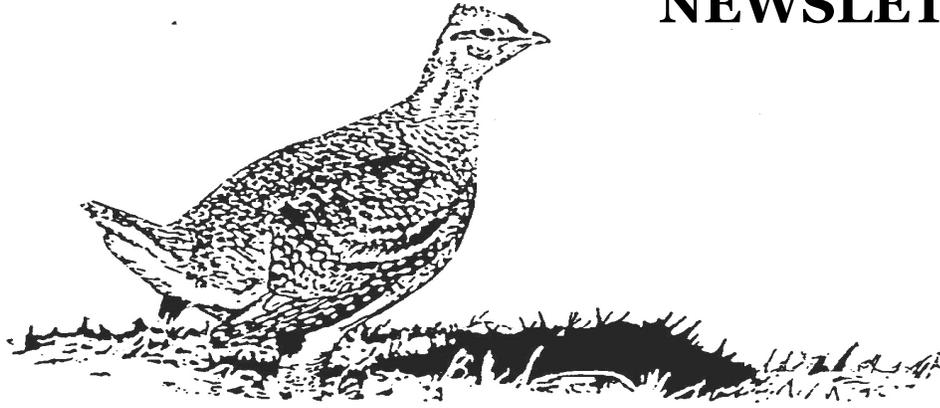


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 77

Fall/Winter 2015

2016 ANNUAL MEETING

by Jim Evrard

Mark your calendars now! The 26th annual meeting of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society will take place on Saturday and Sunday, April 16 and 17, 2016. The meeting will be held in the St. Croix Inn located on the shores of beautiful St. Croix Lake in Solon Springs. This will mark the 8th time the WSGS annual meeting has been held in beautiful Solon Springs.

The WSGS Board will meet on Saturday morning in the St. Croix Inn and the annual members meeting will begin at 1 PM. in the lower room of the Inn. The business meeting will end at 3 PM. followed by a program featuring the future of sharptails in northwest Wisconsin. The program will end with a drawing for door prizes and the annual art print raffle. A social hour will follow prior to the catered dinner beginning at 6 PM. in the lower room of the Inn.

An early Sunday morning tour of sharptail habitat in the Barnes-Brule area is planned followed by a group breakfast at 9 AM. in an area restaurant, ending the 2016 annual meeting.

A block of 15 rooms has been reserved in the St. Croix Inn at a special rate of \$50 per room with a slightly higher cost for a room overlooking the St. Croix Lake. Call the St. Croix Inn at (715) 378-4444 to reserve a room. The reservation cut-off date for the block of rooms is April 10th.

There will also be a \$15 per person meeting registration fee that will cover the costs of the catered dinner and beverages and munchies during the meeting breaks. Send the registration fee to me at: Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840.

If you have suggestions to add to or improve the annual meeting, contact Vice-President Tom 'Ziggy' Ziegeweid at 2950 E. Wellington Drive, Eau Claire, WI 54703-0748, Cell Phone (715) 456-8635 or Home Phone (715) 834-2627.

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

“We have crept out of our close and crowded houses into the night and morning, and we see what majestic beauties wrap us in their bosom....The musical south wind which converts all trees into wind harps, the crackling and spurting of hemlock in the flames; or of pine logs which yield glory to the walls and faces in the sitting room; these are the music and pictures of most ancient religion.... I go with my friend to the shore of our little river....and, with one stroke of the paddle I leave the world of villages and personalities behind, and pass into the delicate realm of sunset.”

Most of you know that I am a Gordon MacQuarrie Old Duck Hunter Inc. nut so you might be surprised that I came by this Ralph Waldo Emerson quote via a Nash Buckingham story. Emerson was a 19th Century poet. I haven't read Emerson and would not have considered nature writing to be his strength, but this passage made a lot of sense to me. Like most of you, I have a busy life, too busy actually for October, and I agree with Emerson about how valuable a stroke of the paddle away from villages and personalities is.

One of the good busy things we're about is the potential transplant of sharptails to Moquah Barrens. Bird numbers have dropped to a handful on this northernmost Wisconsin sharptail area. Recent efforts have created much better habitat. Tom Doolittle, USFS wildlife manager has succeeded in obtaining Forest Service funding, and has asked WSGS to be their principal non-profit partner. We will serve as advisors, handle the pass-through money, and provide match, mostly in terms of hours donated.

Together with Tom Doolittle, WASA has hired Sandy Schultz-Naas to do the research on how best to trap and transport Sharp-tailed Grouse, and do it with the least harm to the birds. This is a challenging undertaking. We want this effort to succeed, so we are building on the knowledge of past efforts. The history of prairie grouse transplants is not full of successes. Jim Evrard, Fred Strand and I recently met with Sandy and DNR wildlife biologists Todd Naas and Greg Kessler and Tom Doolittle, and we think we're getting closer to Sandy's report. Lots of logistics, and concerns from neighboring states who may have source populations.

We hope we can begin trapping as early as next March, little over four months away. You'll read more in the next newsletter, but there may be a call for WSGS members with special skills to volunteer on this project.

One of the tactics we may use is to set up stuffed sharptails on the historic dancing grounds at Moquah with sound recordings, so that transplanted birds have a focus area to relate to. If you have sharptail skins from Wisconsin or west that you would like to donate please let us know. Thank you.

And now – the wind is picking up – it's cloudy outside. And I'm off to dip a paddle in the water. I hope you can too. Thanks.

Thank you, *Dave Evenson*

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.

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Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Evrard

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

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Mike Cole Ed Frank
Paul Kooiker Bruce Moss
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NAMEKAGON BARRENS SHARPTAIL HUNT

by Bruce Moss

Five sharp-tailed grouse flushed well within shotgun range of Jim Evrard, Mike Cole and me as we began our two-day hunt in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (NBWA). Unfortunately we had arrived in the NBWA only a couple of minutes before and had not yet left our truck. This did not seem to be a problem as they only flew a short distance and landed. Our stalk resulted in a thorough search of the barrens within a quarter mile of the landing site without finding these elusive birds. After six hours of hunting over two days, we learned that sharp-tailed grouse were well adapted to eluding both hunters and Hazel, Mike's German Shorthair pointer.

It soon became impossible to keep track of how many birds we saw, but our rough count estimated that we had flushed about 75 grouse. Readers of this account must wonder how three hunters and a dog can flush so many grouse without filling their one-bird-a-piece limit. The answer is simple; they live there and have evolved escaping predation by taking flight at great distances from danger. Most were airborne before we could get within 100 yards. One finally made the fatal mistake of flying away from two hunters but near the third, me.

The three of us figured this was a great hunt. The dog work was terrific. Seeing some 75 grouse was unbelievable. Staying with friends in a family resort was great fun. Having the NBWA totally to ourselves was incredible. Getting one bird for three of us was fine. We were hunting for a Wisconsin trophy and one was enough.

Sharp-tailed grouse hunting in Wisconsin had been closed for a couple of years to protect the isolated populations. However, record numbers of sharptails this past summer at the NBWA allowed for 100 hunting permits to be issued. Past seasons have indicated that hunting success would be low and probably less than 20 grouse would be taken. Surveys of hunters during the season confirmed that few were shot.

Part of the hunt was to enjoy the remote area and explore places that the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area could use when visiting the wildlife area. We stayed about six miles east of the NBWA on the St. Croix Trail at the Kimball Lake Resort. We rented a lakeside cabin (actually a small home) for a very reasonable cost. The Resort would be a great place to stay when viewing sharptails in the spring. Our hunt was topped off with dinner the first day and finished with lunch the following day, both in the hamlet of Webb Lake south of Highway 77.

(Editor's Note: Since Bruce was the only lucky hunter during our hunt, bird-less Mike decided to return on the second-to-the-last morning of the hunting season for another try for sharptails. He and his other German Shorthair, Helga, hunted in a different part of the NBWA and again found grouse. Mike finally had an open shot and bagged his first Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse.

I returned with my spouse to the NBWA the last morning of the season and too found sharptails. My hunting partner was not quite as good as the two pointers in finding birds, but I still managed to miss a flushing straggler sharptail that offered a good shot just after I flushed a flock of five out-of-range birds from a firebreak edge. We also saw more sharptails along the roads. What a great ending to a great experience!



MASSIVE MOQUAH PROJECT

by Jim Evrard

Dave Evenson, Fred Stand and I, representing the WSGS, met in late June in the Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland with Tom Doolittle, wildlife biologist for the Washburn Ranger District of the Chequamegon National Forest. The purpose of the meeting was to finalize the administrative procedures for the proposed cooperative sharptail translocation and habitat improvement project (“Challenge – Cost share Agreement”) for the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area (MBWA) in Bayfield County.

The sandy interior of the Bayfield Peninsula was once home to thousands of Sharp-tailed Grouse. Over time, a tremendous loss of habitat due to natural forest succession and an intensive tree planting drastically reduced sharptail numbers to the point where hunting was discontinued and the very existence of sharptails in the area was threatened.

The DNR recognized this problem and signed an agreement with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to create the MBWA. At the time, the Chequamegon National Forest did not have a wildlife biologist on its staff and had little, if any, funding for wildlife management. It wasn't until the early 1970s that a wildlife biologist joined the national forest staff as the only professional wildlifer for the entire forest and his budget barely covered the cost of his office supplies.

The DNR stepped in and assumed the wildlife management responsibility in the national forest, signing an agreement with the USFS. DNR Wildlife Manager Don Bublitz stationed at Brule was responsible for managing the Moquah Barrens. A modest acreage of federal land in the center of the peninsula was maintained in open barrens habitat through prescribed burning.

Sharptails continued to decline to a dangerous low level until an effort was made to translocate birds from the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area (CMWA) to the MBWA through a cooperative effort by the DNR, the U.S. Forest Service and the Great Lakes Indian Wildlife Commission (GLFWC).

Larry Gregg, DNR Researcher headed the field operation that captured hens with their broods late in the summer in the CMWA, transported them to the MBWA where some, but not all the birds, were fitted with radio transmitters and released. The WSGS donated \$800 to purchase radio transmitters. GLFWC wildlife biologist Peter David was responsible for monitoring the radioed sharptails in the MBWA.

None of the radioed sharptails survived the winter, killed mostly by avian predators. However, the number of spring displaying male sharptails (the best index to the population size) increased significantly the following spring and continued to be in relatively good numbers for a number of years before sliding downhill to the handful of birds that continue to be counted today in the MBWA. There is genetic evidence that some of the Crex sharptails bred with the Moquah birds.

At some point, the USFS added additional wildlife biologists to the staff of the Chequamegon National Forest, with a biologist supervisor at forest headquarters and a biologist in each of its ranger districts. Scott Posner was appointed the new Washburn District Wildlife Biologist and given the management responsibilities for the MBWA. Under Scott's management, the size of the open barrens was increased by timber sales and prescribed burning. However, sharptails numbers did not respond and remained at a low level.

Posner recently retired and was replaced by Thomas Doolittle. Doolittle had lived and worked professionally in the area before joining the USFS, working in Alaska for a number of years. Nearing retirement, he returned to Ashland to assume the wildlife biologist position in Washburn. Tom stated one of his life goals was to see sharptail numbers in the MBWA recover their numbers to a level where their continued existence would be assured. Doolittle oversaw the prescribed burning of an impressive acreage of the MBWA this spring.

Tom aggressively sought federal funding to improve the open barrens habitat and boost sharptail numbers in the MBWA. He put together a partnership between the USFS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the WSGS, and the Bad River and Red Cliff Bands of the Ojibwa Indians for a cooperative project to translocate sharptails from northwest Minnesota to the MBWA. In addition, using timber sales and burning, he plans to open a corridor from the existing barrens habitat, west to the forest boundary and then through USFWS Fish Hatchery lands to private agricultural land on clay soils that still supports a small number of sharptails. Hopefully, the two groups of sharptails will intermingle, increasing their genetic diversity.

The WSGS will serve as the conduit to funnel money to the various players in this impressive project that will total nearly a quarter million dollars -- a combination of cash and in-kind donations.

Some of the money sources besides the USFS include the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help four declining wildlife species inhabiting the Lake Superior Watershed: the Sharp-tailed Grouse, the Kirtland Warbler, the Golden-winged Warbler, and the Brook Trout. DNR wildlife biologists Greg Kessler, stationed at Brule and Todd Naas, at Ashland, are major players in this project.

Another source of federal money is a USFWS effort to improve populations of insects that are important 'pollinators' of domestic and wild plants. These pollinators, including butterflies and bees, are declining and there are fears that their reduced numbers will cause a drop in domestic food production and the health and diversity of natural plant communities.

Simply, federal funds will be transferred to the WSGS account and we will pay the project bills with that money. No WSGS money will be involved. Any time that the all-volunteer WSGS members are involved in the project will be used as an in-kind donation. The WSGS will not benefit monetarily but we will be involved in supporting Sharp-tailed Grouse and their habitat in Wisconsin which is our organization's mission.

Dave Evenson and I are involved in the project since he is the WSGS president and I'm the Secretary/Treasurer (he signs the papers and I sign the checks!). Retired DNR wildlife biologist and Sharp-tailed Grouse manager and long-time WSGS member Fred Strand will be the local WSGS representative. Doolittle is the overall project supervisor.

Progress in this ambitious project will reported in future newsletter articles.



WSGS WEBSITE

The WSGS website, "wisharptails.org", describes our goals and objectives, projects, members of our board, membership and contact information, and electronic copies of recent newsletters.

Those members wishing to receive their newsletters electronically should check the appropriate line on the back page of the printed newsletter when renewing memberships or contact Jim Evrard at the WSGS address.

MINUTES OF WSGS BOARD MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The WSGS Board held its fall meeting at the Crex Meadows Center, Grantsburg on September 10, 2015. Board members present were Mike Cole, Dave Evenson, Jim Evrard, Ed Frank, Paul Kooiker, Bruce Moss, John Probst, John Zatopa and Tom Ziegeweid. Also attending were guests Steve Hoffman and Bob Hanson.

At 10:30 am., Steve Hoffman, Crex Meadows Wildlife Area Superintendent led an auto tour of the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area that highlighted sharp-tailed grouse barrens habitat with emphasis on prescribed burning.

President Evenson called the board meeting to order at 1:20 pm. By unanimous vote, Evenson was re-elected as President, Tom Ziegeweid was re-elected as Vice-President and Jim Evrard was re-elected as Secretary/Treasurer.

Evrard gave the Treasurer's report - as of 9/10/15 the checking account balance was \$5,979.03 and the CD was \$2,626.00 for a total of \$8,605.03.

Our financial obligations include \$1,500 for a habitat project on the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area and \$1,000 for a similar project in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, both need to be paid prior to July 1, 2016. The WSGS has also pledged \$3,000 for land acquisition for the Douglas County Wildlife Area, but the success of the acquisition is questionable.

Ziegeweid volunteered to make the arrangements for the 2016 annual meeting to be held in Solon Springs at the St. Croix Inn as in past years. Tom will check for meeting dates availability, either Saturday-Sunday, April 16-17 or 23-24, 2016 and will reserve rooms, meeting room and make arrangements with the caterer. A tour of sharptail habitat in the Barnes-Brule area will be offered early Sunday morning.

Bruce Moss gave a summary of the work of the ad hoc Friends of the Northwest Sands group, with the WSGS represented by Dave Evenson, the Friends of Crex represented by Jim Evrard; the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens represented by Moss; and the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary (the Douglas County Wildlife Area) represented by Jane Anklam. Two products were produced - a glossy, colorful booklet for VIPs in the Northwest Barrens area and a color brochure for distribution to the general public. Both publications are designed to hopefully increase support for the barrens community in Northwest Wisconsin. A future project will be the development of a paper placemat for use in area cafes and restaurants.

Bob Hanson reported the progress in developing a cooperative barrens management plan linking permanent barrens management properties with a corridor of temporary habitat ("1,000-acre stepping stones" - i.e. 'rolling barrens') in public forestland. Bob is presently concentrating on a corridor from the Crex Meadows WA to the Douglas County WA. Ed Frank suggested sponsoring a workshop to flesh out the concept with Steve Sjogren from the Hiawatha National Forest in Michigan's UP as a lead speaker. It was also suggested that the WSGS could possibly help pay for Hanson to travel to Michigan to meet with Sjogren.

It was decided to present USFS Technician Mike Bablick with a WSGS plaque for his service to Wisconsin sharptails, particularly those in the Riley Lake WA in the Chequamegon National Forest. Ziegeweid will check for correct spelling and Mike's current employment status.

The Moquah sharptail habitat and translocation project was discussed. Sandy Naas has been hired to write the plans funded with USFS money through Tom Doolittle and the WSGS. Evenson provided a handout summarizing some of the recent progress in project.

Evenson also reported on the August 18th celebration of 21,000-acre Phase II of the Brule/St. Croix Legacy Forest easement that took place at Muck Lake north of Barnes. The event, sponsored by the Lyme Timber Company and the Conservation Fund featured US Senator Tammy Baldwin, Wisconsin politicians, DNR officials besides Lyme Timber Company and Conservation Fund officials. Funds to acquire the easement (for public access, no-development and possible management considerations) came from federal Forest Legacy Program using offshore oil royalties from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Wisconsin Stewardship Program). The WSGS (and Sharp-tailed Grouse!) was represented by Evenson, Frank and Evrard.

Cole and Evrard apparently received 2 of the 100 Unit 8 Sharp-tailed Grouse hunting permits according to on-line information on the DNR website, but have not yet received the actual permits. Ziegeweid called DNR-Madison and found that 154 persons (13 with preference points) applied for the permits. Almost everyone who checked the online draw results found their names on the list of those drawn for the permits.

No recent information was known about the results of the 2nd year of the DNR sharptail research project led by Mike Hardy. The last information available was from our annual meeting in late April and that was preliminary.

“Ziggy” closed the meeting with a lengthy discussion of his efforts this past spring to obtain sharptail information from people (most cranberry marsh owners and operators) in Central Wisconsin. His efforts were recorded in detail in our last newsletter. The meeting adjourned at 3:40 p.m.



EARLY SHARPTAIL HUNTING IN NORTHWEST WISCONSIN

by Jim Evrard

Your President Dave Evenson according to his wife is totally obsessed with the late Wisconsin outdoor writer, Gordon MacQuarrie. Dave has been doing a lot of research into MacQuarrie’s writings by digging through back issues of the Milwaukee Journal Newspaper, looking for MacQuarrie’s articles.

In the course of his research, Evenson has found other historical tidbits about Wisconsin fishing and hunting. One of these ‘tidbits’ is a story written by the late Mel Ellis, who became the chief outdoor writer for the newspaper following MacQuarrie’s death.

The article appeared in the 17 October 1952 issue of the Journal and was titled; *Sharptail too smart and tough to be lightly called a “chicken”*. The area hunted was near the village of Gordon and possibly in the area of the Douglas County Wildlife Area., known locally as the ‘Bird Sanctuary’.

The point of the story is that the sharptails Ellis encountered were very wary and don’t deserve being called “chickens”. Early hunters lumped the Sharp-tailed Grouse and the Prairie Chicken into one collective species, “chickens”. Ellis hunted two flocks of sharptails totaling about 60 birds for two days with other hunters and bird dogs. The writer admitted to bagging two young sharptails that were flushed by some other hunters and accidentally flew within his gun range.

Ellis and his companions tried different techniques to get close enough to the birds to shoot but were unsuccessful. The sharptail flocks had sentinels sitting in trees near where the birds were feeding to warn them of predators, including human hunters. The hunters tried to surround the sharptails; crawl on their stomachs; use dogs to distract them; and drive within range in their cars, jump out to flush the birds to hidden hunters, but never got within shotgun range before the birds flushed and flew to safety.

Personally I’ve seen sentinel sharptails and had sharptail flocks flush well before I got into shotgun range. This is a problem with large sharptail flocks late in the season. On the other hand, I’ve had singles, pairs, and small flocks of sharptails flushed well within shotgun range, especially in heavy cover like the shrubby oak brush that sprouts from stumps following fire and clear cutting in the barrens.

I only hope that sharptail numbers recover in Wisconsin to the point where limited hunting can resume consistently. I thrill to the sight of sharptails flushing while holding a camera or binoculars, but nothing can compare to the adrenaline rush when you have a shotgun in your hand, a sharptail permit and tag in your pocket, and a sharptail erupts into flight at your feet with a startling “ca-ca-ca”!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Please check the date on your address label and renew your membership if it has expired or is about to expire. Dues are the main source of income for our small all-volunteer organization.

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

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

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

