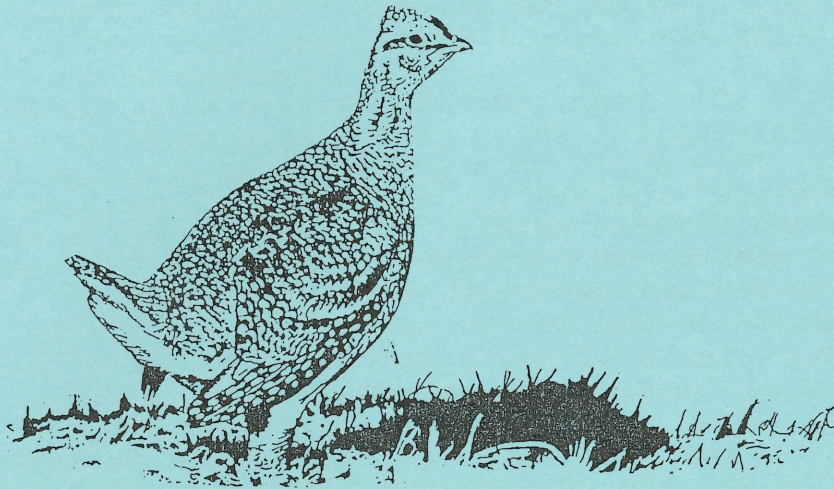


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Volume 12

Winter 1994-95

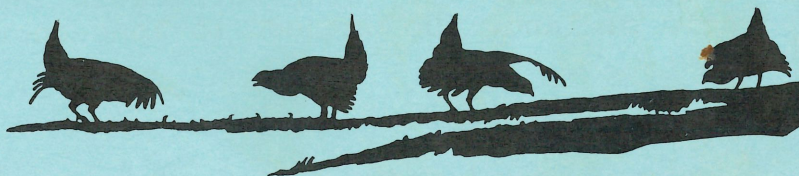
SHARPTAIL HUNTING SEASON IN JEOPARDY!!

An Urgent Message to our membership from your president, Thomas C. Ziegeweid.

This newsletter you have just received is probably the most important one you will ever get, as things don't bode well for the continuation of our hunting season in Wisconsin for sharptailed grouse.

Over the years as the habitat has diminished, and subsequent bird numbers dropped, the DNR has shortened the season, and also cut the bag limit from a five bird limit, down to three, and down to the present one bird a day limit with an approximate three week season. Essentially what we have at present is a "trophy season".

Consequently, the number of people who pursue this sport has also dropped over the years to the present, where we estimated that 200 to 250 people participated in the hunt in recent years according to the permit system records. There aren't many of us left!



That is where our organization comes into the picture. In 1992 our club went on record as supporting the implementation of a permit system to get a statistical handle on the harvest of the birds. At present we have a free permit and report card system, this has been in effect for the last three hunting seasons. This has given the DNR valuable information on hunter numbers, birds bagged, and where the birds are being bagged.

In 1993 and again this year, our club worked with the DNR to enact "hunter control legislation" which is one step farther than the free permit system. This would be a quota system similiar to our turkey and goose seasons, whereby you would get a permit to harvest two birds a season. These permits would be issued on the basis of available bird numbers in different locations. In other words the DNR would have the ultimate management tool to use. Simply put, if the birds fall down low in population you simply don't issue any permits or few of them, essentially "closing the season" without statutorily closing the season.

For those of you unfamiliar with the rule change process that is involved with the DNR and hunting and fishing regulations, you should be aware that it is a gut wrenching nightmare to change rules; and its even worse to try to change the rules back to the status quo. In other words, if the DNR closes the season it will probably never open again and you can kiss it goodbye!

The Department, in my opinion, really blew it when they did not ask for sharptailed grouse hunter control legislation in the 1995 Budget Bill late this summer. This happened despite the seemingly supportive letter I received from Secretary George Meyer July 6, 1994. We also sent a letter to the Department this summer offering to help defray some or all of the costs of the paperwork involving a permit system. Let the DNR charge their \$3.00 fee for permits! Doesn't my \$100.00 patron license make a statement? A question to permanently close the sharptail hunting season will be on the 1995 Spring Conservation Congress Questionnaire.

IF YOU OPPOSE THE CLOSURE OF THE SHARPTAIL HUNTING SEASON HERE IS YOUR GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

Write Mr. George Meyer, Secretary
Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707

and/or
call Telephone (608) 266-2621
Telefax (608) 267-3579

The birds are coming back from their "low" in cycle, the table is starting to turn in the right direction with a renewed interest in barrens restoration. The jackpine budworm has defoliated large parcels of land. Do we need to lose another part of our hunting heritage!

GRASSLANDS THE KEY TO GAME BIRD ABUNDANCE

By Mike Johnson

There are two kinds of predators. Specialists, like the timber wolf, whose normal diet is composed of just a few prey species, and opportunists, like the coyote, that just hunt, seizing upon whatever edibles are encountered. Wisconsin sportsmen seem to fit the latter category. They just hunt, and are ever willing to go that extra mile for the best hunting opportunities.

Three or four years ago, a few people returned from the Dakotas, Iowa, and Nebraska and shoved stacks of photos of pheasant limits under the noses of the guys at work. This year, droves of Wisconsin hunters are traveling to the prairie states to take advantage of near record populations of ducks and upland birds. Most all of these opportunists are fully aware that this game bird abundance is a temporary phenomenon caused by, of all things, the government in Washington. In 1985, Congress enacted a farm bill that provided funding for the "idling" of forty million acres of cropland. Farmers responded by signing up thirty-six million acres of highly erodible fields in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The land has been anything but idle. The CRP program required that enrolled fields be seeded down to grasses, which provided the vast acreage of safe nesting cover needed to begin this unprecedented recovery of groundnesting bird populations. The recovery is only temporary, however.

CRP contracts will begin to expire in 1995, and in less than ten years, gamebird numbers will be back at the levels that they were in early eighties, and many grassland songbird species will begin a decline that may only end in extinction. Seven hundred million tons of soil will erode away each year, jeopardizing four hundred-ten thousand acres of wetlands. In a world where nothing makes sense anymore, animal rights groups are protesting the use of laboratory rats, while thirty-six million acres of wildlife habitat are about to be destroyed because we have difficulty understanding the true cost of environmental exploitation. There is further irony in the fact that CRP is without a doubt less expensive to the taxpayer than the crop subsidy programs that will replace it. Can the program be saved? Maybe.

When Congress returns after the holidays, one of the top items on their agenda is the 1995 Farm Bill. In that bill, the fate of the habitat created by CRP will be spelled out. Please call or write to your Congressional delegation to express your concern for the future of this critical resource:

WISCONSIN

U.S. Rep. Les Aspin
2108 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

U.S. Rep. Tom Barrett
313 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

Senator Russell D. Feingold
B40-1 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20510

U.S. Rep. Steve Gunderson
2235 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

U.S. Rep. Gerald D. Kleczka
2301 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

U.S. Rep. Scott L. Klug
1224 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

Senator Herb Kohl
330 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20510

U.S. Rep. David R. Obey
2462 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

U.S. Rep. Tom Petri
2262 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

U.S. Rep. Toby Roth
2234 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

U.S. Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.
2332 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington DC 20515

ARTICLE FOR WSGS NEWSLETTER

by Dan Dessecker

Wisconsin's natural communities support 4 species of grouse: the prairie chicken, ruffed grouse, spruce grouse and, of course, the sharp-tailed grouse. Each of these critters has inspired its own cadre of supporters to join ranks under a distinct umbrella to best voice the concerns about, and the needs of the species in question.

We have the Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus Ltd. speaking on behalf of the prairie chicken and its environs. The Ruffed Grouse Society carries the banner for ruffed grouse and those species of wildlife that require young forest habitats. A relatively new group recently founded by our own Larry Gregg, Fool Hens Forever, has brought together those interested in what is likely our most uncommon grouse - the spruce grouse. And last but certainly not least, the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society is dedicated to raping and pillaging the landscape to promote the barrens/shrublands habitats required by our namesake and its associates - OK, maybe rape and pillage is a bit strong but you get the idea.

Are the objectives of these groups in conflict because of the varying needs of the 4 featured species - hardly. These groups can and should blend together like the grassland to shrubland to deciduous forest to coniferous forest continuum they collectively endeavor to promote.

Obviously, size plays a role and can dictate the role to be played by these groups. RGS membership dwarfs that of STCPL, which dwarfs that of WSGS, which dwarfs that of FHF (acronyms R' us). Not that membership size alone means very much. I'd rather work with a group that has 20 active members than one that boasts 1,000 inactive members.

So how can WSGS network with the other galliforme groups to best ensure that the strength of the whole is indeed greater than the sum of the parts? How about the following.

There exists today throughout Wisconsin a vocal minority from one end of the environmental spectrum that insists that a "no management" philosophy is best with regard to our natural resources. This philosophy is at the heart of the recent debate over clearcut regeneration harvests on our state forests and the creation of "aesthetic management zones" on our state- and county-owned lands.

Unfortunately, the proponents of this philosophy don't get it. They don't understand that ma nature is anything but a benign granny in a rocker who simply watches the world pass by. As a biologist friend of mine with more than a bit of cajun blood once stated - "Sometimes mother nature can be a real b__h!" She likes to stir things up with wind and, especially, fire. One need only look to the fires that this year raced across much of the western U.S. to see the effects of her "fits".

One Wisconsin state legislator proposed legislation that would mandate the maintenance of biological diversity as the primary objective of our state forests one minute, while publicly questioning the wisdom of barrens management the next. Apparently this legislator, like so many other back-seat biologists, feels that biological diversity means mature forests - a dangerously simplistic viewpoint.

This legislator and those who share his opinion (objective?, agenda?) erroneously view biological diversity as a product that can be actively or passively managed. Wrong! It is not possible to manage for biological diversity. It is possible, and it is essential to manage for important components of biological diversity.

We can't simply build a house, but we can pour a foundation, put up the frame, hang the sheet rock, etc... Any missing component, such as the roof, the floorboards, a barrens community or a young aspen forest makes the entire "structure" somewhat lacking.

The breadth of natural communities of interest to the 4 grouse groups in Wisconsin ensures that someone's ox is sure to be gored by virtually any decision. We all, I think, recognize that we must pursue our own objectives while respecting and supporting those of the other players. However, we all must remain vigilant for, and actively oppose attempts to tie, or to force the hands of professional resource managers. The end of a story based on what occurred in Nazi Germany during the 1930's is instructive - "and when finally they came for me, there was no one left to speak out".

I urge WSGS members to speak out in support of ecologically-sound management decisions that benefit the denizens of barrens and shrubland communities. I urge WSGS members to speak out in support of ecologically-sound resource management, regardless of the ultimate objective, lest "they" next come for our ox.



WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

RESOLUTION TO THE WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES BUREAU OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT FROM THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY.

WHEREAS the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society was created to support the preservation and enhancement of brush prairie communities of which the sharp-tailed grouse is a key indicator species, and

WHEREAS the sharp-tailed grouse offers a unique experience for upland bird hunters in Wisconsin, and

WHEREAS the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society desires that the tradition and opportunity to hunt sharp-tailed grouse in the State of Wisconsin be continued,

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Board of Directors, under the direction of its membership,

RESOLVES that the Bureau of Wildlife Management be requested to promulgate the following rules affecting the hunting of sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin:

- I. A permit shall be required to harvest sharp-tailed grouse,
 - A. An application form shall be required for the permit,
 1. A fee shall be charged to pay for administrative costs related to issuing the permit,
 2. This application shall not be included with the purchase of a Conservation Patron license;
 - B. This permit shall be issued in accordance to the quotas set by the Bureau of Wildlife Management,
- II. A quota system for sharp-tailed grouse shall be devised by the Bureau of Wildlife Management,
 - A. Such quotas shall be determined by the Bureau of Wildlife Management using the best available data with the objective of having acceptable harvest goals for sharp-tailed grouse to protect and enhance the resource and still have hunting opportunities with the bag limits outlined below,
 - B. To save on costs, it is suggested that the initial quota areas be identical to those used for deer hunting;
- III. A seasonal and daily bag limit and hunting season shall be set,
 - A. The seasonal bag limit shall be two (2) sharp-tailed grouse per hunter,
 - B. The daily bag limit shall be one (1) sharp-tailed grouse per hunter,
 - C. There shall be one continuous season, with the length and opening date to be determined by the Bureau of Wildlife Management.

Signed this 14th day of June, 1993, for the Board of Directors by:

James F. Shurts
Vice President
Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

MINUTES - BOARD MEETING, JUNE 14, 1994

Board members Tom Ziegeweid, Bob Dreis, Jim Evrard, and Dave Evenson met at Tony's in Spooner on June 14, 1994.

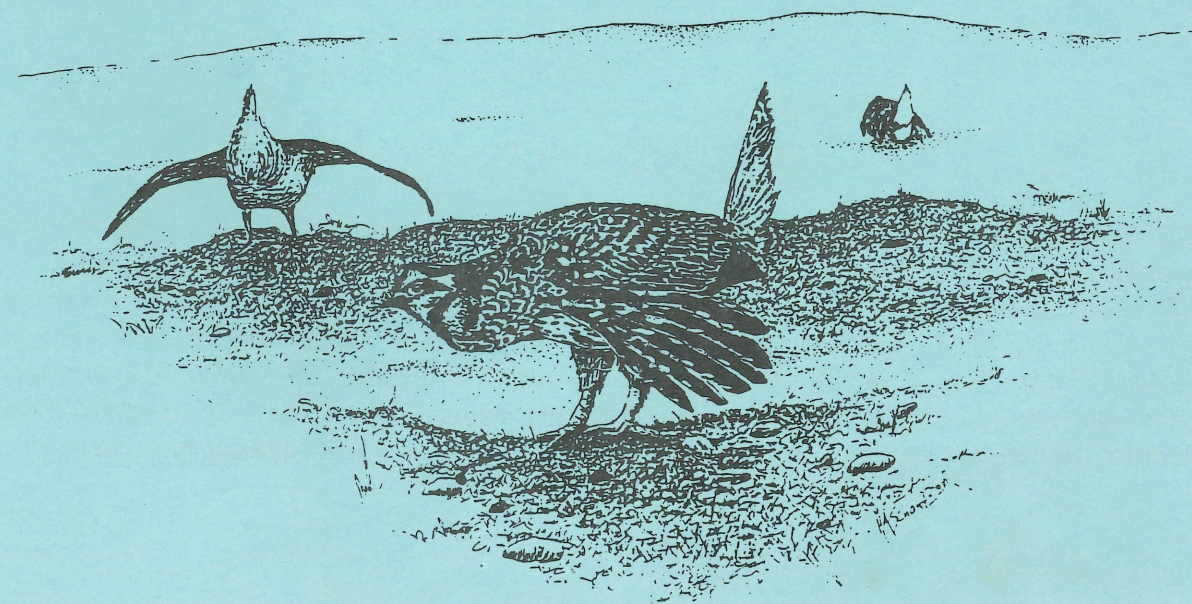
After discussion, the board approved a motion to send the resolution supporting permit hunting for sharptails (as published in the fall 1993 newsletter) to DNR Secretary, George Meyer and to Joe Polacek of DNR, Office of Management and Budget. We next approved a motion to have Tom Ziegeweid send the letter supporting Horicon creation of oak savannah to Patti Meyer, Horicon Refuge Manager. Our thanks to Tom Jancoski for drafting the letter.

After discussion we tabled a decision on whether to support the Wisconsin state prairie nursery. This nursery provides prairie seeds for DNR, DOT or other state agencies' use. It was not obvious to us whether there was substantial challenge to the nursery, how we could best support it, or whether it fit within the objectives of the organization.

We discussed the possibility of funding activities favoring sharptail habitat in Central Wisconsin. Tom Ziegeweid will check with Mike Zeckmeister, Sandhill Manager, to see if they have some needs we could help with.

We will investigate holding the next spring meeting at Solon Springs. There is a large block of industrial forest there that needs to be searched for sharptails and WSGS could provide a good service in the survey effort.

We discussed several membership issues. We are losing dues because some people aren't paying attention to the mailing label dates. We will continue to put a membership application in each newsletter. We also will begin sending a separate "dunning letter" to lapsed members. Tom Ziegeweid volunteered to call lapsed members and see if he could get some renewals. Application forms will ask for phone numbers in the future, and donors of \$25 or more will get a complementary cap, or may check off if they want to skip the cap. We will try to get an interest bearing checking account. Bob Dreis will look into the possibility of bulk mailing and will have our tax deductible numbers printed on checks.



SUPPORT OF THE PINE BARRENS WORKSHOP AND THE GROUSE SYMPOSIUM

By Jim Evrard

I would like to thank the WSGS for their financial support of two recent projects I have been involved with. As you probably noted in the annual Treasure's Report in the last newsletter, the WSGS provided \$100 for each of the meetings. President Tom Ziegewald attended both meetings and displayed the Society's exhibit and distributed literature.

The Pine Barrens Workshop was held in Solon Springs from September 21 to 23, 1993. The first full day was spend in information exchange via papers presented by a wide range of researchers, managers, and other interested persons from the public and private sector. Their presentations are being summarized and will be available ^{partly} in a printed proceedings. The second day was spent in small group excercises ^{designed} to initiate the procedure to develop a research/management plan for the northwestern Wisconsin sand country. To this end, an ad hoc committee was formed which later met in January to begin building the team which will develop the plan that all interests can sign onto. The bottom line is that the sharp-tailed grouse will benefit from any management that increases the amount of barrens habitat in that area of the state. Several members of the WSGS were members of the ad hoc committee including Tom Ziegewald and Ed Frank.

The Wisconsin Grouse Symposium was held at the UW Memorial Union in Madison on February 24, 1994 in conjunction with the Wisconsin Chapter of the Wildlife Society's annual meeting. The WSGS was a co-sponsor along with the Ruffed Grouse Society and Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus Ltd. The life history, management, and status of Wisconsin's native grouse, the prairie chicken, sharp-tailed, ruffed, and spruce grouse, were discussed at the symposium. A summary of the papers presented at the meeting is being published and ~~will be~~ ^{is} available for distribution to interested readers.

I think the \$200 was a good investment in publicity for the WSGS. Tom stated that we picked ^{new} memberships at both meetings and the WSGS gained wider recognition as an advocate for the sharp-tailed grouse and its habitat in Wisconsin.

COUNTY FOREST PLAN INPUT

Most county forests are now writing their 10 year management plans. They are receiving public input and comments on drafts continuously. If you live in a county with sharptail potential you may wish to make a comment. County forests are the backbone of our public land ownership in Wisconsin. Even if your forest doesn't have sharptail potential this is a good time to get involved for all the other benefits public forests do give us. You should contact your county forest administrator directly. Usually they are located in the county seat, and listed in the phone book under county government.

BOARD MINUTES - DECEMBER 22, 1994

Board members Bob Dreis, Tom Zeigewald, Jim Evrard, Dave Evenson, and Dan Dessecker and General Member Shane Walstrom met at Tony's in Spooner.

Jim Evrard will handle most of the details for the general meeting on April 22-23 at Solon Springs. We will send invitations to Minnesota and Michigan Chapters, the attendees of the Pine Barrens Workshop last year, UW Superior, Lakeland College and others and expect good attendance. Jim will talk to Dave Epperle about Douglas County Forest lands and Bob Dreis will contact Steve Coffin of Mosinee Paper Company to invite and get approval to survey on their lands. Outdoor writers Tom Eisele and Tom Davis will be invited by Dan and Dave, and Tom Zeigewald will invite Dave Carlson. We will have a wildlife art raffle. Tom will take care of getting the license.

Most county forests are presently writing their 10 year plans. Dan will get addresses of the counties which have barrens potential and draft a letter to get on their mailing lists for public comment and review.

Tom will look into getting an interest bearing checking account and the potential for going to bulk rate mail.

Tom applied to the Natural Resources Foundation for a \$400 grant to partially defray the cost of a display board.

Tom will write to Herb Behnke, Chair of the Natural Resources Board with copies to Bill Vander Zouwen and Jay Reed emphasizing the WSGS desire to have a hunter control legislation and thus a continuous season.

Tom Jancoski found a great deal on a Woods mower that could be used at Sandhill. We voted to spend \$450-\$600 toward this mower and Dan will contact the Ruffed Grouse Society and Wisconsin Waterfowlers Association to see if they will match that donation. Between us we should be able to fill that need.

Tom will contact Jim Shurts about by-laws change regarding including bogs in habitats of interest. Tom also will talk to Michigan and Minnesota regarding MOU. Dan and others felt that an MOU may be more formal than we need to accomplish good communication.

