

# WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 65

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## MORE SHARPTAIL RESEARCH RESULTS

by Jim Evrard

Preliminary results from recent Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse research designed to answer questions about the recent sharp sharp-tailed decline in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area have been released. This research has been partially funded by the WSGS.

Earlier DNR research has shown that the Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse are relatively free from bird diseases.

Another cooperative research project by the DNR, the WSGS, and Western Michigan University has shown that each of the isolated Wisconsin sharptail populations have suffered from genetic drift (i.e. inbreeding) to the point where they have only about half of the alleles (i.e. genetic material) that 'normal' sharptail have. However, if all Wisconsin populations were combined into one population, then they have the normal number of alleles.

The DNR decided to investigate the feasibility of translocating hen sharptails from one population to another population with hopes of boosting alleles in the 'receiving' population. To that end, sharptail hens were captured in Unit 2, processed, and released in the Pershing Wildlife Area during the springs of 2010 and 2011. We should know if that project was successful within the next two years.

The preliminary research results from two other projects involving Wisconsin sharptails were presented at the winter meeting of the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society in Wausau.

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Cara Kamke, a student intern from Northland College at Ashland, summarized the radio-telemetry work done at the Crex Meadows and Namekagon Barrens wildlife areas in 2010 and 2011. Sharptails were captured, fitted with tiny radio transmitters, and released where captured. Kamke used a radio receiver to follow the birds to examine the daily movements and home ranges of the radioed birds.

On the average, the home range from May to October was 240 acres and the daily movement was in only about 30 acres. It was thought that sharptails made greater movements but perhaps the small populations move less, making them less able to mix with other populations,

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

When I read in the paper this spring that Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) had been discovered near Shell Lake in Washburn County, I sighed out loud to Shirley Anne “Oh, my poor friends in the DNR”. I was still working for the DNR back when CWD hit the state for the first time, and I know how, much of my job became CWD immersed, even from a distance of a few hundred miles. It was only a few hours later that I thought further, what would be the impact of sharptail management. It can’t be good. Every hour that our manager at Spooner is spending regarding CWD is an hour she can’t be spending working on the Namekagon Barrens. And to complicate it even further, the DNR Area Manager for the affected four county area is now expected to manage both the area and be the Crex Meadows/Glacial Lake Grantsburg Manager. So how much of his time will be diverted from sharptail management?

July 1, 2011 came a windstorm to the heart of Wisconsin’s Northwest Sands. These storms come along every decade or so (and may be increasing in frequency if you believe in climate change). Some of us can remember the July 4 downbursts of 1977 in Sawyer and Price counties [also Burnett County], and many remember reading about the 1999 Boundary Waters Canoe Area blowdown event. After reading that this Northwest Sands event was in the scale of 130,000 acres the sharptail part of my brain thought maybe there’s something good in this. Wrong! At least as far as the main consequence of the blowdown was a burning ban, which completely eliminated prescribed burning on Crex or Namekagon Barrens this spring. To be fair the Namekagon Barrens crew did get in several successful burns last fall, knowing the burn ban was coming.

As I’m writing this column, I’m also reviewing the DNR’s Northwest Sands Corridor Plan. In it we find a compelling case of oak and pine barrens, considered **globally significant ecosystems** by the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan. I’m glad. At least DNR Wildlife (and Endangered Resources) recognize how rare these ecosystems are in the world. But DNR Forestry has other plans, and County and private individuals have their plans and priorities too. Barrens may be the priority for WSGS, but it’s not so for more other entities.

Good News! The DNR has a tentative agreement to spend \$17.3 million to buy a conservation easement on 67,437 acres of paper company land, mostly in Douglas County. This press release also hit my computer as I’m writing this column in mid-May. It’s good news. Most of this land is in the heart of the jack pine budworm breakout, Deer Management Units 2 and 9, which has been our best sharptail habitat until it started growing up. WSGS has had inklings of this potential deal for years. But again, we will need to work hard to make sure that sharptails become and remain a priority on this wonderful purchase.



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: Tom Ziegeweid  
Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Evrard

Board Members: Ed Frank      John Zatopa  
Paul Kooiker      Bruce Moss  
John Probst      Mike Cole

Website Editor: Jim Evrard

SPRING BOARD MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The WSGS met at 10 a.m. on April 21st in the Mid-Wisconsin Bank Community Room prior to the annual meeting. All members with the exception of John Probst were present. President Dave Evenson announced that Board Member Mike Dziki has resigned and he had appointed Mike Cole of Grantsburg to serve the balance of Dziki’s term.

Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard stated that his reports had been published in previous newsletters. Current balances were \$12,235.55 in the checking account (4/17/12) and \$2,567.86 in the CD (10/16/11). There are approximately 200 members counting those who have not paid their dues since 2010. About 15-20 have expressed a desire for an electronic newsletter. Eliminating delinquent members and providing electronic newsletters will make it possible for the WSGS to save money by dropping the bulk mailing permit fee and going to 1st class postage.

The DNR sharp-tailed grouse management plan has been approved and the Predator Addendum (no active predator control) will be approved within the month. John Zatopa reported the recent climate change workshop he attended had concluded that climate change will have little impact on sharptails.

Evrard suggested developing a position paper to present to the Natural Resources Board asking that the current burning restrictions in the storm damaged area of the Northwest Pine Barrens be lifted for 2013 to allow prescribed burning to resume. All 2012 spring burning in that area has been banned and sharptail habitat is suffering.

Evenson discussed a sharptail art display currently on exhibit at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center. He and Evrard contributed originals and prints from their collections.

The Board decided to provide funds for DNR staffers to attend important out-of-state meetings if state funds are unavailable. The Board also decided to fund the construction of blinds for sharptail viewing on managed areas. The WSGS will be given credit for the blinds with prominent lettering displayed on the blinds.

Kim Wheeler, the WSGS “Webmaster”, will be asked to provide more photos for the website and possibly a link to the displaying sharptail video on the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens website.

A joint annual meeting with the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society and a summer board meeting were discussed with Evenson investigating further.

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

...Sharptail Research Results cont. from page 1

reducing genetic interchange. The radioed birds will continue to be followed into the winter.

The other research report was presented by Matt Reetz, a Postdoc student at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. His work focused on the Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape where most of Wisconsin’s sharptails still can be found. This was basically a computer-based study that attempted to identify possible habitat corridors linking the isolated sharptail populations in the Northwest Sands. Reetz also examined past habitat disturbances (fire, clear-cuts, blow-downs) and their relationships with historical sharptail numbers. Corridors of sharptail habitat linking the isolated sharptail populations, could provide genetic interchange between them.

Hopefully the knowledge gained by this research can help maintain sharp-tailed grouse as part of Wisconsin’s rich wildlife fauna.



## 2012 ANNUAL MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The 2012 WSGS annual meeting took place in the community room of the Mid-Wisconsin Bank in Phillips on Saturday, April 21st. President Dave Evenson called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. with 17 people in attendance.

Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard stated his reports are found in recent newsletters. Fourteen ballots were cast and John Zatopa, Paul Kooiker, and John Probst, were re-elected to three-year terms. Evrard reported that there are presently about 200 members in the WSGS.

Evenson reported that Board Member Mike Dziki resigned and that he appointed Mike Cole of Grantsburg to serve the remainder of Dziki's term.

Dave also stated that the DNR's sharptail management plan had been approved and the predator addendum will go to the Natural Resource Board for their approval within the week according to Scott Walter, DNR Upland Game Bird Ecologist. Former DNR Assistant Upland Game Bird Ecologist Sharon Fandel was recognized at the meeting for her contributions to Wisconsin sharptails.

Evrard and Board Member Bruce Moss accompanied Cara Kamke and DNR Technician Bob Hanson to the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (WA) to observe winter radio-tracking sharptails. Evrard later wrote an article published in the Wisconsin Outdoor News about her work.

Preliminary sharptail numbers this spring appear to be mixed, with some higher counts (Crex Meadows and Namekagon Barrens WAs), some lower (Pershing and Douglas County WAs), and some about the same (Moquah Barrens and Riley Lake WAs). Sharptail managers will be sent WSGS fund request forms and asked to submit projects for funding.

Board Member John Zatopa represented the WSGS at a recent DNR climate change workshop where he said that the various scenarios presented have potentially little impact on sharptails in the state.

Evenson and Evrard loaned artworks from their sharptail collections to the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center for the spring temporary display.

The WSGS sponsored a recognition picnic for the DNR personnel involved in the successful capture and transfer of sharptail hens from Unit 2 to the Pershing WA. Earlier in 2011, the WSGS cosponsored, with the Friends of Crex, an event celebrating acquiring 240 acres of land to add to the Crex Meadows WA.

DNR Research Scientist Scott Hull began the meeting's program with a summary of the DNR's sharptail research project. Disease has been ruled out as a cause for the sharptail decline in Wisconsin. Nest success of radioed-hens was good, but brood survival was poor. Adult survival was good and harvest of radioed birds was low. Hunting did not change the bird's behavior. Cara Kamke's work indicated that when sharptails are at a low density, spring movements are larger, but home ranges are smaller. Males are tied to leks and make little long-distance movements. The final report is due September 1, 2012.

Thirty radioed hens were moved from Unit 2 to the Pershing WA in 2010 and 2011. The birds stayed on Pershing for 1-2 weeks then their radio signals largely disappeared. Only 3 males were found thus far this spring. Feathers will be tested genetically in 2012 and 2013.

Continued on page 5...



## ...2012 Annual Meeting cont. from page 4

Matt Meetz of the UW-Madison summarized his work involving a GIS-computer study of potential habitat corridors linking up the sharptail management areas from the Fish Lake WA to the Moquah Barrens WA. As part of his work, all historical leks were recorded and mapped. Matt's presentation ended the program and the business meeting at 4:30 p.m..

Drawings for door prizes and the art raffle followed. Jeff Kellogg of Milltown won the framed Louie Raymer Print, Bloomer's Rodney Cole was the Ruth King Print winner, and Mike Vogl of Elm Grove won the Les Kouba print.

The group then was invited to Jim and Shirley Evrard's room in the adjacent Skyline Motel for refreshments, followed by a group dinner at the adjacent Club 13 Supper Club.

Some in the group met in the motel lobby at 6 a.m. the following morning for an auto tour of the Riley Lake WA led by the DNR Biologist Pat Beringer and Dan Eklund of the U.S. Forest Service. Nearly two dozen sharptails were seen, a result of the intensive habitat development by the Chequamegon National Forest in recent years.

The tour group stopped for breakfast in Fifield before returning to Phillips and ending the 2012 WSGS Annual Meeting.

## SHARPTAIL PUBLICITY

The plight of Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse was again described in an article, Tracking Radio Active Sharptails, that appeared in the February 10, 2012 issue of the Wisconsin Outdoor News. The article, written by WSGS Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard, describes ongoing research by the DNR.

Evrard describes a early winter trip to the Namekagon Barrens with Cara Kamke, a student intern from Northland College at Ashland, Bob Hanson, DNR biologist in charge of the intern program at Crex Meadows, and Bruce Moss, retired DNR biologist and President of the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area.

Kamke has been employed by the DNR to follow radio-tagged sharptails in the Crex Meadows and Namekagon Barrens wildlife areas from the fall through the winter to spring.

Information gathered from her radio-tracking efforts will hopefully help DNR biologists better manage the increasingly uncommon sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin.

An interesting note. Kamke gave presentations summarizing her research at meetings of both the national Wildlife Society and the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society. She was awarded the best undergraduate student presentation at the Wisconsin Chapter's winter meeting.

## PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Check the date on your mailing label and please renew your membership if it has expired or is about to expire. The WSGS is a small organization and depends heavily upon membership fees to continue the struggle for the sharp-tailed grouse and its habitat in Wisconsin.

Our membership fees are low compared to most conservation groups and support all-volunteer members who serve as your board of directors and do the work of the society.



## 2012 SPRING SHARPTAIL NUMBERS AND HUNTING PERMITS

by Jim Evrard

After several years of declining sharp-tailed grouse recorded in spring surveys, overall sharptail numbers\* rose in managed areas. More sharptails were counted this year in several areas, the Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens, Riley Lake and Moquah Barrens wildlife areas while fewer birds were found in the Douglas County, Kimberly-Clark and Pershing wildlife areas. Sharptails continued their decline in unmanaged habitat.

Based upon the formula to calculate hunting permit numbers in the DNR's recently approved Sharptail Management Plan, 200 permits will be available for Unit 2 and 35 for Unit 8.

Unit 2 is the area where the sharptail population eruption occurred in the 1990s following the massive clearcutting that took place there after the jack pine budworm outbreak. The area is now forest rather than barrens and sharptails there are basically doomed. The formula called for 214 hunting permits and 200 will be issued. Hunting permit success in Unit 2 has consistently run from 3% to 4%.

Unit 8, on the other hand, is mostly the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area with a small portion of the Douglas County Wildlife Area. Sharptails are much easier to find in the smaller intensively managed wildlife areas and are much more vulnerable to hunting. The formula calls for 195 hunting permits but only 35 will be issued. However, permit success is much higher, varying from 17% to 32% in recent years. No permits were issued for Unit 8 in 2011.

While the increased sharptail numbers were heartening, the outlook is not good for the species in Wisconsin. It is hoped that the DNR's recently approved sharp-tailed grouse management plan will eventually lead to significantly higher sharptail numbers. However, this plan must be coupled with action (funding) in order to make it a reality.

\*Sharptail data was provided by Scott Walter, DNR-Madison.

### 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 the last three 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 me at the WSGS address. The electronic newsletters will be sent beginning with Newsletter No. 66.



## AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

by Tom Ziegeweid



Its June already! The year is almost half over. Fishing has been good, having just returned from North Dakota last week. Lots of water in the prairies, ducks too numerous to count.

In a few short months I plan on going back to South Dakota with my friends from the Minnesota Sharptail Society for another prairie grouse hunt in the Fort Pierre National Grasslands.

Interestingly enough, this property is managed by the U.S. Forest Service, although there is hardly a tree in sight. There are a few private farms interspersed in this huge property, along with Native American land on the northeast corner. Private cattle grazing keeps this area 'grousey' by mimicking the buffalo herds of years past.

Be prepared to walk miles! I figured we walked around 20 miles in three days of hunting. The walking is easy though; hard dry ground and short grass make for a good trek. Bring tennis shoes along. I found my feet held up well with tennies, and left my leather boots in the truck.

Although the pheasant season wasn't open yet, later in the season you can actually bag pheasants, sharptails, and greater prairie chickens all on the same day if you move around. Prairie chickens and fairly abundant here with sharptails a bonus. The U.S. Forest Service biologist told us the chicken to sharptail ratio is around five to one.

One has to 'figure out' the landscape to find the grouse. Sometimes you had to walk a few miles before you got a flush. To my amazement, I discovered that chickens don't cackle when flushed, and you can get pretty close to them, as opposed to the wary sharptails I am used to hunting.

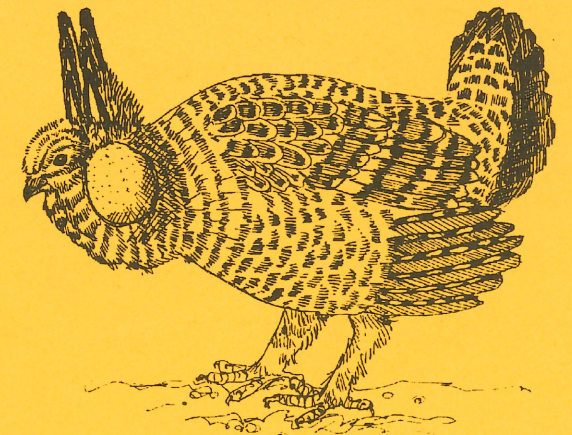
The opportunity to observe other unusual wildlife abounds; I saw my first burrowing owl, along with a prairie rattlesnake. Antelope are plentiful also, with a few mule deer and whitetails to boot.

This area is very affordable, with reasonable motels and eating places. Good walleye fishing is available in the Missouri River, which flows through Fort Pierre.

I was amazed to meet hunters and fishers from all over the U.S. This is a premier place to hunt with pointing dogs.

See you in the field,

Tom





## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/PO Box \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to volunteer for:  
\_\_\_\_\_ Board of Directors  
\_\_\_\_\_ Bird Censusing  
\_\_\_\_\_ Newsletter articles  
\_\_\_\_\_ Annual Meeting  
\_\_\_\_\_ Electronic Newsletter (by email)

Enclosed:

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Dues (Regular - \$10, Supporting - \$25, Contributing - \$50, \$100 Sustaining, \$200 Sponsor)  
(Dues are fully tax-deductible)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ WSGS Logo Decal (\$1.50)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Four-color Cloth Patch (\$3.50)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Tan or blaze orange Cap (\$15 – indicate color choice)

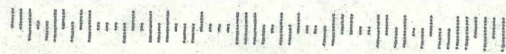
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ King Sharptail limited edition print (\$60)

(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



5/1/2013

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