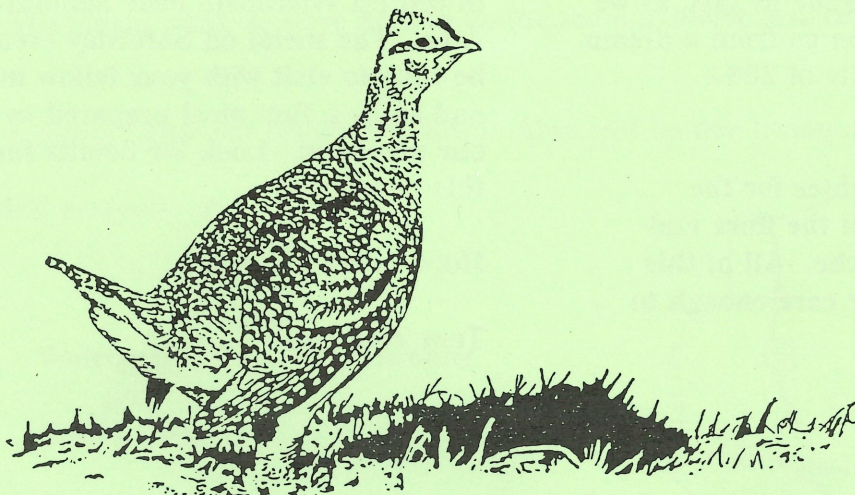


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Volume 16

Spring, 1996

SHARPTAIL PERMIT LEGISLATION UPDATE

The bill which allows the DNR to control sharptail hunter numbers and thus reopen the season is progressing through the legislative process.

AB815 was introduced on January 25th with sponsors in the assembly: Boyle, Johnsrud, Hubler, Goetsch, Ainsworth, Kreuser, and sponsored in the Senate by Senator Jauch and Senator Schultz. On February 21st it went to hearing in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee, chaired by

Representative Johnsrud. Three people testified, all in favor of the bill. Bill VanderZouwen's testimony for the DNR is found elsewhere in this issue. Jim Shurts who has carried most of the workload on this issue for WSGS, testified on our behalf, and Ed Frank, also a WSGS member, testified on his own behalf. The bill remains in committee. When you contact your representative or senator, be sure to refer to AB815.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
BY
THOMAS ZIEGEWEID

Well, I guess all good things must come to an end. As many of you know by now, my term as President will end at the annual meeting. Six years have gone by fast, as we have seen our organization go from a dream of a few, to a vibrant entity of 200+ members.

The future does look brighter for the sharptailed grouse and all the flora and fauna that inhabit its' niche. All of this because you as a member care enough to support our group.

If you have never been to an annual meeting, you are missing out on a great time. We will be doing a bird census survey in central Wisconsin near Sandhill Wildlife Area. The social on Saturday evening will be time to visit with your fellow members and enjoy a fine meal prepared by one of our members. Look for details further in this newsletter.

Hope to see you soon,

Tom Ziegeweid

WILDLIFE ART RAFFLE
SHARPTAILS AT RILEY LAKE

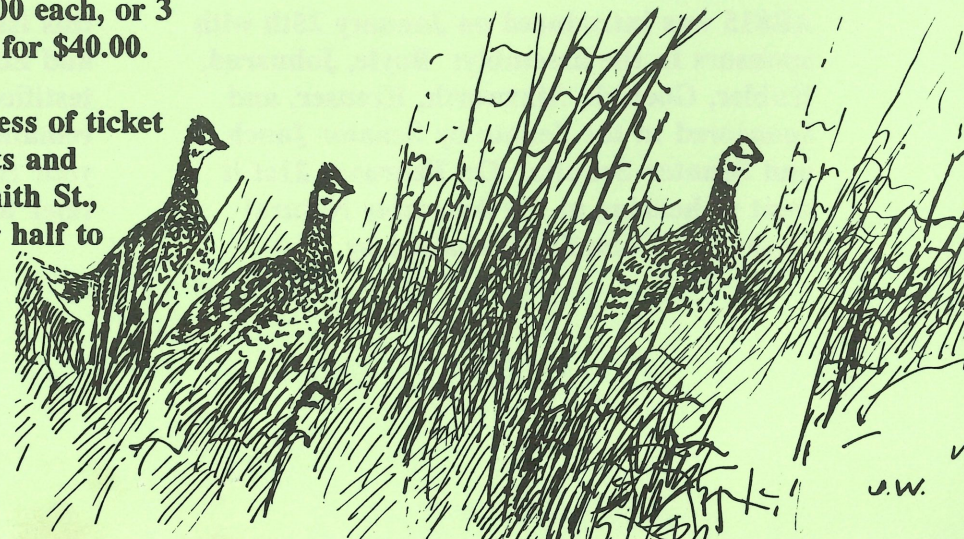
This year we have a truly unique art work for you. "Sharptails at Riley Lake" is an original painting by Jonathon Wilde, Wisconsin Artist and WSGS member. This wonderful painting is professionally framed and you will see it nowhere else. If you know art, you realize that sharptail prints are rare, and sharptail originals are even more rare. Here's your chance at one.

You are receiving six tickets directly, and can get more if you're a good sales person. Tickets also will be available at the annual meeting. Ticket prices are \$10.00 each, or 3 tickets for \$25.00, or six tickets for \$40.00.

Please write the name and address of ticket holder on tickets. Return tickets and payment to: Bob Dreis, 732 Smith St., Spooner, WI 54801. Keep your half to

verify winning ticket. You may also bring your tickets and payment to the annual meeting.

This raffle of original art work, Sharptails at Riley Lake by Jonathan Wilde, is sponsored by the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, P.O. Box 1115, Cumberland, WI 54829, under Wisconsin Gaming License R0016707-01195. The drawing will be held April 20, 1996 at Sandhill Wildlife Area. Ticket holders need not be present to win.



ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday and Sunday, April 20th and 21st, 1996

Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center

Welcome back to the center of the state and the southern most sharptail range. We hope to do for Central Wisconsin what we were able to do for the northwest last year, document lots of birds.

The Outdoor Skills Center at Sandhill Wildlife Area will be our headquarters for the weekend.

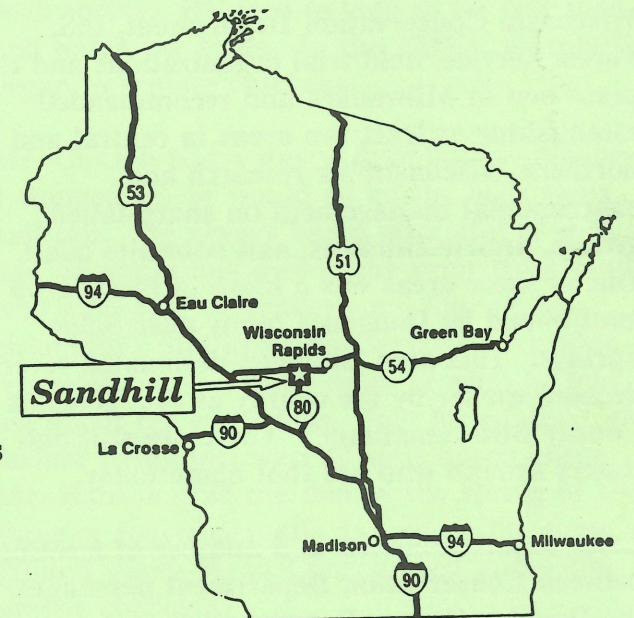
Here's a quick overview of the meeting:

Saturday

- 1:30 p.m. Welcome and business meeting
- 5:00 p.m. Social Hour
- 6:30 p.m. Dinner with world renown outdoor chef John Kubisiak
- 7:30 p.m. Sharptail Census briefing and assignments

Sunday

- 5:00 a.m. Sharptail census (breakfast on your own)
- 10:00 a.m. Census debriefing
- 11:00 a.m. Depart Sandhill



Sandhill is located 20 miles west of Wisconsin Rapids on Highway X west of Babcock, Wisconsin. For more information, write or call: Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center—Department of Natural Resources, Box 156, Babcock, WI 54413 (715) 884-2437 or (715) 884-2882.

It should be a fun weekend. We have permission (and encouragement) to survey sharptails on several cranberry bogs as well as on Wood County Wildlife Area. Remember to bring your hip boots! This is not like the sand country of Solon Springs.

The evening meal will be held at Sandhill also. I can attest that John Kubisiak will provide us with some fine outdoor cuisine, probably featuring buffalo. To help John in his preparations please let him know you are attending by calling ahead (715-884-2437). ✓

Accommodations ✓

Tom Ziegeweid has reserved 10 rooms for Saturday night at the Super 8 Motel, 3410 8th St. So., Wisconsin Rapids. Make your reservations directly with Super 8 (715-423-8080) and make sure you tell them you are with the Wisconsin Sharptailed Grouse Society. The room rate is \$56.88 per double. If you wish to camp call ahead to Dick Thiel or Mike Zeckmeister at Sandhill (715-884-2437) to get information and/or permits.

EARLY DAYS WITH DOUGLAS COUNTY SHARPTAILS

By Jim Hale

The area we now call the Douglas County Wildlife Area is nearly 50 years old. It was early in 1946 that representatives of the Wisconsin Conservation Department, U.S. Forest Service, field trial organizations and the press met in Milwaukee and recommended establishing at least two areas in central and northern Wisconsin for research and experimental management on sharp-tailed grouse, prairie chickens, and bobwhite quail. One of these areas was a block of forest crop land owned by Douglas County near Solon Springs. This area had been designated several decades earlier by the county as the "Douglas County Bird Sanctuary". There are still old-timers around who use that name today.

Later negotiations led to a number of meetings between Conservation Department personnel, the Douglas County Board, and the Conservation Commission. Public hearings also were held. Finally it was agreed that the 63 county-owned forties (2,520 acres) of the Bird Sanctuary would be withdrawn from the Forest Crop program and leased to the Conservation Department for 50 years at 10¢ per acre. This arrangement was approved by the Conservation Commission in December, 1947 and the withdrawals of Forest Crop lands for grouse research purposes were completed in March, 1948. A sharptail research project was started immediately with funding from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (usually called the Pittman-Robertson Act or P-R program).

I was put in charge of statewide sharptail and prairie chicken research late in 1947, and so became a one-man work crew on what is now the Douglas County Wildlife Area. I did have some temporary help, but the project was always a low-budget operation. The nuts and bolts of what we did are buried in lengthy reports in DNR archives, but some of the more interesting things that went on you won't find recorded there.

I became acquainted with several of the local people. Clare and Marie Wildner lived in the house that is still occupied just northwest of the present field trial building. Clare was a professional dog-trainer and field trial organizer, with strong political connections in the County Board and City of Superior. He was one of the major local backers of the new sharptail area. Clare and Marie both had feisty personalities. Clare would usually chew me out about something the minute I arrived at his place, but in the next moment pat me on the back and invite me in the house for a piece of Marie's apple pie. I learned early on that his bark was much worse than his bite; we always got along well. Marie was also a good friend. She, too was inclined to tell me what I wasn't doing right in rather profane terms, but always ended with a smile and a second piece of pie. Among other things, Marie took great pride in her frequent mention that she was the first female ever hired by the Conservation Department to be a fire-watcher in a fire tower. This was sometime around 1920.

Wildners had an assistant trainer who lived with them. His name was Ted Holzer, an Ohio native who somehow had ended up at Solon Springs. Ted was much interested in our sharptail project and became an invaluable field man, first as a volunteer and later as a full-time WCD Conservation Aid.

A neighbor down the road was a farmer named Al Etienne. Al and his son Harold donated many hours of their time, advice, tractor, and other equipment purely out of interest in sharptails. Eventually we could pay them a little, but their efforts as volunteers were substantial.

There were other folks in the Solon Springs area I came to know quite well, but the most interesting individual of all was Mead Church. He lived alone in a small house in section 10 on the east-west road that is the northwest boundary of DCWA. This town road is now known as Mead Church Road, but it has nothing to do with a house of worship. The remains of Mr. Church's house still stand, but it is no longer occupied and is hardly visible behind a screen of brush. In 1948, however, none of that brush was there and an old shed stood across the road, the only thing that blocked a broad view of open grasslands.

Mr. Church told me he had lived in his house for 54 years. It had been built by his family who homesteaded there in 1894 after traveling by wagon from Grantsburg. They made this trip entirely on dry land except for crossing the Namekagon and St. Croix Rivers. He described their farm like an immense grassy park with scattered large Norway pines, a few jack pines, and scattered small potholes.

Raising crops exhausted what little fertility was in sandy soil in three years or less. He said grouse were abundant in the early years, but were primarily prairie chickens (yellowlegs) with only a few sharptails (pintails). Up until about 1930, as many as 200 prairie chickens used the field across the road from his house each spring. He used to hide in his cow shed and watch the birds. In the 1930's, sharptails began to replace chickens.

Mr. Church had a way with animals. Whenever I stopped by, we would sit on the back steps and talk. He always had a pocketful of corn, and he would talk and at the same time hand-feed a flock of chickadees and four or five chipmunks that knew him well. I have often regretted not recording more of what he told me about the early days. Just for contrast, the farmer living just west of the Church house, Mr. Hanson, told me that in the spring of 1947, three or four sharptails danced on the same ground where Mead Church used to see 200 prairie chickens.

In 1952, the grouse research project was terminated and management of the DCWA was turned over to WCD game managers. The main reason for this change was the conclusion that limited funds could be more efficiently used by maintaining clearings and brush on more sites rather than spending it all on just one area.

Your Donation is Matched



Remember—your contribution to the State of Wisconsin Endangered Resources Fund is matched, dollar for dollar. When you donate using the "checkoff" on your personal income tax form, the state will match the first \$500,000 received. Your \$20 gift to endangered resources protection work in the DNR will mean \$40 of income to be used to maintain the heritage inventory system, manage state natural areas, and increase the number of biological inventories that can be completed. If you haven't already done your taxes, look for the loon and "checkoff" for endangered resources!

DNR TESTIMONY ON SHARPTAIL PERMIT AUTHORITY

Good morning. My name is Bill Vander Zouwen. I am the Wildlife Ecology Section Chief with the Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Wildlife Management. I previously held the position of Upland Game Staff Specialist during which time I lead a team in developing a long range plan for sharp-tailed grouse management. Bill AB 815 grants the Department rule making authority, thereby meeting one of the objectives of the sharptail management plan. Moreover, the Natural Resources Board asked Department staff to assist the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society and legislature as needed to develop such a bill. The Department supports this bill.

Ideally, we would prefer that gamebird hunting regulations be simpler. But, times have changed. This bill is necessary to offer continuation of this hunting heritage as well as ensure continued preservation of this species.

Sharptails were one of our primary gamebirds when Europeans settled Wisconsin. They were commonly seen across the southern prairies and savannahs and the northern pine barrens. With the advent of intensive agriculture, southern populations were lost. But, the extensive logging and fires in the north provided ideal brushland habitat, and northern populations flourished. Fires have since come under control and the mature forests have returned. This has largely restricted sharptails to public lands managed specifically for open brushlands as well as a few areas of large-scale commercial logging operations that temporarily provide open habitat. These populations are now found primarily in northwest and central Wisconsin in Burnett, Douglas, Bayfield, Price, Rusk, Wood, and Jackson counties.

Each spring we survey sharptail populations on public lands managed specifically for habitats that support sharptails as well as some private lands. These surveys have shown that sharptail populations cycle up and down along with ruffed grouse populations. So far, sharptail populations have been limited by the amount of suitable habitat rather than by hunting. Surveys have shown that populations on properties open to hunting have had similar trends to those on properties closed to hunting. Some of the hunted properties have higher populations now than any time in the last 50 years. However, to be on the safe side, a few of these properties were closed to hunting. Others had refuge areas designated. For those areas open to hunting, there was a short hunting season with a bag limit of only 1 bird per day. Yet, there was still a danger of overharvesting sharptails on these well-known properties. We could not take that risk, so we closed the hunting season this year with the expectation that it would continue to be closed until we could regulate total harvest. The only way that we could both allow hunting and guarantee that populations are not overharvested is with a permit system that AB 815 would allow.

With authority granted through AB 815, the Department would promulgate rules describing hunting zones and criteria for opening seasons and setting permit levels. Permits would only be available each year in zones where sharptail populations exceed a safe threshold. Permit levels would be set conservatively to ensure that only the harvestable surplus is taken and that subsequent breeding populations will be secure. Due to the small number of sharptail hunters, we expect that costs of the permit system would be minimal.

This proposal has been supported by the Conservation Congress Upland Game Committee as well as the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. Again, the Department supports this bill as a way to ensure both the preservation and hunting heritage of this gamebird.

DON BRONK

Education: University of Wisconsin, graduated 1961, B.S.

Military: Wisconsin ARNG, 1960-66; M.O.S. - Medic; Rank SP-5; Honorable Discharge

Employers: Institute of Paper Chemistry - Appleton
(First to last) Gibbs Mfg., Janesville (sub-contractor for Apollo moon rocket)
Wausau - Marathon County Park Dept., 25 yrs. Admin. Officer

Current Status: Semi-retired; free-lance writer and lecturer

Hobbies: Hunting (mostly waterfowl), fishing, camping, woodworking, photography, archaeology (Greece, Near East) astronomy, science fiction, classical music, paleontology, play writing and going, ancient religions, travelling, game cooking, natural history, reading

Sharptail Interest: Began when I hunted them at the Ackley Wildlife Area, starting in 1972.

ED FRANK

Worked with Wisconsin upland game birds and hunters for 33 years before retiring from Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in 1991; four years as a field wildlife manager, seven years as a field research project leader and 21 years as the central office Upland Game Specialist in Madison.

I have a cabin in Washburn County and enjoy April to November visits to nearby barrens areas populated with sharptails.

While remnants of pine-oak barrens are likely to persist well into the future, it's still far from certain that they will be large enough or managed intensively enough to ensure the future of sharp-tailed grouse populations or sharptail hunting.

I offer to do what I can to keep threatening shadows from engulfing sharptail habitat, populations and hunting.

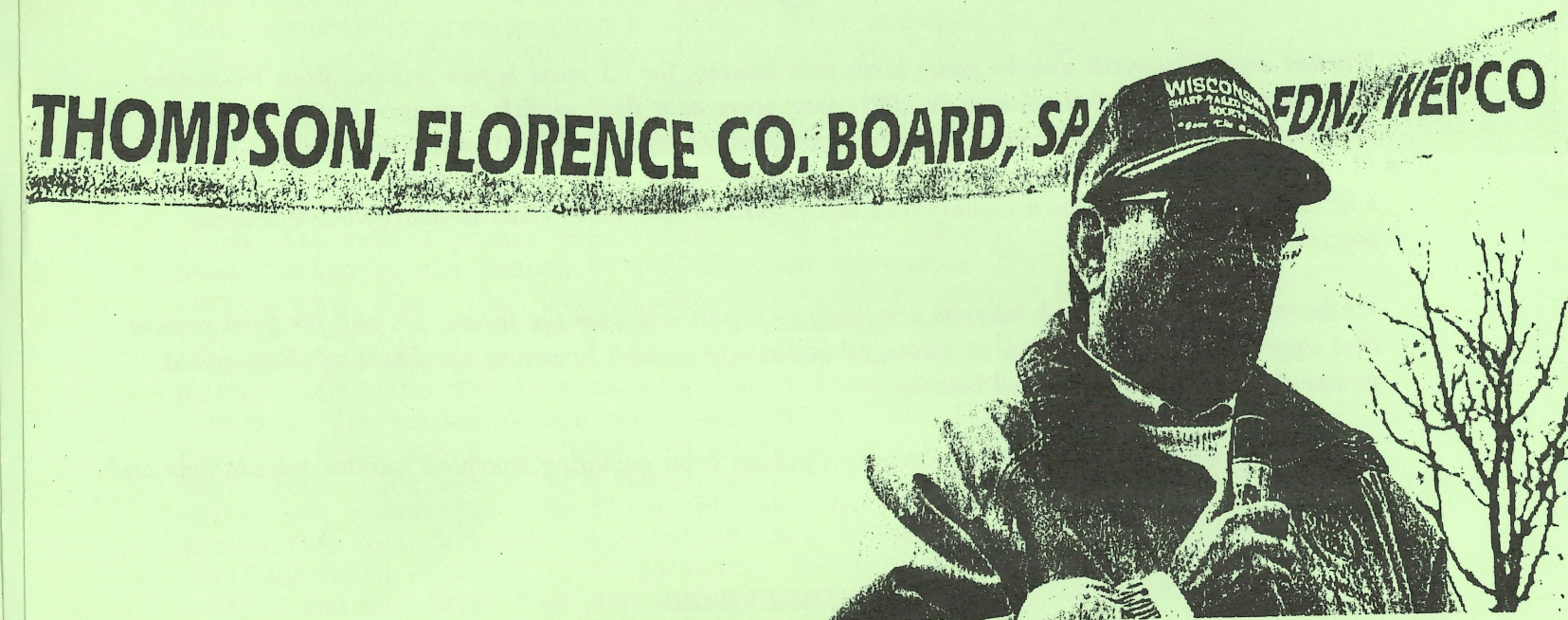
JIM EVRARD

I'm a charter member of the WSGS and was a volunteer board member from 1991 until elected to a 3 year term as a board member in 1993. I became Secretary-Treasurer in 1995.

I've participated in many WSGS activities including the on-going struggle to maintain a sharptail hunting season in Wisconsin. I was instrumental in developing the Pine Barrens Workshop in Solon Springs in 1993, the Wisconsin Grouse Symposium in Madison in 1994, and the successful 1995 WSGS annual meeting and sharptail census in Solon Springs.

I'm seeking re-election to help continue the increasingly successful efforts by the WSGS to support the sharptailed grouse, their habitat, and their hunting in Wisconsin.

SPREAD EAGLE BARRENS STATE NATURAL AREA



Governor Tommy Thompson Speaking at Spread Eagle Barrens Dedication

HATS FOR SALE

You too can wear with pride a beautiful Wisconsin Sharptail Grouse Society hat, just like this one worn by Governor Tommy Thompson. This is a quality green corduroy cap with white lettering. See the back page for details or pick one up at Sandhill (while you're checking out details check your mailing label to see if your dues are overdue.)

SPREAD EAGLE BARRENS PURCHASED

For nearly forty years the State of Wisconsin has leased approximately 4,265 acres of Florence County owned land known as the Spread Eagle Plains. This is the largest remaining barrens in Northeast Wisconsin. Beginning with the first lease in 1956 the state has paid a per acre lease fee that is shared between the county, townships, and local schools. Now, following approval on a county wide referendum and by the Florence County Board, the DNR has purchased the barrens for \$1.4 million.

Under the lease the state has managed the lands to provide habitat for Plains 1 grassland species and hunting. The county has maintained the stumpage rights for timber throughout the lease periods. Prescribed burning has been used on the properties for fifteen years to maintain and enlarge the open grassland. Public uses such as hunting, fishing, trapping, cross country skiing, bird watching, berry picking and snowmobiling have been allowed.

The purpose of the proposed purchase is to protect, enhance and preserve the unique pine barrens/bracken grassland ecosystem. The long term goal is to establish a 8,850 acre natural area known as Spread Eagle Barrens State Natural Area. The 4,265 acres of previously leased land would form the core and other lands would be purchased through voluntary sales. In addition, commitments to manage

additional adjacent lands in a manner consistent with the natural area plan, would be sought. Wisconsin Electric Power Company has already indicated a willingness to cooperate on restoration and management of the 1,690 acres they own within the proposed natural area project boundary.

The proposed Spread Eagle Barrens State Natural Area is a joint project between Florence County, the State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Electric Power Company and The Sand County Foundation to maintain, restore and enhance a pine-oak barrens habitat. The project sponsors believe that creation of the Spread Eagle Barrens Natural Area can establish Florence County as a center for education and research on landscape scale habitat restoration and forest management.

On October 18th Governor Tommy Thompson spoke at a ceremony to dedicate this cooperative effort at maintaining an important and unique ecosystem.

Sharptails have been found on the Spread Eagle as recently as 15 years ago, but no longer are present. DNR plans will open up the habitat more, but there are no plans at this time to re-introduce sharptails.

BALLOT - WSGS BOARD (Vote for 3 Members)

_____ Don Bronk

_____ Jim Evrard

_____ Ed Frank

_____ write-in

MAIL IN OR BRING TO ANNUAL MEETING

**PLEASE CHECK THE DATE ON YOUR MAILING LABEL BELOW TO
DETERMINE IF YOU ARE PAID UP**

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

(1996 Annual Dues \$10.00)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Enclosed: \$ _____ **dues**

(Regular - \$10) (Supporting \$25)

(Contributing \$50) (Sustaining \$100)

(Sponsor \$200)

Dues are fully tax-deductible

Volunteer Activities

_____ **Board of Directors**

_____ **Newsletter Writing**

_____ **Bird census work**

_____ **Publicity**

_____ **Education**

_____ **Fund Raising**

_____ **Other**

Yes! Please send me:

_____ **Deluxe corduroy dress cap (\$14.00 postage incl.)**

_____ **WSGS Logo Window Sticker (\$1.50 postage incl.)**

_____ **Total Amount Enclosed**

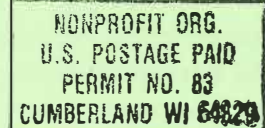
**Thank you for your continued support,
Board of Directors**

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

WSGS

Box 1115

Cumberland, WI 54829



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