

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Volume 7

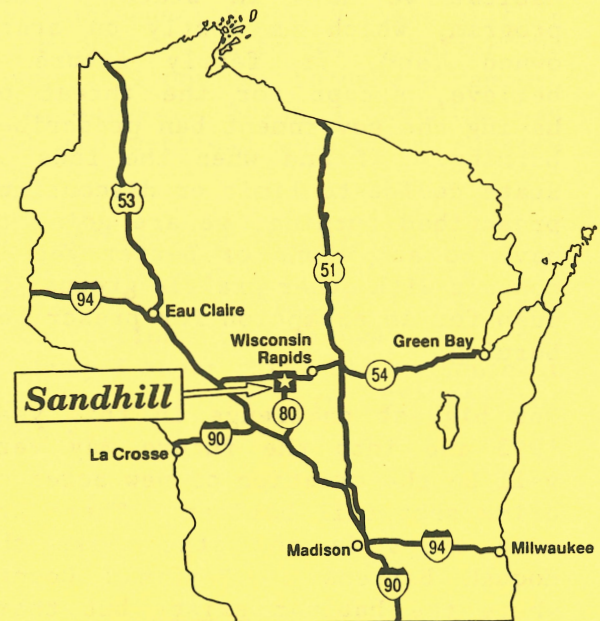
Spring, 1993

MEETING AGENDA

April 24, 1993

1. ✓ President's Opening Greeting
Summation of last year's activities
Brief explanation of club to "Newbees"
2. ✓ Elections of board members
3. ✓ Metro Chapter
4. ✓ Results of sharptail report card, future use, approximate kill, etc.
5. ✓ Resolution on hunting discussion, consensus to DNR.
6. ✓ Permit system? Quota system?
Report card continuation
7. ✓ Spread Eagle Wildlife Area information and status, Central Wisconsin potential
8. ✓ Where we fit in, in the future, influence DNR projects *Downstreamism*

All Roads Lead to Sandhill!



Sandhill is located 20 miles west of Wisconsin Rapids on Highway X west of Babcock, Wisconsin. For more information, write or call: Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center—Department of Natural Resources, Box 156, Babcock, WI 54413 (715) 884-2437 or (715) 884-2882.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

A new year is upon us, as we prepare to meet the challenges of our natural work. We, as an organization, do indeed have a number of challenges concerning the sharptail and the habitat types that it inhibits.

Perhaps our first challenge is to study the impact hunting and harvest are having on our remaining population. We obviously do not want to harvest an excessive number of birds, but we do want to have the opportunity to hunt the sharpie if the bird numbers are there. The newly installed permit card system should give us a handle to grab on to study harvest. This point was brought up by one of our board members, and I think its something we should discuss and address at our spring meeting at Sandhill. I personally did have the privilege of bagging my first sharptail at Crex Meadows this past October, with a great outing to boot! Another challenge in the forefront is to preserve and maintain the exiting habitat we have in state. This program, which is mostly on state owned land, is fairly secure I believe, except for the threat of having the government ban prescribed burning. If and when the feds or state decide to limit or discontinue prescribed burning, we are going to have to act alone or better yet in concert with other prairie groups, to push for an exemption for prescribed burning.

Our biggest challenge in this year 1993 and into the future may very well be the creation of new acres of prime sharptail habitat. There are some areas in the state like the Moquah Barrens in Bayfield County where the habitat exists but there are few birds. At this time there is a translocation project going on with

GLIFWC, whereby sharptails have been relocated from areas with good numbers. This project, although somewhat controversial, has merit and has some success. As you know by now, our club donated \$800.00 to install radio transmitters on some of the birds to keep tabs on them. If this project works it can be said that it is very cost effective and fast.

As I have travelled around the State of Wisconsin extensively, hunted and fished, visited with people, gone to various meetings with environmental groups and DNR, it has become apparent to me that the future of sharptail and brush prairie enhancement will have to be done on state owned land. Although there is some possibility on private land, there are too many hurdles to jump, I feel. One possibility that has merit may be working with paper companies to "fast crop" and rotate pine plantations, especially those next to existing habitat on managed areas.

Where I see the greatest opportunity to expand sharptail habitat is in central Wisconsin. The Meadow Valley, Sandhill, Wood County area is an area waiting for good things to happen. This area is literally a vast wilderness of mixed habitat types. Historically it was an area of some big timber, bogs, sedge meadow, and sand prairie. I have watched over the years this area "grow up" into a stage of succession that no longer supports even ruffed grouse and woodcock, although the wild turkeys like it. Quite frankly, with the money and "push", this area could literally be another showcase area like our Crex Meadows. Food for thought.

See you at the meeting in April,
Tom Ziegeweid

SPRING MEETING

We'll be holding our spring meeting in the center of the state this year, so we're not too far away no matter where you live. The new Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center will be our headquarters for our meeting on April 23rd - 24th.

On Friday evening, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. or so we'll check in for our evening get together. We'll meet at the Maples Motel; ask at the desk for the WSGS social room. We'll take up a collection for refreshments. This has turned into an opportunity to showcase your gourmet wild game or other culinary snacks, so we hope you'll continue to share your offerings. Also, at this time we'll get an orientation and get organized for the morning surveys.

The crew at Sandhill expects to have five blinds up on dancing grounds on the Wood County Wildlife Area and surrounding lands. One interesting facet of sharptail habitat in Central Wisconsin is the amount of usage there is on cranberry marshes. We hope to have permission to do some surveying on these lands. Those of you who have done sharptail surveying before on upland sites are fore warned. You don't go anywhere in this country without hip boots! So bring your hip boots along and any extras in case someone doesn't have them. The Outdoor Skills Center also has a limited selection of hip boots.

This is one area of the state where you can get in a small slam of breeding native grouse-sharptails, prairie chickens, and ruffed grouse. (You have to go a ways to find a spruce grouse!) Jim Keir has

volunteered to hold the prairie chicken blinds for the society on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings so if you are interested in coming early or staying over, factor that into your plans.

After the morning surveys we will hold our general meeting back at the Skills Center. At this time we will close the polling for board members, so if you haven't sent in your ballot bring it with you.

Accommodations

Tom Ziegeweid has reserved 10 rooms at the Maples Motel on the south end of Wisconsin Rapids good until April 1st only. Housing will be tight in Wisconsin Rapids because of a wrestling sectional. As soon as you're sure you're going, sign up a room. If you're equipped for cool season camping with a camper or van plan on going that route to save the rooms for people who need them. There are several campgrounds available nearby. If you are neither fortunate enough to get in before the rooms sell out nor to have a camper, come anyway. Bring a sleeping bag and air mattress and we'll squeeze you in.

The address for the Maples Motel is 4750 South 8th St., telephone 715-423-2590. The motel is at the intersection of highway 13 and highway Z about three blocks south of K-Mart. Rates are \$59.85 for doubles.



NEW MEMBERS

The word is starting to get out that WSGS is in existence. We got some excellent publicity from an article by Bob Riepenhoff in the Milwaukee Journal this past winter. From this article we picked up quite a few new members out of the Milwaukee metro area, where we have not been known

Loren Sloan - Gordon
Eldon Miller - Turtle Lake
Mike Smith - Grantsburg
C Topf Wells - Madison
Andrew Vogl - Villa Park, IL
E. S. Infield - Wooster, OH
Pamela Lohmeier - Tomahawk
Tom Baade - Thiensville
Paul Stoll - Apple Valley, MN
Charles Kolitz - Beaver Dam
Chuck Sauer - Marathon
David Moll - Pewaukee
Wayne Hall - Hartland
Robert Simmelink - Sheboygan Falls
Keith White - Green Bay
Ned Norton - Port Edwards
Sam Robbins - Madison
Doug Sundquist - Grantsburg
Barry Gilbert - Shorewood

before. The Minnesota SGS has a metro chapter and perhaps it's time for us to consider it also. Any of you metro people interested in making that a reality? Perhaps we can discuss it at our April 24th meeting

Neil Binkley - Waunakee
Bob Gunville - Whitefish Bay
Jerry Maus - Muskego
Bill Steinhilber - West Bend
Shirley Anderson - Ashland
David and Joan Angell - Eau Claire
Neil Binkley - Waunakee
Kelly Bleich - Mosinee
Jim Castellano - Marshfield
William Custer - Madison
Jim Dahl - New Auburn
Frank Irving - St. Paul, MN
Bernice Moertz - Menomonie Falls
Dennis Magner - Cohasset, MN
Kermit McDonald - Roseville, MN
John Probst - Rhinelander
Richard Steinman - Mequon
Ken Tuckwell - Eau Claire



BAYFIELD COUNTY FOREST HABITAT/FUEL BREAKS BY FRED STRAND, DNR WILDLIFE MANAGER AT BRULE

Public properties, such as our county forests, were established and are managed for a wide variety of natural resources and public benefits. The habitat/fuel breaks on the Bayfield County Forest (BCF) is an example of how both sharptails and forest resources benefit from the same project.

A large area of the west central portion of the BCF is in almost continuous jack pine and red pine timber stands. This poses a large wild fire threat since controlling wild fire in large blocks of pine is extremely difficult and dangerous. Recognizing this danger the BCF, in cooperation with DNR Forestry, initiated a plan to reduce the size of these continuous pine stands. The plan called for the creation of two 5 mile long, 1/4 mile wide "breaks". In the break area the pine trees were to be harvested and the area managed for a different habitat type which was less difficult to control wild fires in. Hence they were called fuel breaks. Most of the break area was converted to herbaceous plants (grasses, etc.) brush or aspen.

Sharptails began to use some of the fuel break areas. This was an unintended "benefit" of the habitat created. DNR wildlife management saw this as an opportunity to help sharptails. We wanted sharptails to become an intended benefit of this land management scheme, not an accidental by-product.

We approached the BCF and DNR forestry personnel with our idea. They readily agreed that our goal of managing the area for sharptail habitat was compatible with their goal of managing the area for a fuel break. We now call these areas the BCF Habitat/Fuel Breaks. The Habitat/Fuel Breaks are managed primarily for grassy and brushy habitat mainly through the use of prescribed burning. While the break areas do not contain a lot of sharptails or sharptail habitat it does provide for a core of sharptails and sharptail habitat in an area managed primarily for forest benefits. To further enhance the area for sharptails, BCF has agreed to emphasize management of jack pine instead of red pine along both sides of the breaks. This will benefit sharptails because jack pine is a shorter lived (rotation) species. Jack pine will be harvested (clear-cut) more frequently (every 40 to 50 years) than would be red pine (every 80 to 110 years). Recently clear-cut pine areas provide temporary sharptail habitat until the area becomes reforested.

The BCF Habitat/Fuel Breaks are a great example of how public land managers can achieve diverse natural resource and public benefits on the same parcels of land.



MEMBER DONATIONS

Ever since WSGS was started we have had good friends who were willing to kick in an extra donation. These donations are what will enable us to do more special projects such as the radio telemetry work we are sponsoring on Moquah Barrens. Over the years donations have totaled \$1,295. A grand thank you to these members is due. Thank you!

Mike Umland	\$95.00
Jim Shurts	55.00
Jim Swedenborg	50.00

Tom Davis	50.00
Neal Niemuth	50.00
J. B. Wilson	50.00
Glenn & Ellen Niemuth	50.00
Don Swedenborg	50.00
Bob Banks	50.00
Ken Wallin	45.00
Walter & Sheila Shambaugh	45.00
David Uihlein	40.00
Leo Mortenson	35.00
John Clemetson	30.00
Andrew Cook	30.00
Harlan Davis	30.00
Willard Saaski	30.00

Other Donors

Fran Hamerstrom
David Clausen
Fred Strand
Ray Biller
Ray Anderson
Jim Evrard
Keith Bennett
Don Johnson
Bill Berg
Donald Bronk
Jonathan Wilde
Don Bublitz
Rex Swedenborg
Keith Merkel
Tom Ziegeweid
Harold Jordahl
Ray Castellano

Pat McFaul
Vern/Murial Larson
George Wordingham
Jerry Solsrud
Ronald Rellatz
Wade Lindeman
G. V. Umland
Rick Lecher
Dugan Wilson
Rod Cole
Pat Savage
Ronald Hanson
Tom McConaughy
Mark Martin
Nancy Braker
Dick Hunt
Shirley/Mike Keegan

Rod Bahr
Ned Norton
Bernice Maertz
Dan Dessecker
Bob Dreis
Richard Steinman
William Carlson
Mike Vogl
Peter David
Gerald Richardson
Allan Jaber
Paul Stoll
Northern States Field
Trial Assn.
Arnold Campbell
Ken Tuckwell

Other Acknowledgements:

- * Thanks to Jonathan Wilde for the pen and ink sketches that enliven our publications.
- * Thanks to Neal Niemuth for keeping member records and mailing lists.

- * Thanks to Mark Martin and Larry Gregg for providing photos and data for our sharptail display board.
- * Thanks to Tom Ziegeweid for putting together display board.

CENTRAL WISCONSIN SHARPTAILS!

I decided the time has come for the central Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse to receive a little recognition, after reading the most recent Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society newsletter. I believe the best way to do this is to provide articles for the upcoming Society's newsletter on a regular basis. (Dave didn't hesitate about my offer)

The first step is to welcome and invite you to central Wisconsin. My name is Mark (Bird Dog) Randall. I am a wildlife technician for the Department of Natural Resources stationed at the Sandhill/Meadow Valley Work Unit. It is the largest state wildlife area. We are located about 20 miles southwest of Wisconsin Rapids, near Babcock, Wisconsin. The work unit consists of three properties, Sandhill Wildlife Area, Wood County Wildlife Area and Meadow Valley Wildlife Area, providing nearly 150 square miles of public land.

Of the three wildlife areas, Wood County W. A. is home to a remnant population of sharp-tailed grouse. The wildlife area consists of approximately 21,000 acres with the majority (18,500 acres) owned by Wood County and leased to the Department of Natural Resources; the lease is in effect until the year 2064.

The Wood County W. A. lies within the bed of old Glacial Lake Wisconsin, part of the unglaciated, "Driftless Area". The topography is generally flat and poorly drained, featuring extensive marshes and numerous low, sandy ridges and islands.

Tamarack and black spruce stands dominated the original forest type on peat lowlands which were intermixed with numerous and extensive bog openings. The sand islands and ridges were occupied by pineries of varying quality. The main species were white, norway and jack pine, with some red and white oak. Due to the influence of logging, drainage, farming and uncontrolled fires, the forest cover type has changed considerably through the years. Pioneer species such as aspen, white birch, jack pine along with the fire resistant oak dominated the uplands, while much of the lowland has reverted to sedge marsh and willow.

During the 1930's and 1940's, Wood County was known as the "best chicken country in Wisconsin". Wood County formerly produced the highest county kill return for prairie grouse in the entire state. The 1940 prairie grouse harvest estimate was 7,687 for Wood County, with Douglas County ranked second with 5,171. The population declined drastically to the point where hunting has been closed since the 1950's.

By the early 1940's, advancing forest and shrub growth created excellent habitat for sharptails at the demise of the prairie chicken. Sharptails prospered until the 1960's when forest growth displaced them in favor of the ruffed grouse. However, remnant openings on the western portion of the wildlife area remains to provide suitable habitat for sharp-tailed grouse survival. The western one-third has an open treeless aspect dominated by wetlands. Current sharp-tailed grouse habitat management consists of prescribed burning and noncommercial cutting, hand and mechanical, of tamarack and aspen.

Due to the vastness of the "open marsh" habitat portion, 4,500 acres of brushy wetland in the western portion of the property is considered to have management potential for maintaining a sharptail population. Although acreage appears small, the adjacent private holdings (primarily cranberry production) and county forest of similar habitat combined provides a contiguous unit comprising approximately 25,000 acres. An objective of the Wood County Wildlife Area Master Plan is to maintain a viable population of sharp-tailed grouse with a minimum cyclic low of 8-10 breeding birds per section of suitable habitat.

It is difficult to paint a picture of Wood County W. A. with words. Better yet, make a date to attend the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society's Annual meeting to be held at the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center, April 23 & 24, and tour the area first hand. We plan to set up a few observation blinds on the more permanent dancing grounds. Do not forget to bring your hip boots for they are needed to reach some the blinds. Also, four-wheel drive vehicles maybe needed to travel the roads on the wildlife area. Hope to meet you there!



LETTERS FROM MEMBERS

Dear Tom:

I'm writing this letter in regards to the article published in the Sunday Milwaukee Journal on 1/16/93, about the plight of the sharp-tailed grouse. I find myself interested in this situation due to the fact that I enjoy upland game bird hunting, but with the decline of Ruffed Grouse and the Ringed Necked Pheasant in my hunting area, I'm finding myself drawn to this cause.

To date I haven't had the opportunity to hunt these birds, but with my and my hunting partners memberships, I hope in the future these beautiful birds will become plentiful for all to enjoy.

Thank you,
Wayne Hall

Hello:

I read the article in the Milwaukee Journal on the sharptails with great interest. I own some land near Ladysmith that had sharptails on it up to last sighting 3 years ago. I have interest in preserving this great bird. Would like information.

Bill Steinhilber



Edition size: 900
Image size: 16" x 20"

Spring Dance at Crex

By Louis Raymer

Greetings:

I did good hunting sharptails in eastern Upper Michigan. Even saw first ever, a pretty Spruce Grouse male on the edge of a sharptail management area.

Terry Retzlaff

Hello:

My purpose for writing is regarding the winter, 1993 newsletter. In particular the bylaws, Article 1, Purpose. My concern is the narrow focusing of the Society's view of preservation and enhancement of the oak and pine barrens habitat is critical for the survival of this unique species. But, just as important, especially in central Wisconsin, are the bogs, marshes, and swamps of central Wisconsin. They occur in Portage, Wood, Jackson, Monroe, Juneau, and Adams counties. These are also critical habitats for the survival of the sharp-tailed grouse.

Franklin J. W. Schmidt, in his "Bogs, Swamps and Marshes" paper noted that the sharp-tail low in Jackson County occurred in 1934, at which time he found several nests in sphagnum bogs. He concluded that sphagnum bogs were the original sharp-tail habitat in Wisconsin, and further " . . . they rely on sphagnum bog for nesting cover when their numbers are reduced."

Sincerely,
Mark Randall

Dear Tom:

I just read "the Milwaukee Journal" article about your organization. What a wonderful idea. Enclosed is my check, count me in your organization. I am also interested in attending your membership meeting at the Wood County Wildlife Area. While hunting for grouse and woodcock in the Wood County Wildlife Area I have come across the odd sharptail. At the time I wasn't sure that they were sharptails, but thanks to you I am more sure they were sharptails.

If there is anything else I could do to help your organization, please let me know. I am more than willing to volunteer some of my time.

Sincerely,
Tom Baade

Treasurer's Report

Balance Brought Forward
8/15/92 \$1065.35

Income
Dues \$ 860.00
Donations \$ 365.00
\$1175.00

Expenses
Printing \$ 255.00
Stamps \$ 116.00
Sec. of State \$ 35.00
Reg. of Deeds \$ 16.00
\$ 422.00

Balance as of 2/16/93 \$1868.35

Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
P.O. Box 1115
Cumberland, WI 54829

