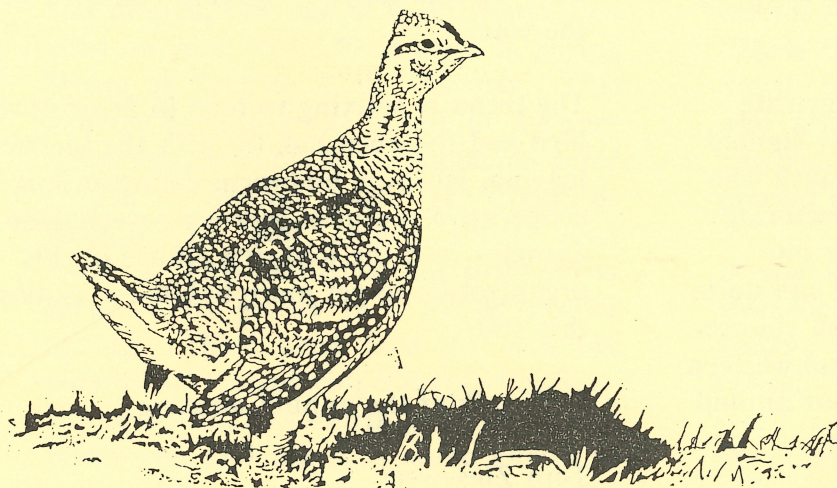


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Volume 13

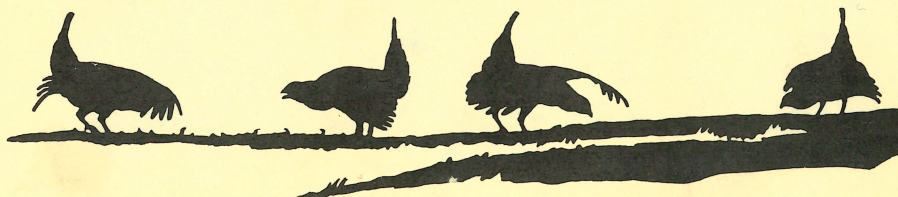
Spring, 1995

WELCOME TO SOLON SPRINGS

This is going to be the best meeting yet of the WSGS. We'll be in the heart of sharptail range, with birds to be watched on nearby Douglas County Wildlife Area and Namekagon Barrens. As you will see in the agenda inside, our main effort will be towards finding and counting sharptails on large clearcuts on forest lands owned by Douglas County Forest and Mosinee Paper Company.

We plan to have some fun at this meeting too. For the first time we're having a wildlife art raffle, which always perks up people's interest. And we're having a special evening meal at the Douglas County Bird Sanctuary Clubhouse, overlooking the Douglas County Wildlife Area.

This will be our 5th birthday anniversary. We sure hope that you can attend. Inside you'll find further details. See you at Solon!



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

It's almost time for our annual meeting again folks, and I can't wait for what promises to be another fun event. I can smell the steaks cooking on the open fire and I can smell the aroma of the fresh north air after another long Wisconsin winter.

We are going to do a survey of some private lands for birds that have been recently sighted by various people including Neil Niemuth who is doing a study of this area for his doctorate degree. This is a "first time" event for our organization and may be a project we can do to some degree every year. This is a good chance for all our members from northern and western Wisconsin to attend as we have had our annual meeting at Babcock the last two years.

1995 is going to be a pivotal year for sharptails and the barrens habitat with the Department of Natural Resources wanting to close the season for good. This question will be on the Spring

Hearing agenda. The spring hearing will be held on Monday, April 10th in each county in Wisconsin. Here is our last chance to keep the season open! You should make an attempt to show up and let your opinion be heard before the vote.

The trend is starting to turn in favor of the bird and the open habitat with the increase in logging, jackpine budworm deforestation, cooperative ventures between government agencies, and the lobbying efforts of this organization to get more habitat work done in this state.

Let's talk at the annual meeting,

Tom Ziegeweid

WISCONSIN TRAILS ARTICLES

We need to thank our good friends (and WSGS members) Tom Davis and Howard Mead at Wisconsin Trails for two articles that lifts up the Spread Eagle Barrens as one of the hidden corners of Wisconsin. The other article, written in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of the first Earth Day, gives a half page write-up on WSGS. This is super publicity that we couldn't afford to buy.

There's no better celebration of what's fun and educational to see and do in Wisconsin than Wisconsin Trails. You can subscribe for two years (12 issues) for \$34.95 or 1 year for \$19.95.

Please write to Wisconsin Trails, P.O. Box 5650, Madison, Wisconsin 53791-9372.

Wildlife Art Raffle - First Ever for WSGS

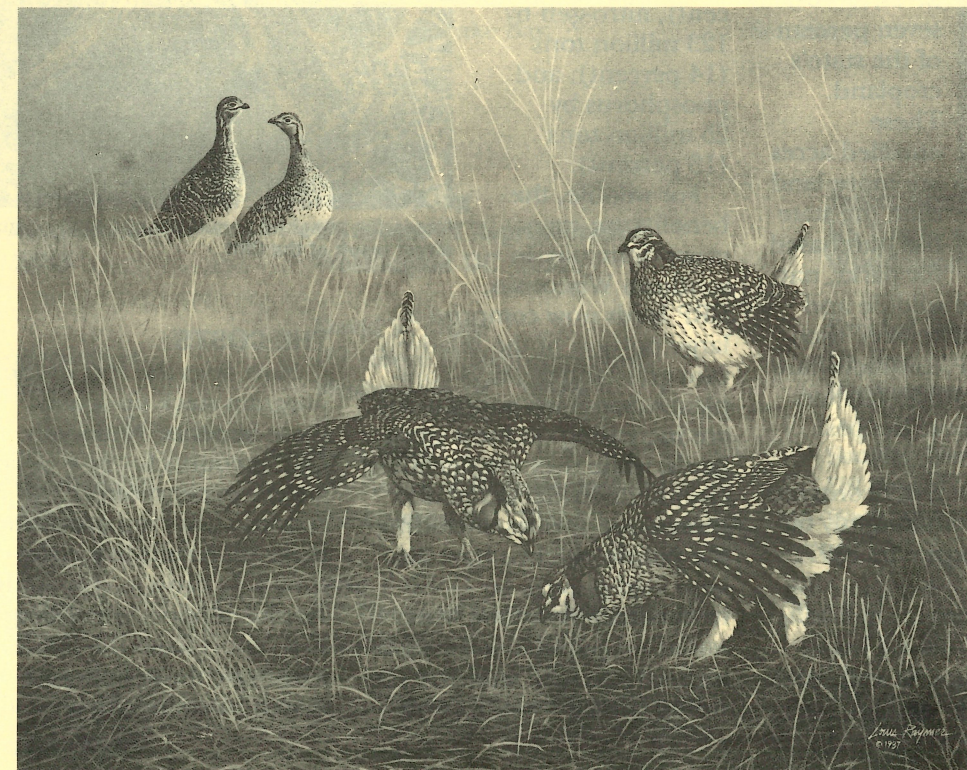
We have assembled a fine group of wildlife prints to be raffled off at the conclusion of the annual spring meeting. All framed and matted, any one of them would look good on your wall. First prize is Spring Dance at Crex by Louis Raymer. This dancing ground scene is one of the very few prints available featuring sharp-tailed grouse. Second prize is Creekside Solitude by well known artist Scott Zoellick. This limited edition print shows three ruffed grouse in a winter conifer setting. Third prize is a pen and ink portrait of a displaying sharptail cock by Karen Smith, and fourth prize is a Larry Seiler pen and ink of a scene known to many of us, a rapidly departing ruffed grouse.

Raffle ticket prices are: 1 ticket for \$5.00, or 3 tickets for \$10.00, or 10 tickets for

\$25.00. Please legibly write your name and the name of the ticket purchaser, if different, on each of the stubs sold. If you cannot attend the meeting please send the tickets and payment to Bob Dreis, 632 Smith St., Spooner, WI 54801. Those who attend can bring their stubs and payment to the meeting. You need not be present to win.

If you need more tickets contact Dave Evenson at Box 1115, Cumberland, WI 54829. Buy a bunch - it's for a good cause!

We thank Friends of Crex and Dan Dessecker of the Ruffed Grouse Society for the donation of prints. Both of these are good organizations you should consider joining.



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

Spring Dance at Crex

By Louis Raymer

FIELDS & STREETS

NEWS OF WISCONSIN'S NONPOINT SOURCE PROGRAM AND PRIORITY WATERSHEDS: FEBRUARY 1995

The E.N.D. for the C.R.P.?

Congress re-examines the benefits and costs of the popular Conservation Reserve Program

Bridget Waite, DNR Nonpoint Source Program.

Created as part of the 1985 Farm Bill, the CRP established 10-year contracts that pay farmers for not planting crops on highly erodible soils or land adjacent to streams, lakes and wetlands.

Wisconsin landowners embraced the CRP. Farmers

"The timing is crucial. Without CRP continuing, most of the environmentally sensitive lands enrolled in the program will be put back into crop production."

*Jim Baumann,
Wisconsin DNR*

across the state have signed more than 21,500 contracts covering some 713,000 acres, almost seven percent of the state's cropland. These enrolled acres are more land than the state has purchased for parks, natural areas, and wildlife and fishery habitat in more than 100 years. CRP contracts have also paid Wisconsin farmers \$500 million over the past decade.

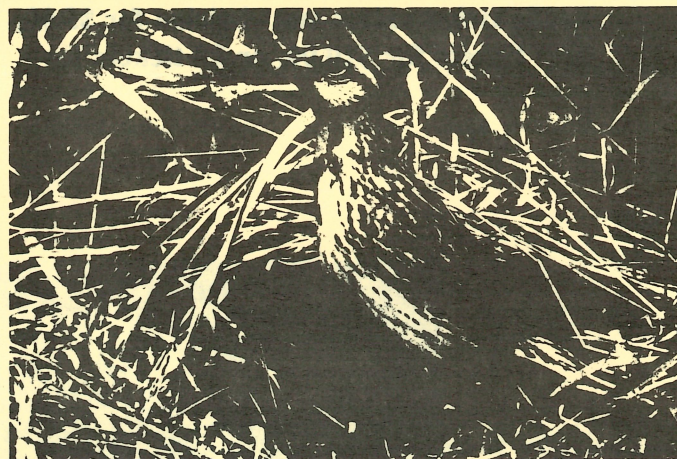
Now, however, the contracts are running out. Roughly 60 percent will expire by 1997. With the new budget-cutting mood predominant in Washington, questions are being raised as to the cost and benefits of the program.

THE BENEFITS

For the Wisconsin acres enrolled in CRP, the average annual soil erosion has been reduced by an estimated 9 million tons, or 12.6 tons per acre. The reduction in pollutants reaching lakes, streams, wetlands and groundwater has also been significant. For the northern plains region, the Economic Research Service estimates sediment to streams and lakes has been reduced by 23 million tons (11 percent), nitro-gen by 123 million tons (14 percent), and phosphorus by 25 million tons (13 percent).

For wildlife, the benefits are even more dramatic. In southern Wisconsin, CRP lands now comprise a large portion of the relatively rare grassland-wetland complexes. Songbird populations are increasing on these grasslands, while they are declining elsewhere. Endangered and threatened species, including the prairie chicken have also benefited greatly, say DNR researchers. At a time when waterfowl populations are historically low, CRP lands are providing critical nesting cover.

According to USDA economists, CRP will reduce soil and wind erosion, improve water quality and provide other environmental benefits totalling between \$3.4 and \$11 billion nationally over the life of the program.



Increasing songbird populations in wetland-grassland areas are a direct result of the CRP

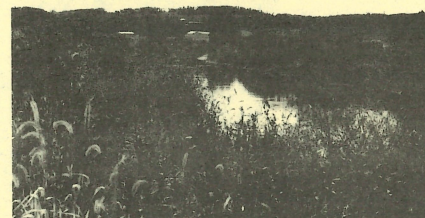
THE COSTS

How does the cost of the program stack up against these benefits? Nationally, CRP accounts for \$1.8 billion annual expenditures. The reduction in crop production, however, results in a corresponding drop in commodity surplus support. According to a report from the Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute, the annual

CRP CONTINUED . . .

commodity program savings would range from over \$0.5 billion in 1997 to more than \$1.5 billion in 2001.

Another way of estimating annual commodity program savings is to look at expected commodity support payments if CRP is not extended. Without CRP, crop prices are predicted to drop and commodity program costs increase, as much as \$1.9 billion annually. In other words, if current farm programs remain



unchanged, the net effect on the federal budget approaches zero. In Washington terms, the CRP is nearly "budget neutral."

Normally, a budget neutral program with substantial environmental benefits would

garner great support. But these are not normal times. DNR analysts predict that Congress will retain the CRP, but in modified form. Here are some of the forms a revised CRP is predicted to take:

Reduced acreage. With more than 60 percent of the CRP contracts expiring in 1996 and 1997, Congress may decide to renew only a portion of these expiring contracts, and may also decide not to enter into any new contract

Targeting. Improved targeting of lands to achieve environmental benefits is likely. For example, CRP contracts may be targeted toward areas with the highest wildlife habitat potential. CRP contracts could also be targeted toward watersheds with impaired or threatened waters. Targeting based on water quality needs would likely shift emphasis from the Great Plains with its high wind erosion rates to the Great Lakes, Mississippi River and Chesapeake Bay.

Greater targeting may also be mandated at the watershed level. For example some proposals call for restricting enrollment to lands that are both highly erodible and will benefit water quality and habitat.

Conservation easements.

Long-term or perpetual easements may be used as a less expensive approach than 10-year contracts. In many cases, the cost of the 10-year contract approaches the market value of the land.

Combining Programs.

Some groups are calling for combining CRP, Wetlands Reserve, the Agricultural Conservation Program and several other programs into a single, more flexible program with a set of goals to replace the CRP's national acreage goal.

The fate of the CRP—whether it's continued largely as is, modified or ended—will be decided in the next few months. Those with a stake in the program should contact their Representatives and Senators.

Mark Newmann
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Tom Barrett
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Steve Gunderson
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Gerald D. Kleczka
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Scott L. Klug
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

David R. Obey
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Tom Petri
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Toby Roth
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
US House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Senator Russell D. Feingold
US Senate
Washington DC 20510

Senator Herb Kohl
US Senate
Washington DC 20510

CONTINUED . . .

BRUSH MOWER UPDATE

By Tom Ziegeweid

Those of you who have been generous in the past with paying your dues and donating various extra donations to WSGS will be happy to know that our club is taking the lead in organizing a consortium of clubs; namely, the Ruffed

Grouse Society, Wisconsin Waterfowl Organization and our group to cooperatively help defray the cost of a new brush mower for habitat work in central Wisconsin. Hopefully by our annual meeting, the deal will be closed.

Treasurer's Report

Balance Brought Forward
9/24/94 \$2688.41

Income	
Dues	\$ 830.00
Caps and stickers	\$ 80.00
Meeting registration	\$ 200.00
Donations	\$ 562.00
Interest	\$ 2.64

Expenses	
Brochure printing	\$ 942.60
Postage, bulk mail	\$ 281.22
Newsletter printing	\$ 249.00
Sec. of State	\$ 10.00
Raffle license	\$ 25.00
Rubber stamps	\$ 29.55
Sharptail prints	\$ 100.00
Meeting bldg. rental	\$ 20.00
Framing costs	\$ 43.84
Balance 3/7/95	\$2661.84



Opening weekend at Crex Meadows - three sharptails fall to members Shane Walstrom, Jeff Klugow, and Tom Ziegeweid

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU WILL DO FOR NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION IN 1995 IS MAKE YOUR VOICE OF SUPPORT FOR CRP HEARD IN WASHINGTON!

Necedah 2400 Acres Barrens Restoration by Richard King

Historically sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens were probably present on Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in small numbers. A review of the land survey notes indicates that most of the Refuge was originally a tamarack bog. Judging from the surveyor's notes, barrens habitat constituted approximately 2% of the Refuge's original landscape. If prairie grouse did exist on the Refuge at this time they would have been found on these small isolated barrens.

Original white settlement of the Refuge occurred during the decade of 1850 to 1860. An increase in the frequency of fires probably occurred during the decade of 1860 to 1870 along with increased settlement and land clearing operations. As a result, barrens habitat increased dramatically at this time. Drainage and settlement in the area increased in the decade of 1900-1910. Sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens also became abundant at this time.

Agriculture depression beginning in 1920, excessive drainage district taxes, and drought resulted in the end of the agriculture period. By 1925, abandonment was common, with only a few farms left. Large scale land abandonment allowed for the creation of the Refuge in 1930. Fire suppression efforts began immediately with the creation of the Refuge. For this reason most of the barrens habitat that existed on the Refuge in the 1930's has been lost. As the barrens habitat disappeared so did the species associated with it. The decline of barrens habitat can be clearly seen in the decline of sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens on the

Refuge. If sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens are good indicators, a severe decline of barrens habitat occurred on the Refuge shortly after 1960. At this time the sharp-tailed grouse population should have cycled back up but for some reason was unable to.

Beginning in the mid-1960's and ending in the mid-1970's the Refuge began large scale barrens restoration efforts. Approximately 400 acres of barrens habitat was created at that time. The Refuge is currently initiating another large scale barrens restoration effort. It is hoped that an additional 2,000 acres of barrens can be restored. The Refuge will be taking an ecosystem approach to the restoration process. The goal of the restorations will not be to promote any single species (e.g. sharp-tailed grouse, Karner blue butterflies, etc.) but rather the whole ecosystem. Restored units will have both tree-less (brush prairie) and scattered tree (savanna) components. Restorations will be accomplished with selective-cut timber sales and prescribed burning.

A problem with units that are restored with selective-cut timber sales is that they will have mature trees on them. While the presence of mature trees is a great benefit from the diversity standpoint, it is a limitation as far as sharp-tailed grouse management is concerned. However, enough tree-less (brush prairie) habitat will be restored to provide adequate habitat to sustain sharp-tailed grouse.

SHARPTAIL SEASON CLOSURE ON SPRING QUESTIONNAIRE

At the spring Conservation Congress hearings you will be asked to vote on the question of closing the sharptail season. The question and the reasoning is listed below. It's important for you to attend this meeting and make your voice

heard on this and other issues. Conservation Congress will be held on April 10, 1995 at 7:00 p.m. in each county. Call the DNR or watch the newspapers to find out the city and location of your local hearing.

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SEASON CLOSURE (1996)

Sharp-tailed grouse require extensive amounts of brushy grasslands to prosper. Most of their habitat has disappeared with the control of wild fires, planting of trees, natural succession from grasslands to forests, and conversion of grasslands to agriculture. Sharptails are now limited to scattered pockets of habitat in central and northwest Wisconsin. Due to these adverse habitat trends, the sharp-tailed grouse will likely be considered for listing as a threatened species sometime during the next 10 years.

According to mandatory hunter report card data (1992-1993), an average of 200 hunters per year pursued sharp-tailed grouse. Their total harvest was 93 in 1992 and 54 in 1993. Sixty-five percent of the harvest was located on just 3 public properties: Namekagon Barrens, Pershing, and Crex Meadows Wildlife Areas. Comparisons of population trends on these properties with those on areas closed to hunting show that hunting has not adversely affected sharptail populations.

DO YOU FAVOR CLOSING THE SHARP-TAILED GROUSE HUNTING SEASON?

YES _____ NO _____

WISCONSIN NEEDS YOU! VOLUNTEER

Two opportunities for volunteers in research have recently come up. Number one is: The Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas. This is a major work, with the intent of documenting breeding birds all across the state, over the next five years. There's a special need for the good birders out there to become heavily involved but there also is room for those of you who don't know all the birds all that well to contribute. This effort is being coordinated by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology (WSO). Contact Bettie Harriman, 5188 Bittersweet Lane, Oshkosh, Wisconsin 54901 (414-233-1973) for more details. As a society we may want to become involved as a financial sponsor of the sharptail section.

In 1995 through 1997 field seasons the DNR Bureau of Research will be doing a

pilot barrens ecosystem project. Starting this summer there will be lots of opportunities for individuals to be involved in field research on nesting birds, small mammal trapping, herptile censuses, and plant work. Much of this work will be done at the Namekagon Barrens but it also may entail field work at Crex, Douglas County Wildlife Area, or Moquah Barrens. If you're interested in helping out give Jim Evrard a call at 715-463-2896 or Larry Gregg at 715-762-3204.

You will be associated with trained biologists in this effort so any willing volunteer is welcome. Again, the WSGS could consider signing on as a financial sponsor to this barrens research.

Letters from Members

Gentlemen:

Thank you for your newsletter and attractive brochure. I dislike cutting up the former so I'll enclose a check for \$23.00 which will cover renewal and a cap.

I have hunted sharps for many years, off and on, in Manitoba, South Dakota, and Nebraska. For the past several years I've been hunting prairie chickens in the eastern sandhills of Nebraska. Now and then we encounter some sharptails. Some years ago, I simply grew tired of shooting ringnecks, and switched to better gamebirds!

Will appreciate your dropping me a line with the newsletter editor's name and telephone number or your secretary.

Do you have any other Ohio members?

Sincerely,

Ernie Infield

Dear Ernie:

Thanks for your past letter. We have members from as far away as Hawaii and Alaska, but you're our only Ohio member.

Dave Evenson