

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 66

Winter 2012

LAND TRADE TO BENEFIT SHARP-TAILED GROUSE

by Dave Evenson

After years in the making, the Natural Resources Board at their December meeting approved a major land trade between the DNR and Burnett County. This trade, if approved by the Burnett County Board, will bring the Namekagon Barrens and lands between Crex Meadows and the Kohler-Peet Barrens into state ownership. The state will trade wildlife areas presently managed for forest game and cash to Burnett County, which will continue to manage the lands as part of the Burnett County Forest.

The DNR will convey 5672 acres, including all of Danbury WA, Kiezer Lake WA, and forested parts of the Crex Meadows and Amsterdam Sloughs wildlife areas plus \$660,750 to Burnett County. In trade Burnett County will convey 5040 acres of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area and 1322 of present County Forest between Crex and the Kohler Peet Barrens on Governor Knowles State Forest.

The Namekagon Barrens has been leased from Burnett County since 1956, and would be due for a new lease (or not) in 2017. These Barrens provide critical habitat for 246 species of plants and 121 species of birds. At present the Namekagon Barrens are the strongest of the "string of jewels", sharptail areas stretching through the Northwest Sands from Polk County up to Moquah Barrens on the Bayfield Peninsula. The extension to Crex, after land clearing and habitat management, will greatly enhance sharptail movement and genetic exchange between Crex and Governor Knowles barrens. This is a case where the whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

Burnett County will have better blocking of its forest management blocks. They will continue to manage these lands for forest game much as at present. Restrictive covenants will ensure these lands stay in public domain. All lands on both sides of the trade will remain open to public hunting, trapping and fishing.

Many people need to be thanked for making this trade work. Pete Engman from the DNR and Jake Nichols from Burnett County Forestry Department were the men on the ground that kept all the parts going. Dave Clausen, Natural Resources Board Chair, and past WSGS board member, facilitated a great part of this trade, stretching back to the Crex Boundary expansion years ago. Dick Steffes, DNR acquisition chief did yeoman work getting appraisals done in quick order, and verifying the right parcels so that the trade could work. Thank you to those and others from both Burnett County and Wisconsin DNR.

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

As I prepared for our June 2012 Board meeting on and near Middle Eau Claire Lake, smack-dab in the middle of MacQuarrie country, I re-read parts of Keith Crowley's biography of our famous Wisconsin outdoor writer. Of course Gordon MacQuarrie (1900-1956) is best known as the outdoor writer for the Milwaukee Journal, and especially for his Old Duck Hunter Association (ODHA) stories. But there was at least a time or two that he went specifically after sharptails or chickens as he called them, and another few stories where he pursued them as part of a general upland hunt.

MacQuarrie's first sharptail story "Chickens Fly Funny" was published in 1933. The setting was near Maple, in Douglas County, on some brush farms that may well be part of the red clay farms that hold sharptails today. In this story Mac states that he had gone "chicken" hunting 6 years prior to no success. We know he started duck hunting in 1927, and can only guess whether that first chicken hunt had been before that. In any event these were the days of the cutover and the pioneer farm and probably the best sharptail habitat Wisconsin has ever had.

In "Weary Weekend" published in 1940, MacQuarrie and Mr. President Al Peck hunted ruffed grouse and sharptails at two different farms, The Phelps farm in the Brule River Valley, and at the Repke farm near Douglas County Highway M. Mr. Peck died in 1939, so the hunt predated 1940. Both of these sites could have sharptails today- The Douglas County Wildlife Area is bisected by County M, and there are places on and near the Brule that hold birds when the clearcuts are big enough.

In 1943 "We Shall Gather by the Icehouse" was published, but the hunt, which includes Mr. President, obviously occurred earlier. This hunt occurred exactly where the WSGS board camped and fished last summer, on The Thoroughfare between Middle and Lower Eau Claire Lakes. As I drove through the closed canopy pine and oak forests it would never occur to me that sharptails thrived here. Board Member Mike Cole set me onto the 1938 air photos online (a wonderful and fascinating resource) and as I looked at them I can see the logging trails, windrowed tops and small farms and can see how it once happened.

"My Favorite Spot" was written in 1953. At this stage MacQuarrie is aware that the barrens of his youth are going, as he pronounced the prairie grouse "in critical condition". But MacQuarrie maintained ultimate faith in the ability of wildlife experts to restore the populations, and he mentions the Hamerstroms specifically.

So "My Favorite Spot" published in 1953, professes prairie grouse in dire straits and notices a couple of fine biologists. Do you think MacQuarrie might have read Hamerstrom's work? I just had to get hold of Wisconsin Technical Bulletin No.1, by Frederick and Frances Hamerstrom and Oswald Mattson, "Sharptails into the Shadows?" published in 1952. (thanks, Jim Evrard for your copy). I've read it before, of course, but not for a while. As I read, I just had to say to myself "Wow, those biologists 60 years ago laid out everything that we think we're discovering and arguing about today". WSGS really should publish "Sharptails into the Shadows?" in its entirety so that all our members can read it- it's that basic and that good.

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

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

2013 JOINT ANNUAL MEETING WITH MSGS

The 2013 annual meeting of the WSGS will be held jointly with the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs) on Saturday and Sunday, April 26 and 27 at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center in Grantsburg.

The meeting will open at 9 AM. on Friday with technical sharptail presentations by agency and academic personnel. Following lunch, a field trip will begin at 1 PM. that will highlight habitat management and conditions in Crex Meadows and adjacent areas. There will be a social and a catered dinner Friday night along with a raffle drawing for sharptail art prints and a silent auction, both fund raising events for the WSGS and the MSGS.

The formal meeting will resume Saturday morning at 9 AM., featuring less technical presentations. After lunch, separate business meetings of both groups will begin at 1 PM. and end at 3 PM., ending the joint annual meeting.

More information and registration forms will be available in the next newsletter.



SOME RESEARCH RESULTS

By Jim Evrard

Scott Hull, DNR upland bird researcher in Madison, sent an email message in mid-summer containing preliminary results from the sharp-tailed grouse genetic study being conducted by staff from Central Michigan University (CMU).

Karen Malone, CMU graduate student, stated that a genetic analysis of sharptail egg shells collected from hens captured in Douglas County and translocated to the Pershing Wildlife Area, indicated that the hens had successfully mated with Pershing male sharptails.

This is encouraging news, hopefully strengthening proposals for further sharptail translocation projects to bolster declining sharptail populations throughout the state.

It should be noted, however, that radio signals from the Douglas County hen sharptails released on Pershing ended after several weeks. Nests found from these birds (the source of the eggshells analyzed in this study) indicated that none of them hatched. And the sharptail census this past spring after two years of translocations did not show any population growth.

However, it is difficult to census sharptail, especially with present limited DNR manpower and budgets. It may well be that there are sharptails in the general Pershing area that the DNR biologists are unaware of.

A late note from DNR's Mark Schmidt, Pershing Manager in early September, reported a flock of ten sharptails were seen near the lek on the South Unit of Pershing and four sharptails were seen in the North Unit. Mark hopes most of the birds survive the winter and help grow the breeding population in 2013.

...Land Purchase continued from page 1

Jim Shurts represented WSGS, Mark Nupen spoke for Friends of the Namekagon Barrens and Dave Oxendale spoke for Friends of Crex at the December 12 NRB meeting, as each of these groups and others favored the trade.

The deal is not quite final. At the time of writing the Burnett County Board needs to approve it. All indications that they will do so are positive, but? Since some of the lands on the DNR side were purchased in part with Federal Pittman-Robertson funds the Fish and Wildlife Service will need to OK the transfer. Again, this should happen, but?

2012 WSGS PROJECTS

2012 was a busy year in terms of WSGS support for Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse and their habitat. Early in the year the WSGS Board granted \$2,000 to the DNR at Crex Meadows to provide a portion of the matching funds needed for a large barrens habitat management project.

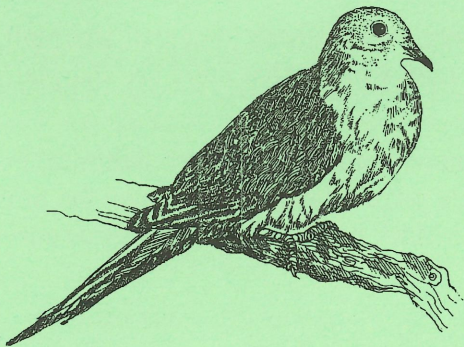
Later in the year, the Board granted \$2,000 to the DNR at Spooner for the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. The money will be used to construct three sharptail viewing blinds and to control exotic invasive plants in the Barrens.

At the same time, the Board also agreed to grant the Friends of Crex (FOC) \$2,000 for their Land Acquisition Fund. The FOC recently created the revolving fund to buy land within approved project boundaries of the Crex Meadows, Fish Lake, and Amsterdam Sloughs wildlife areas in situations where the DNR cannot act quickly enough and the land would be lost to development. The acquired land is sold to the DNR at a later time or in some cases, donated outright.

The FOC used the fund to buy a 75-acre tract in the northeast corner of Crex Meadows in 2011. All but a few thousand dollars of the purchase price were recovered from the Wisconsin Stewardship Program funds and a federal endangered species fund. The FOC also bought a small plot of private land adjacent to the Amsterdam Sloughs Wildlife Area that had been used as a parking area for people using the public land. Both tracts of land were donated to the DNR this year.

The final financial pledge was \$4,000 to the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) for habitat management in the Riley Lake Wildlife Area in the Chequamegon National Forest east of Fifiield. The sharptail population there has responded well to the extensive and intensive habitat management conducted there in recent years by the USFS.

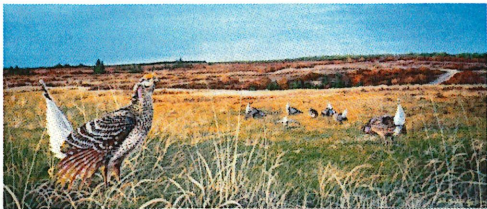
Finally the WSGS continues its support by paying \$230 in annual dues to five private conservation organizations that support sharptails and their habitat. Included are the North American Grouse Partnership, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Friends of the Namekagon Barrens, Friends of the Bird Sanctuary (the Douglas County Wildlife Area), and the Friends of Crex.



ANNUAL ART PRINT FUNDRAISER

The WSGS is again conducting a raffle for three, framed, limited edition, ready-to-hang-on-your-wall art prints depicting Sharp-tailed Grouse. Sharptail art is rare either as prints or originals.

This year we will be offering artwork by Wisconsin's Ruth Maslowski King, featuring a sharptail dancing grounds in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. Ruth donated the original painting and the printing rights to the WSGS. An edition of only 100 prints.



The second print is by the late Owen Gromme, considered to be the Dean of Wisconsin wildlife artists. This extremely rare, colored artwork, titled "Prairie Sharp-tailed Grouse", was acquired in the secondary market since it is a sold-out edition.



Wisconsin Artist Buzz Balzer donated this print-on-canvas paper of a flock of Sharp-tailed Grouse feeding on white birch buds. Balzer is a well-known artist with a long list of awards, including those from Ducks Unlimited and the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, and exhibitions from South Carolina to Missouri to Wisconsin.

The annual art print raffle has been a major fund-raiser for the WSGS. Income for memberships covers the costs of member services (including the newsletter) but raffle income provides the money for special projects.

The raffle ticket is printed below. Those wishing to enter the raffle should place your name and address on the ticket stub(s), detach the stub(s) and send in with your donations to:

WSGS
102 E. Crex Ave.
Grantsburg, WI 54840

WSGS 2013 ART RAFFLE TICKET

This raffle is being offered by the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
102 E. Crex Ave., Grantsburg, WI 54840
Wisconsin Raffle License R0016707A-11301

The raffle will be conducted at 4 p.m., April 26, 2013 at the annual meeting of the WSGS in Grantsburg, Wisconsin. Ticket holders need not be present to win. Winners will be notified by mail or telephone. No prize has a value exceeding \$500.

Suggested donation is \$10/ticket or \$20/three tickets.
No donation is necessary to be eligible for participation.

(KEEP THIS PORTION FOR YOUR RECORDS)

(DETACH HERE AND SEND WITH DONATION OR MARK 'NO DONATION')

Name _____	Name _____	Name _____
Address _____	Address _____	Address _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
Phone _____	Phone _____	Phone _____

COLE APPEARS BEFORE NATURAL RESOURCES BOARD

by Jim Evrard

New WSGS Board Member Mike Cole of Grantsburg appeared before the Natural Resources Board (NRB) at their June meeting in support of Wisconsin sharptails and their habitat.

In July of 2011, the northwest part of the state experienced massive wind damage from an extremely strong storm that entered Burnett County from Minnesota. There was little damage to man-made structures except for that caused by falling trees. However, it was the trees that suffered. There were estimates of as many as 180,000 acres of forest were damaged by the storm.

The extensive blowdown with all its dry fuel caused the Fire Control division of the DNR to ban all outdoor burning in much of northwest Wisconsin in the spring of 2012. This might have prevented wild fires, but it also prevented the DNR crew at Crex Meadows from using controlled fire to maintain sharptail habitat. The Crex crew normally burns 2,000-3,000 acres annually, mostly in the early spring.

DNR-Madison worried that allowing the Crex crew to burn while at the same time prohibiting people from even smoking outdoors, much less doing any burning, would be politically dangerous.

What apparently didn't enter the decision making process was that the Crex crew is highly trained, has much experience, and uses the latest equipment to safely control burn thousands of acres. They never had a fire escape control in many years of burning in Crex Meadows.

The WSGS Board feared that the DNR would again ban burning in the spring of 2013, endangering the already precarious Crex sharptail population. The WSGS Board decided to contact the NRB, taking a position supporting prescribed burning by the Crex wildlife crew in 2013.

The position paper to be presented to the NRB board was cooperatively written by several WSGS board members who decided that the paper would be more effective by presenting it before the board in person rather than mailing it. Obligations prevented the paper's authors from presenting the paper, but Mike Cole stepped forward and offered to read the paper to the NRB at their meeting.

If DNR wildlife crew cannot resume managing sharptails with fire this coming spring, Crex sharptails will slip closer towards extirpation.

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.

CALL FOR BOARD NOMINATIONS

The terms of WSGS Board Members Dave Evenson, Tom Ziegeweid, and Bruce Moss expire in 2013. Nominations are being sought for three-year terms for the three positions. Any member interested in serving on the WSGS Board and any member wishing to nominate a fellow member to the Board, please write WSGS Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard, or call at (715)463-2446 or email at grouse.7067@gmail.com.

HERB BEHNKE HONORED

by Jim Evrard

Herb Behnke, Wisconsin Natural Resource Board (NRB) member for many years, was honored recently at the Friends of Crex annual landowners picnic held in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area Rest Area. Behnke was presented with a plaque by WSGS President Dave Evenson for his long-time support of sharptails and their habitat in Wisconsin.

Herb began hunting sharptails and waterfowl in Crex Meadows in the 1950s as a guest of the late Ken Wallin who owned a camp on Iron Creek on the north side of wildlife area. Behnke, a resident of Shawano, never forgot Crex and its sharptails during his many years on the NRB.

More recently, Herb almost single-handedly was responsible for the expansion of the acquisition boundary of the Crex Meadow Wildlife Area. When a few local residents of the Grantsburg area voiced opposition to the boundary expansion, the DNR decided to either abandon the project or scale down the size of the expansion.

Behnke, who was also recently inducted in the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame, had enough foresight to see the value of the boundary expansion, pushed the idea through the NRB and it was approved. Since then the DNR with the help of the Friends of Crex bought a 320-acre tract, a 240-acre parcel and a 75-acre property within the new boundary.

Without Herb's help these properties would have been chopped into small parcels and sold for recreational development. Some of the land acquired has been restored to barrens habitat with plans for additional sharptail habitat development.



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 few 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



The 2012 hunting season is rapidly drawing to a close and none too soon for my aching body. Hey! Hunting is work! But we will continue on, there is always next year.

I started off the season at Meadow Valley Wildlife Area (WA) near Babcock, on the opening weekend of the fall turkey season. I did manage to bag a 9 lb. jake poult plus a grouse. I saw around a hundred birds that weekend which reinforced my anecdotal reports I had been hearing of a super-hatch of upland game birds.

As I looked back at the years I have hunted, one will never forget the nasty storms and abhorrent weather that were part of the hunting experience, but the blizzard at Thief Lake this year took the cake.

We are living in an era of weather extremes. Over the years it might rain some during my annual trip to northern Minnesota; but getting 14" of wet blowing snow on top of 1-2" of cold rain was almost unbearable. My group of friends and I were lucky we had a heated shack to stay in. The farmer we rented it from plowed us out with his tractor and scoop. This was the first week of October.

I managed to walk out hunting the first day and the three of us bagged out. If you got out on the lake (only 2/3 of the pre-drought size), you were treated to an incredible shoot. There were ducks flying everywhere more or less continually.

As I am writing this article, I had gotten word of the land trade deal going through our DNR Board's approval of the Namekagon Barrens WA in Washburn County.

I hunted there for the first time in my life on opening for sharptails. This core property is a real jewel. Hopefully by the time you get this newsletter it will be finalized. I did manage to fill my one Zone 8 sharptail tag.

Why are ducks avoiding Wisconsin? Actually I should rephrase this question to "Why are ducks avoiding the interior of Wisconsin? Most of the ducks in Wisconsin this year were on the edges of the state, like the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River.

Yes, I realize the first week of the season there are plenty of local birds pretty much all over. But after that, most every place I went hunting was devoid of birds. This is a pattern I noticed for the last decade, if not longer.

Be prepared for a drastic cut in season length and bag limits on ducks next year. Unless we get some major precipitation this winter and next spring, this record fall flight will crash. The prairies went from being very wet to very dry in three months. It's raining right now, December 15, 2012. We'll take it!

I hope to see you at our first ever joint meeting with the Minnesota group this spring.

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

WSGS
102 East Crex Avenue
Grantsburg, WI 54840