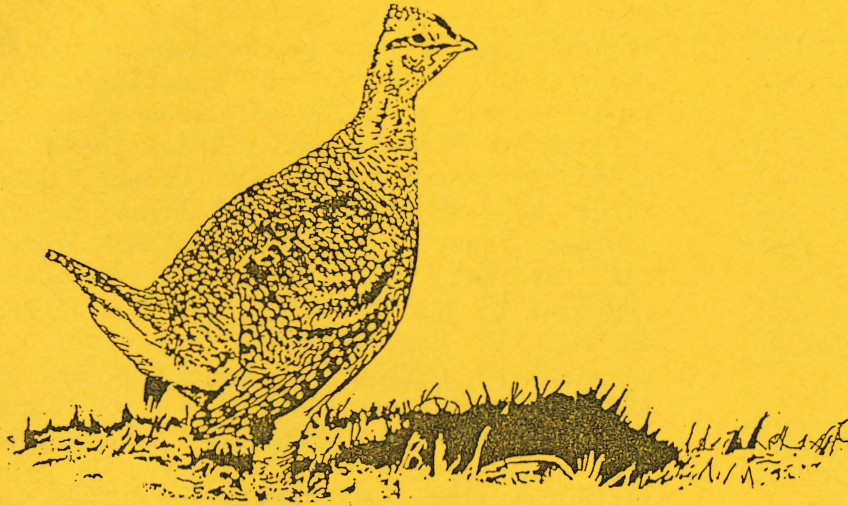


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 1

FALL 1990

CHARTER MEMBERSHIP

Congratulations - you're a charter member of the Wisconsin Sharptail Grouse Society! How did I get such an honor, you may ask. Somewhere along the line you have hunted the bird, sat in a sharptail blind, or just showed an interest in barrens habitat. A bunch of us have talked about the need for this group for several years. It seems the only way to start it is to just start. So here we go!

The story of sharptail is similar throughout the midwest states. This bird of the brush land that lives neither in extensive forest land nor well groomed farm lands finds few places that meet its habitat needs. In 1985 Minnesota recognized the bird's plight and started the Minnesota Sharptailed Grouse Society. Michigan is at the same stage as Wisconsin right now and is in the process of forming a SGS. This summer they have held two meetings and are seeing substantial interest. Perhaps someday we can form a Midwest Confederation.

Minnesota has broken the ground for us and has these objectives:

1. Publicize the sharptail's demise
2. Educate the public and resource professionals about sharptails
3. Encourage management of brushlands for sharptails and other species
4. Discourage adverse management practices
5. Promote both hunting and non-hunting recreational use of sharptails
6. Develop model sharptail habitat demonstration areas
7. Influence both legislative and DNR decisions that will benefit brush lands for sharp tails and other species

Many of these objectives also can become objectives for the Wisconsin Chapter of SGS. But we may wish to develop other objectives.

Where do we go from here? A lot of that depends on you. We are a group scattered across the state. Frequent meetings or fund raisers would seem difficult, but it would be good to plan a workshop or meeting in the near future. For now, this newsletter will be the main binding force among us. We will continue to print it twice a year. Please let us know what you're thinking.



THE NAMEKAGON BARRENS

Situated near the junction of the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers, the Namekagon Barrens is one of the long time strongholds of the sharptail. It's sandy soil supported a frequently burned pine barrens in pre-settlement days. This open land was attractive to early farmers, but they quickly found the soil was not fertile enough to grow good crops and the land went tax delinquent. Most of it then ended up in county forest ownership.

In 1953 the Wisconsin Conservation Department leased 5,686 acres from Burnett County to keep it in open habitat in an area that was rapidly growing up due to fire protection and tree planting. This lease was renewed in 1966 and continues until 1991.

In the past year several things have come together that have caused the DNR to pursue buying this area. STEWARD legislation, a bonding authority passed by the legislature, provides funds for major land purchases. Dr. Stan Temple's minimum viable population analysis (see below) suggested the pursuit of a larger area. The Nature Conservancy and the Sand County Foundation recognized the scarcity of open brush prairie in Wisconsin and are interested in securing an enhanced Barrens.

Negotiations are now proceeding to acquire about 5,100 acres of the existing leased lands as well as 4,200 adjoining areas for a total of 9,300 acres. These lands are presently owned by Burnett County, 5,967 acres; Douglas County, 1,947 acres; and the Mosinee Paper Corporation, 1,398 acres. The project has received conceptual approval by Burnett and Douglas Counties, as well as Mosinee Paper officials. A feasibility study is presently before the Natural Resources Board. With their approval and with continued cooperation from the present landowners, it seems likely that the sharptail's future at the barrens will be secured.



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

Spring Dance at Crex

By Louis Raymer

This limited edition print by Louis Raymer is one of only a handful of sharptail prints available. Louis is a Grantsburg artist and a frequent visitor to Crex. This print is offered by the Friends of Crex organization at a cost of \$75.00 unframed (Members of FOC may deduct 10%) or \$175 framed. Please add \$5.00 for shipping. Wisconsin residents add 5% sales tax. Make checks payable to Friends of Crex, Box 367, Grantsburg, WI 54840. All proceeds will be used to build a new Wildlife Interpretive Center at Crex.

MINIMUM VIABLE POPULATIONS

While sharptails appear to be thriving on several of our managed areas, it's no secret that the number of places that you can find sharptails in Wisconsin is dwindling. What causes sharptails to fade away? And why can't you find any sharp tails on the overgrown pasture in your back 40 when it looks just like your favorite hunting spot?

Sharptails show a very definite trait of area sensitivity. They need a certain amount, fairly large, of suitable habitat to thrive. They just don't survive where the forest is marching in on them. For example, we never find a dancing ground within 1/8 mile of the forest edge and seldom even within 1/4 mile. If you take 1/4 mile off of all sides of a parcel even as big as a square mile, you will see that there isn't very much habitat left in the middle.

In Wisconsin isolated managed areas of 1500-3000 acres, such as Ackley, Dunbar and Spread Eagle Wildlife Areas and others have lost all their birds over the past several decades. So it appears that even units of this size probably aren't big enough to supply all the life needs of sharp-tailed grouse.

Professor Stan Temple of UW Madison has done a minimum viable population estimate for sharp-tailed grouse. I'll summarize his results here: if you're really interested you'd best talk to him directly or get the paper.

A minimum viable population is one that can sustain itself through highs and lows, chance events such as bad storms, fire during the nesting season or invasions of goshawks. It needs to be large enough to avoid genetic inbreeding

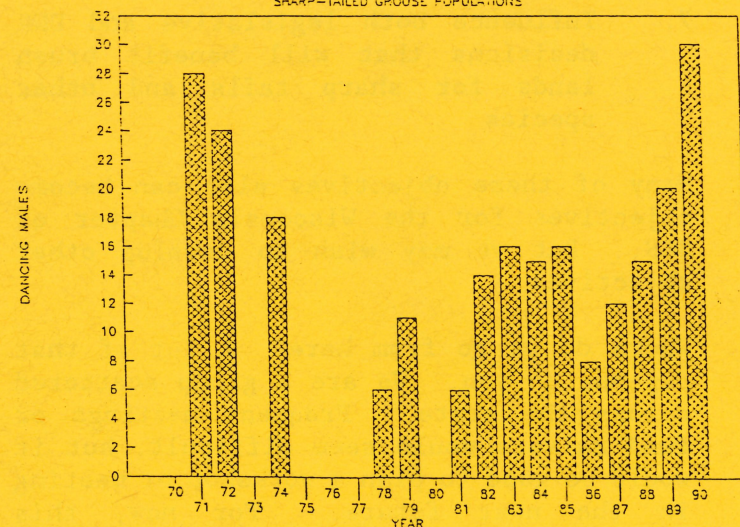
problems. This is complicated in this species by the fact that only a few males on a given lek (dancing ground) do all the breeding. Dr. Temple determined that a spring breeding population of 280 (140 females all of which breed and 140 males of which only 10 percent breed) has a high probability of avoiding chance event genetic or demographic problems.

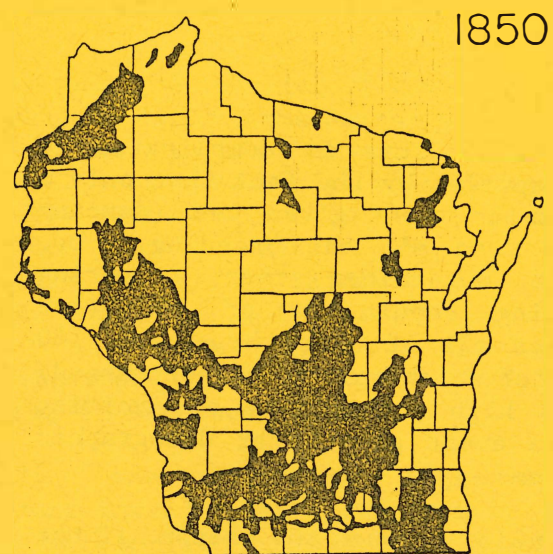
Continuing through the season, if the 140 hens have 6 young each then the late spring population must equal 1120 or better. This population can sustain natural mortality as well as a harvest of 165 birds, and come through to the next year with enough birds to continue the cycle.

Now how many acres does it take to support this population? Sharp-tailed grouse don't reach high density; a good prehunt density might be 40 birds per square mile. At that level it would take just over 10,000 acres to support this minimum viable population.

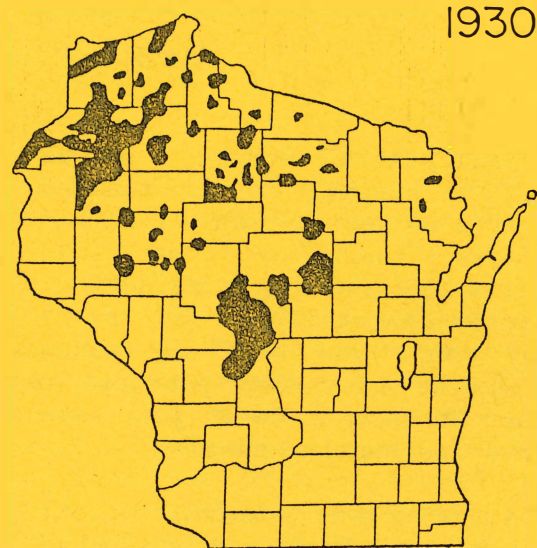
We don't have many 10,000 acre contiguous blocks of habitat in the state (nor in the Midwest). Pershing Wildlife Area and surrounding farm lands, an area in central Wisconsin including Sandhill Wildlife Area and adjacent cranberry bogs, and Crex Meadows are a few areas that make it. The Namekagon Barrens and Moquah Barrens are close. As a society we should be looking for ways to link up smaller blocks or open up areas around existing small blocks. Another possible help for the birds is to transplant genetic material from one area to another to limit inbreeding problems.

NAMEKAGON BARRENS
SHARP-TAILED GROUSE POPULATIONS

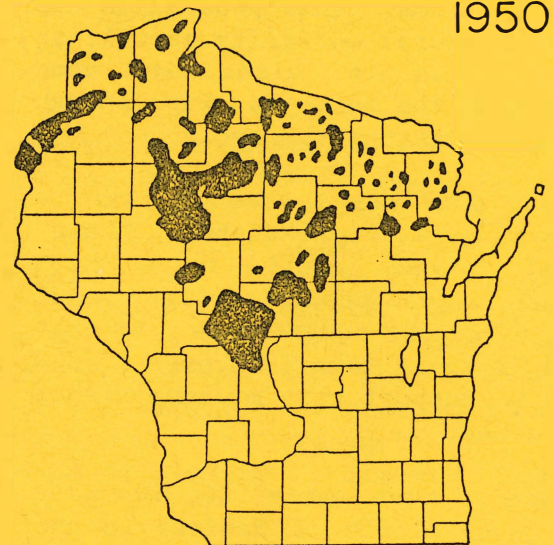




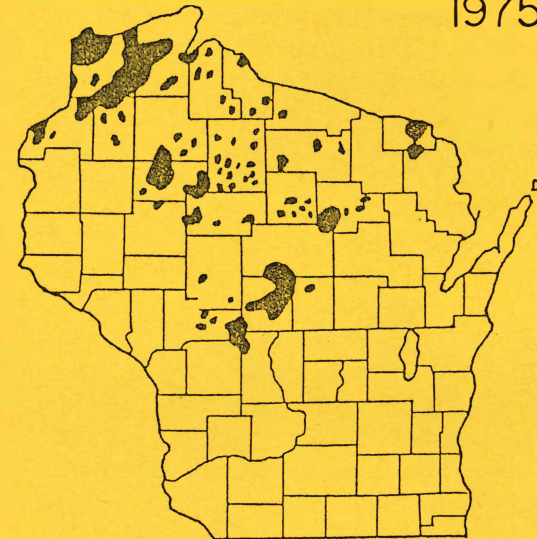
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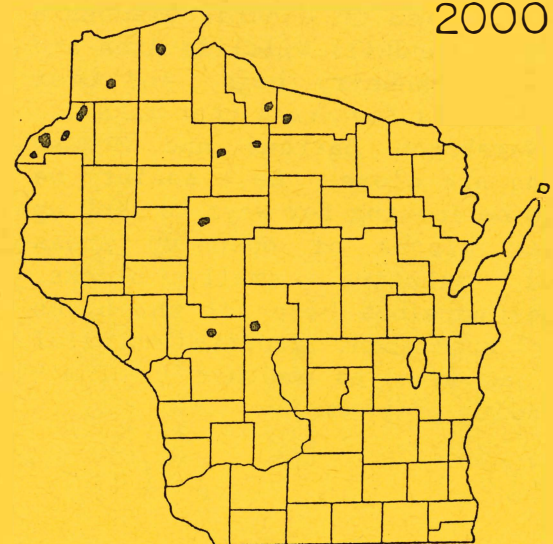
1930



1950



1975



2000

This series of maps, compiled by DNR researcher Larry Gregg in Research Report Number 141, depicts the extent of loss of range for sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tails are doing well in the places where they remain, but those places are becoming rare. Most of them are areas designated and managed specifically for sharp-tails. We need to protect and manage all existing range, and work towards recovery on former range.

NEW BEGINNINGS AT MOQUAH

At the northern end of the sand outwash plain that runs from Polk County to the Bayfield peninsula lies the Moquah Barrens. This area is a part of the Chequamegon National Forest administered out of the Washburn District. About 6,000 acres have been designated as barrens type, but through the years other priorities kept the area from being intensively managed. In 1975 it was estimated that 50 sharptails were using the area, but that number has dwindled to almost none today.

In the past several years the CNF has aggressively moved to reclaim the area through increased timber sales and prescribed burning. In addition, areas of the forest adjacent to the barrens are being considered for complementary management. One unit of about 4,000 acres may be managed on a "big block" basis with clear cuts up to a square mile being the basic management unit. These clear cuts will provide sharptail habitat for the first decade or so after

cutting, at which time another block may be ready. Another 5,000 acres is being considered for a pine savannah unit which would consist of scattered large trees or groves, with mostly grassy vegetation between. Altogether up to 15,000 acres of the forest could be in habitat conducive to sharptail grouse.

Now the habitat is looking pretty good and getting better, but there are no birds within colonizing range. So the DNR, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the Chequamegon National Forest are cooperating to reintroduce sharptails to Moquah. By the time you read this the birds will have been captured at Crex Meadows by GLIFWC personnel and released on Moquah. Up to 100 birds will be released over the next four years. With improving habitat we hope these birds can again make Moquah into a strong hold for sharptails in Wisconsin.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION (Annual Dues \$5.00)

Volunteer Activities

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: GRANTSBURG State: WI Zip: 54840

Enclosed: \$ 5.00 dues;
\$ 5.00 additional donation

- ☒ Board of Directors
- ☒ Newsletter Writing
- ☒ Publicity
- ☒ Education
- ☒ Fund Raising
- ☒ Other

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AND RETURN THIS APPLICATION TO: Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, P.O. Box 1115, Cumberland, WI 54829

ABOUT YOUR NEWSLETTER

The editor (so far) of this newsletter is Dave Evenson. Dave is the DNR Wildlife Manager for the Cumberland Area. Crex Meadows and the Namekagon Barrens thus fall within his territory.

It's very important for the SGS not to become a mostly DNR group. Obviously there is a certain amount of expertise on sharptails within the DNR land managers and researchers, and we need to capitalize on that expertise. But even more so, we need to involve and fire the imaginations of bird watchers, sharptail hunters and anyone who enjoys the barrens. Therefore, the call goes out for articles, letters to the editor, or other comments.

Do you have an interesting sharptail story? How about an observation of sharptail occurrence or activity in an unusual site? Or if you are (or know) an old time hunter send in a reminiscence of the good old days. We have several professional writers among our numbers (you know who you are). Can you contribute on a frequent or occasional basis?

Above all, let us know what your interests or experiences are. Scrawl out a note on the back of your sign-up sheet or attach a letter. Communication is all we have going so far, and no communication is an indication of no interest. Keep those cards and letters coming, folks!

Wisconsin Sharptailed Grouse Society
P. O. Box 1115
Cumberland, WI 54829