: Lauren Finch

## **A HUGE THANK YOU TO JIM EVRARD, 1942-2020**



Everyone who is reading this newsletter knows Jim's name- he's been compiling and editing for a long time, probably 20-25 years. He's been treasurer and secretary of this organization for about the same length of time. There is no question that he has devoted more time to this organization than anyone else over the past 30 years. Most members have no idea of the amount of time Jim spent on such details as dealing with the IRS regarding tax exempt status or working with the banks or the post office regarding mailings. It is safe to say that WSGS would be a far different organization, possibly a defunct organization, had not Jim stepped up to the plate.

Jim was diagnosed with liver cancer late last year, and spent the first part of this year in hospice at home. He heard the call of The Old Duck Hunters on February 10. Coincidentally, the WSGS board met two days later. We voted at that meeting that a continuing honor that we will be giving is to have all further awards that WSGS presents be entitled "Jim Evrard Award." Thank you, Jim, our friend.

### **DUES SLIPPAGE**

We know you want to be part of this organization, but it's sometimes hard to remember when to pay your dues. Nearly half our membership is in arrears- that's not fair to those who are faithful in keeping up with their dues.

If you receive your newsletter via U.S. Mail, note the expiration date for your membership on the mailing label. Email newsletter recipients can look the same place, near your name. Either way, we'll be sending out a reminder shortly, to get you up to speed.

If you can change from hard copy to email newsletter, please do so. Printing and postage are one of the bigger expenses for WSGS. Thank you.

### **NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR WSGS BOARD MEMBERS**

The terms of three WSGS board members Mike Cole, Ken Jonas and Jim Evrard (deceased) expire this year. Nominations are being sought for three-year terms for the three positions. All WSGS members in good standing can be nominated by themselves or by other members. Send nominations to:

WSGS  
102 East Crex Avenue  
Grantsburg WI 54840

## 2019 STG SEASON CLOSURE

### *A letter to the DNR*

Dear Tami and Pete,

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) is an advocacy group that promotes and supports science based management of sharp-tailed grouse in the state of Wisconsin. We have been active in providing support for projects ranging from habitat enhancement to sharptail trans-location and are engaged with public education about the species. The primary focus and top priority of the WSGS is doing what we can to have a viable and sustainable population of sharp-tails in the state for perpetuity. We also support and advocate for sharptails to continue being listed as a hunted species and for a managed public hunt to occur in years when the best science based information indicates that a limited harvest would not result in additive deleterious impacts on defined population segments.

In light of our purpose and mission, there was considerable discussion and disappointment expressed at our recent summer WSGS Board meeting surrounding the recommendation of the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources Sharp-tailed Grouse committee that was later confirmed by the Wildlife Management Leadership Team, to not conduct a limited harvest season in any of the state's sharptail management units for 2019. While the WSGS does have a representative on the DNR Sharp-tail committee, the WSGS Board of Directors as a whole does not support the DNR's decision. The no season decision was recommended despite three of the management units being eligible for a hunt based on the DNR committee's own criteria and a statewide increase of 19% over the 2018 count. STG Hunting Unit 8, which contains the Namekagon Barrens and Douglas County Wildlife Area, counted 76 male sharp-tails on monitored leks this spring, which is 3X greater than the minimum threshold needed to conduct a fall hunting season. Unit 8 did have a limited hunting season in 2018 where over 200 hunters applied for the 25 permits that were available, resulting in a harvest of 11 sharptails by the 18 hunters who actually participated. Unit 8 spring lek counts increased to 76 males this year, up 16% from the 67 males counted in 2018, suggesting that the fall hunt had negligible impact on the breeding population of the unit for that annual period.

Our WSGS Board of Directors also had a lengthy discussion of the Sharptailed Grouse Population Viability Analysis (PVA) that was recently released. The implications of the PVA scenarios were used as justification by the WDNR Sharp-tail Committee for not conducting a hunt in 2019 due to "low probabilities of population persistence over the next 50 years" as stated on the WDNR web page. Yet at current harvest levels, the PVA modeled prediction was for an 80% likelihood of viable persistence of the population at Namekagon Barrens which was the source of data used for the modeled runs. Our WSGS Board

*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.



has a number of members who served as wildlife biologists and wildlife researchers over the course of their careers and whose expertise in the field of wildlife management and biology is highly respected by their peers. After review of the material that the WSGS Board had access to, the consensus was that outcomes predicted by the PVA model are unreliable and the assumptions used as inputs for the model are insufficient to have confidence in the outcomes. The author's PVA power point presentation justifiably states that there is "lots of noise and uncertainty" in the model due in part to "low population size and annual variation." Yet the WDNR sharptail grouse committee took the implied PVA results verbatim and chose the recommendation to not have a hunt this year despite an increased population over 2018, for fear that a harvest would be additive mortality and increase the likelihood of quasi extinction in the 50 year period. Our WSGS Board is disappointed with their recommendation and the justification that is publicly stated.

We fully understand the challenging limitations that Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse face including ecological stressors, suitable habitat availability, disjunct populations, genetic variability and low public awareness. We are interested in continuing to work with all private and public entities including state agencies, to do everything we can to insure that sharp-tailed grouse will be a viable and sustainable member of Wisconsin's suite of wildlife species for the future. We suggest that the Department of Natural Resources develop specific conditions or a model that is prescriptive for determining when to initiate a sharp-tailed grouse hunt for specific management units in any given year, and the number of hunting permits that will be issued, based on that data that went into that decision. We would be glad to assist with the development of this product and feel it would go a long way in removing the uncertainty that now exists for WDNR staff and WSGS members as well as the general public, when it comes to the expectation of the chance to hunt a spectacular game bird in our home state.

Very Truly in Conservation,

*The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, Board of Directors:*

*Dave Evenson, President*

*Ken Jonas, Vice- President*

*Jim Evrard, Secretary-Treasurer*

*Bruce Moss*

*Paul Kooiker*

*Mike Cole*

*Ashley Steinke*

*Robert Dumke*

## **MINUTES OF SUMMER 2019 WSGS BOARD MEETING**

*July 18, 2019 Bob Dumke Home*

*Present: Mike Cole, Bob Dumke, Dave Evenson, Jim Evrard, Ken Jonas, Bruce Moss, John Probst, Ashley Steinke, and Councilors Ed Frank and Tom Ziegeweid.*

*Absent: Paul Kooiker*

President Evenson called the meeting to order at 12:45 p.m. in the Dumke dining room of their home on Prinel Lake, Danbury. Bob (moving about in his 'scooter') was introduced to the group and gave his recent medical history and the history of their property. Ziggy also gave us the history of his recent spinal surgery. It was also reported that Kooiker was absent due to a medical appointment with the surgeon who recently repaired one of his heart valves.

The Secretary's Report was given by Jim. The minutes of all WSGS activities are published in the WSGS Newsletter so were not read at the meeting. Evrard also gave the Treasurer's Report. As of *Continued on page 7*

July 17, 2019, the checking account balance was \$5,585.36 and as of October 16, 2018, the CD balance was \$2,690.00 to a total of \$8,275.36 with no indebtedness. *Continued on page 7.*

# WSGS BOARD MEETING MINUTES

## *McNeil Farmhouse on the Brule, Sept 23, 2019*

*Present: Mike Cole, Bob Dumke, Bruce Moss, Dave Evenson, Alex Lehner USFS, Aaron Falstrom USFS*

1PM

Secretary Treasurer report: Jim Evrard reported via email-The WSGS is solvent with about \$5,000 in the checking account and \$1,600.00 in the CD and no debts. We will again serve as the 'money bags' for the USFS in their last year of the Moquah Project.

Alex and Aaron reported on the Moquah project. This spring saw high counts of 13 males and 3 females on the 241 lek (release site) and 10 birds on Three Poles lek, probably mostly males. Laura Erickson reported birds at the power plant near Oulu. A couple of broods have been seen. USFS burned the unit that holds the 241 lek this summer, for the first time in decades. They have a contract for a 10 person brush cutting crew- 210 acres. The genetics project is ongoing.

We have about 100 visitors on Facebook, Mike reports. Always looking for good content to post. We discussed Twitter and some other platforms, but probably work on Facebook and website for now.

The Northern Great Lakes Visitors Center, Ashland, has been reserved for Saturday, April 18, 2020 for annual meeting. We agreed to have a fish boil for supper, probably Todd Naas officiating. Possible sites for fish boil include the NGLVC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Landing, or Harborview Event Center, Washburn, next door to Washburn Hotel. Crest Motel also mention. Bruce suggested just giving a list of nearby motels and letting people choose their own. Professor Erik Olson, Northland College, was suggested as being on agenda- explaining his students involvement with surveys. (This may be spring break at Northland). Note - since the meeting Alex has gotten the email introduction between Dave and Erik, and he has been asked to participate.

Bruce suggested that the history of Moquah would be an interesting topic- perhaps Dan Eklund presenter.

We tabled discussion of project requests until further talk with Jim.

2020 Season possibilities/ review for Threatened status. Ken Jonas had talked with Kent Van Horn before the meeting and Kent had assured us that we would have a first crack at data before season setting meeting next year. Bruce thought that was too late, and we should at least write a letter yet this year laying out the facts that there already is a system in the plan for setting harvest and quotas- while it may not be perfect, it is in place until it is replaced. 2020 will be the year for review of species for Threatened and Endangered status. It behooves us to meet with DNR early on that issue as well, and verify the data needed and how the process works. If listed season structure becomes moot.

Bob Dumke brought up Ed's letter to Bob Hanson re adaptive management- we concluded that probably Bob and Ed have different definitions for what this means.

We have not received any response on question to Mark Witecha re DNA work on existing wings- need followup.

4 PM we closed meeting, ate Bruce's venison brats. Bob, Bruce and Dave stayed overnight. Probably a first for a WSGS board meeting- no alcohol was consumed. Dave and Bruce fished in the morning, beautiful day, but caught no fish. Some cohos were in, fair amount of fishing pressure. Dave and Wanda Zeug were there, shared of the bounty of their garden and we shared a nice visit as well. Homebound about 12:30.

Reporter- Dave Evenson

Since the annual meeting, a \$980 grant was provided to buy jack pine seed for an experiment in an industrial forest; a grant of \$228 was provided to support the past Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop held in Grantsburg on May 29 And 30 and Steinke donated 20 lbs. of grass-fed beef-burger to the same workshop. The workshop was co-sponsored by the WSGS and the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. Thirty-five people attended the Workshop including 5 WSGS Board Members and Ed Frank.

The group then turned to a discussion of potential sharptail research projects. Adaptive Management was discussed by Dumke and Frank that centered on evaluating on the ‘rolling barrens’ concept. This research could involve the UW-Madison (Dr. Zuckerberg), DNR staff-Madison and the WSGS. The long discussion was circular. Another potential research project would be the development of a new Sharptail Population Model. It was thought that a meeting of all the stake holders was needed and a letter to that extent should be sent to Madison DNR.

The next lengthy discussion involved the PVA presented at the recent meeting of the DNR’s Sharp-tailed Grouse Committee. Various board members expressed concern over the validity of the population estimates and as a group, showed little confidence in the hypothetical exercise. Another concern was that the PVA was not distributed to the Committee members in a timely fashion that allowed valid examination of the concept. The projected sharptail numbers were too conservative. Another concern that ending sharptail hunting and putting the species on the endangered list might lead to less financial and political support for the sharptail in our state.

Jonas and others will develop a letter highlighting our concerns and send it to the DNR.

A motion was made by Evrard to present artist Buzz Balzer with a recognition plaque for his contributions to the WSGS including an original painting of sharptails feeding in white birch in the winter on Crex Meadows. The painting was raffled for \$800 with \$400 going to Balzer and \$400 to the WSGS. Balzer also gave the right to make prints of the painting to the WSGS.

More recently, Balzer donated another original portrait and the right to make prints of a male sharptail to the WSGS. Cards were made of the painting’s image.

The election of Board Officers was held with Evenson and Evrard returned to their offices Ken Jonas elected to the position of WSGS Vice-President.

Ziggy was presented a WSGS plaque for his many years of service to the WSGS. However, Evrard screwed up and brought the wrong plaque from among the three plaques that was given him. The error will be corrected.

The recent establishment of a Face Book page for the WSGS by Ken and Mike was discussed, approved and decided to continue with the effort in the future.

The 2020 WSGS Annual Meeting will take place on April 18 and 19 in Ashland with focus on the sharptail translocation project. A potential meeting place might be either the federal Great Lakes Visitor Center on U.S. 2 or the Sigurd Olson Institute on the Northland College campus.

The group then adjourned at 4:30 p.m. for a social in the Dumke home and on the lawn overlooking the lake. The outside temperature was high with high humidity making outside activities miserable with the exception of a slight SW wind.

The Dumke’s arranged a potluck dinner in their dining room at 5:30 p.m. that was highlighted by the presentation of birthday cakes to Evrard who would turn 77 years old the following day. Kooiker shares the same birthday. Due to the heat and potential of violent storms predicted later that evening, most meeting attendees left for their homes, ending the meeting.



*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.*

## 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

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