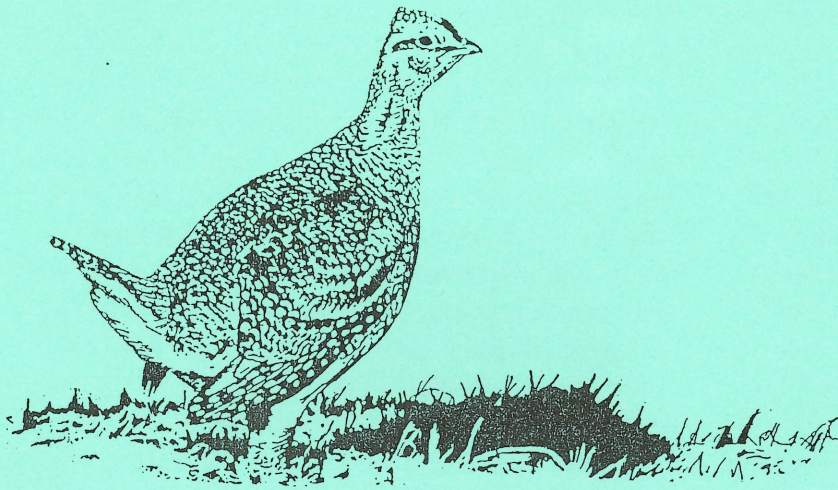


# WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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Volume 14

Fall, 1995

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## SPRING SHARPTAIL COUNTS UP

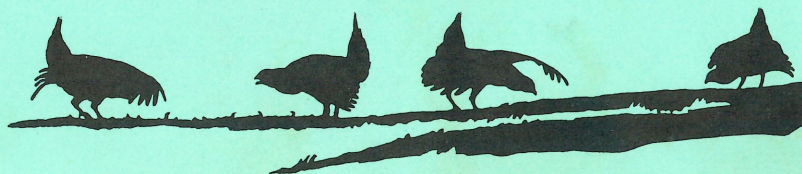
By Larry Gregg

The 1995 dancing ground survey indicated substantial increases in sharptail numbers on all of the 7 managed sites in northwestern Wisconsin (Table 1). Although numbers on several sites remain below recent cyclic highs, counts on both Namekagon Barrens and Moquah Barrens were higher than any recorded during the past 2-3 decades. Besides setting a new population benchmark, the count of 44 dancing males on Namekagon Barrens allayed concern of the property manager about the high harvest level sustained during the previous hunting season.

In contrast to the general increase seen in sharptail numbers in the north, little change was observed in the counts of dancing males on the 2 properties being managed to benefit sharptails in central

Wisconsin (Table 1). Causes for apparent regional differences in sharptail population trends are unclear, but central Wisconsin prairie chicken counts also evidenced little change between 1994 and 1995.

Although Wisconsin's sharptail habitat base continues to shrink in the face of successional changes, our recent population trends appear more favorable than those of our neighbors. Bill Berg (MN DNR) reported that sharptails dropped 11% and 4% in their northwest and east-central ranges, respectively, between 1994 and 1995 while John Urbain (MI DNR) reported that sharptails were down this spring within their primary range in the eastern Upper Peninsula.





## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

By Thomas C. Ziegeweid

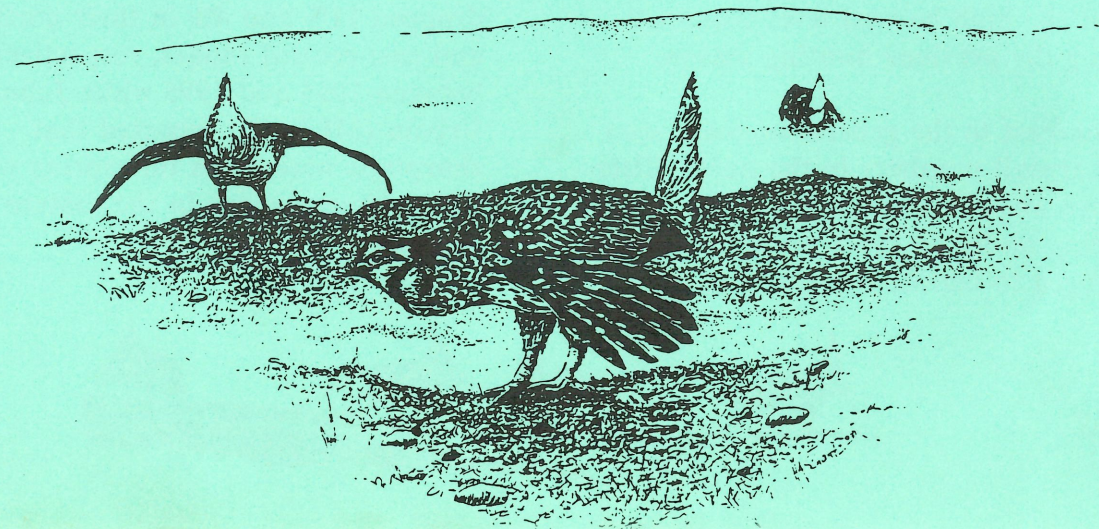
As many of you are aware by now, the DNR Board authorized the closure of the sharptailed grouse season effective in 1996. However, we will have a season this fall with the same format as the last few years. Remember to get your free permit from a DNR office and mail it in right away at end of season if you hunted or if you didn't!

Will this be our last season? I hope not. The birds are doing very well on the managed properties and the recent clearcuts on paper mill company lands in Douglas County and adjacent areas. There was a 50-60% increase in dancing male numbers this spring despite a good harvest last fall of around 100 birds. What is really saving the sharptail for the moment I believe is the clearcutting of large (section size) blocks of jackpine and red pine for pulp production by the paper companies. Many of these plantations are reaching maturity and will be cut continuously on a rotational basis. At our spring meeting we made a general agreement to support the paper companies clearcut practices.

Another bright light on the horizon with the sharptail is the incorporation of open barrens management into some of the county forest ten year plans which have recently been completed. With all due respect to the counties who did this, Douglas County is at the forefront with their ten year plan. They have incorporated a sizeable corridor to "connect" the Douglas County Wildlife Area to the Namekagon Barrens.

In the next few months our organization will be working with legislators and the DNR to include the sharptailed grouse in the statutes with the other game species regulated by a quota system. This is necessary if we are to have a season in future. We may be sending you a short memo in future alerting you to any legislation impending in this matter. Please act on it, we need an all-out effort from the membership to insure that the sharptailed grouse and its habitat are around for the future.

Tom



More birds were found on unmanaged habitats this spring than last year, but the count better reflects survey effort rather than sharptail population trends. Although wildland sharptail habitat still exists in about a dozen of Wisconsin's 72 counties, most of the survey effort this spring was concentrated in a single county. Neal Niemuth, University of Wyoming grassland bird researcher, coordinated a group of volunteers from the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society to survey a large block of land in southeastern Douglas County. Much of the jack pine forest in that region has been recently clearcut as a result of budworm infestation and the area now represents the best and largest block of wildland sharptail habitat

existing in Wisconsin. Survey participants noted sharptail courtship activity in 25 sites, including 23 in Douglas County and one additional lek in each of the adjacent counties of Bayfield and Washburn, and flushed a total of 204 birds. An additional 23 birds were observed during limited survey work in Price, Oneida, Rusk, and Vilas Counties.

Wisconsin's sharptail populations have evidently fared better than those in Minnesota and Michigan for two consecutive springs. If such trends continue, they will lend support to our strategy of intensive management of dedicated tracts as a means to preserve some habitat for sharptails within a largely forested landscape.

Table 1. Sharptail Population Trends on Managed Lands

Property	Number of Dancing Males								
	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Crex Meadows W.A.	42	67	81	103	126	47	53	59	83
Douglas County W.A.	10+	10+	7	3	5	4	2	8	12
Kimberly-Clark W.A.	13	15	25	40	56	32	20	20	28
Moquah Barrens W.A.	2	2	--	3	6	9	6	7	21
Namekagon Barrens W.A.	15	15	15+	33	37	25	16	25	44
Pershing W.A.	30	39	43	23	37	34	24	16	26
Riley Lake W.M.A.	25	30	20+	20	25	8	5	7	18
Wood County W.A.	42	--	32	--	54	13	11	16	19
Dike Seventeen W.A.	--	--	--	--	<u>16</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>8</u>
Totals					<u>362</u>	<u>182</u>	<u>146</u>	<u>167</u>	<u>259</u>



I remain optimistic that barrens and sharptails will be a part of the Wisconsin landscape of the future. Douglas County, one of the prime counties in this range, has written in a clumped clear cut scheme into its 10 year plan for its county forest that should provide low brushy growth for a decade at a site. Biodiversity is becoming ever more a force in Wisconsin and this is one of the chunks of diversity

that we have a good chance of holding onto. The managed properties are in as good shape as they're ever been, and the will is there to keep them. These will remain the core. Accidental or incidental range such as wildfire or budworm clearing will be supplementary but cannot be counted on to keep the barrens.



## SHARPTAILS DECLINE SLIGHTLY

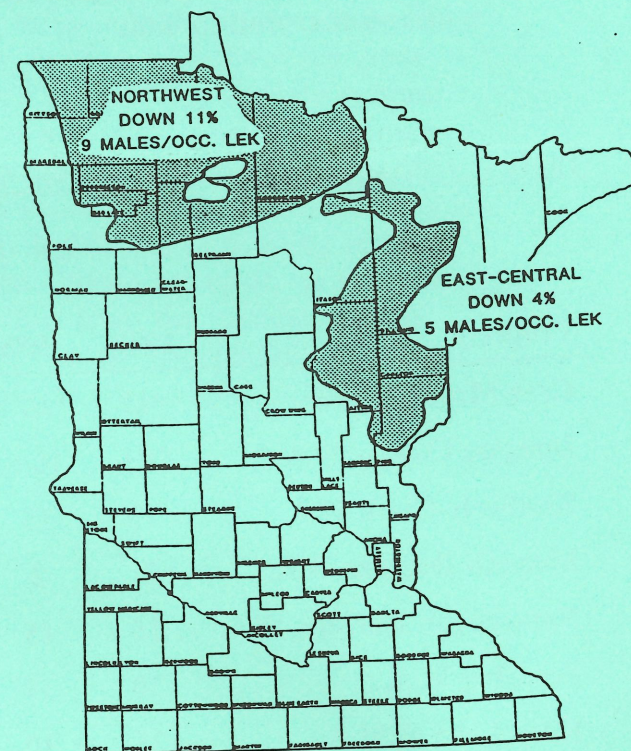
BILL BERG

Minnesota sharptails again declined this spring, but not as severely as in previous years. Range-wide, 284 dancing grounds were checked, 141 were active, and 980 male sharptail males were counted.

Males in the East-central range declined 4% from 1994. There were 146 dancing grounds checked, and the 74 active grounds contained an average of 5.4 males. Nine had one bird each, indicating that these grounds may soon be lost. The two largest grounds each had 19 males.

In the Northwest, there were 67 active grounds among the 138 that were checked. The largest had 28 males, and there were four with only one male. The Northwest always has more males per ground than the East-central range due to larger habitat blocks; there was an average of 8.7 males per active ground in 1995. Part of the decline in the northwest was due to the very wet conditions last summer and fall.

Since 1980, 75% and 87% of the sharptail population has been lost in the Northwest and East-central ranges, respectively. That's an incredible decline for any species. Because of RIM funding and DNR's high brushland management priority, brushland management is progressing well. There is still a net loss in brushland and grassland habitats, however. In most work areas, cooperation from DNR Forestry has been excellent. With continued management and consecutive years of high nesting success, it is possible to bring the bird back to the population levels of the late 1970's, when roughly 50,000 sharptails were taken yearly.



## SHARP-TAILED GROUSE STATUS AND FUTURE IN WISCONSIN

A Report by Dave Evenson at the Prairie Grouse Technical Council  
Medora, North Dakota

Greetings to you from the eastern fringe of sharptail range, the state where prairie meets boreal forest and eastern hardwood forest. Those of you who have attended past conferences are well aware that we have a central Wisconsin population of greater prairie chickens, but may not be as aware of our sharptail populations. I'll be talking about the future of sharptails in Wisconsin but also will give some history and some present situations as well.

The U.S. Forest Service and the DNR in Wisconsin are both reorganizing. The anti-government winds are being felt here as well as elsewhere. The Chequamegon and Nicolet National Forests are being consolidated under one administration. I'm not close to the situation but I don't perceive this move to be a threat to the two populations that are managed on the Chequamegon units. In the DNR reorganization about 200 previously authorized positions are being lost department-wide. A few of those are positions that once had a hand in sharptail management. We'll miss those people, but again I don't perceive the reorganization as a bad thing for barrens or sharptails. More telling in the short run is the failure to get an increase in license fees, which will lead to 1.5 million budget reductions for wildlife in each of the next two years. This legislative refusal to grant license structure adequate to keep up with inflation is at least partly driven by those anti-government winds.

Wisconsin has recently approved a biodiversity report, which has a major section regarding pine and oak barrens. For the most part the reason we have any barrens at all to maintain is due to a handful of old time sharptail managers. I'm optimistic that those sharptail areas, in quotes, will be maintained and there even is potential under the biodiversity report to restore some former barrens.

Wisconsin's initial survey records show about 4 million acres or 12 percent of the total land mass in pine and oak barrens.

Those figures increased dramatically during the early settlement periods as settlers cleared land and logging and subsequent fires affected the land. I've heard that at one time prairie chickens were found in every county in the state. I'd have to assume that sharptails found most of them.

Better fire protection and the forces of succession reduced the barrens to those few places where conscious efforts were made to keep an open landscape.

Today we have populations mainly on four managed properties in the northwest pine barrens, on 3 managed properties based on bogs and somewhat carved out of the big woods, and on two central properties and adjoining cranberry bogs. We also have perhaps



our largest population on 20,000 acres of jack pine that budworm damaged recently, clear cut paper company, and county forest lands. This will be temporary habitat as it is planted or grows up naturally.

Management actions that we use include clearing, herbiciding, mowing, and burning.

Clearing by logging and then mechanical further knock down work is becoming less each year as most of the lands which are authorized for barrens are past this stage. The DNR continues to do a bit, maybe 200 acres a year, and the Forest Service also is using commercial timber sales around Moquah. Of course the temporary budworm habitat came through the logging route.

Herbicide in recent years has all been done using Rodeo applied either by helicopter or through a wick system. At Pershing Wildlife Area we have done 200 acres of aerial herbicide work on young aspen that grew out of effective burning control. On Crex Meadows we do about 50 acres a year of wicking on oak sprouts.

We mow on occasion. This past winter we mowed 300 acres on Crex Meadows in areas that we couldn't easily burn due to endangered species Karner Blue Butterfly concerns. The average mowing would be less, about 200 acres per year.

Prescribed burning of course is our major woody plant control option. All of our dedicated management areas have systems of firebreaks and are burned on rotation. In theory most units are

burned every 4-5 years but in reality it may vary up to 10 years or more. We burn in the spring and in the fall, about 6,500 acres per year.

Our spring dancing male surveys are up 54% on same site surveys from 1994, which was higher than 1993. This year the Wisconsin Sharptailed Grouse Society was able to survey about 20,000 additional acres, not normally counted. This consisted of clearcut budworm damaged jack pine, same wildfire area, and other young plantations or other open lands. They found 204 dancing males. Together with the managed property surveys we found 459 dancing males, which probably is a high proportion of the males in the state. I would guess as high as 80%.

Over the past three years we have had a mandatory report card for sharptail hunters. Hunters took an estimated 93, 45, and 108 birds in those years. We have 300 to 500 applicants with about 160 to 240 hunters each year. Sharptails are trophy birds in Wisconsin.

As you can see from these last numbers, we are not dealing with many hunters or many birds. This spring the Wisconsin DNR started the process to close the sharptail hunting season. As it now stands 1995 will be the last season for sharptail hunting until we can get legislative authority to control hunter numbers. The Wisconsin Sharptail Grouse Society has drafted model legislation and is looking for a sponsor. We don't know at this time now successful that will be.

## ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES APRIL 22, 1995

The annual meeting was held at St. Croix Inn in Solon Springs with about 40 members in attendance. President Tom Ziegeweid called the meeting to order and gave a brief history of the organization. Tom made a request for non-board members to become more active as members of committees or taking on various duties. Appreciation plaques were given to Dave Evenson for his five years on the board and Cliff Wiita for all his work as wildlife manager on Kimberly Clark Wildlife Area.

Dave Evenson gave election results. Shane Walstrom and Tom Davis were elected to 3 year terms. (On Sunday the Board named Tom Ziegeweid, President; Jim Shurts, Vice President; and Jim Evrard, Secretary-Treasurer.)

Old business:

County Forests: As county forests are going through their 10 year planning, Tom has been corresponding with those that have sharptails or potential (Burnett, Douglas, Bayfield, Washburn, Wood Jackson, and Clark). Tom and other members felt that since Wood and Jackson Counties are not quite as far along in the process there may be more time to get our input in. Tom will continue to work on this.

Bulk Mail: We have a non-profit bulk mail permit now. It costs about 11¢ to send a newsletter, even a bulky one that would be 52¢ in regular mail. This was

helpful this spring in mailing out the raffle tickets.

Sandhill Mower: Together with the Ruffed Grouse Society and Wisconsin Waterfowl Association, we were able to fund a brush mower for the DNR at Sandhill Wildlife Area. Thanks to Tom Jancoski for leading this project.

Natural Resource Foundation Grant: We were again turned down for an NRF grant for educational materials, due to many applicants and limited monies.

3 State MOU: An alliance of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan sharptail societies was again discussed. At the least we should continue to exchange information. We've usually had a representative or two at Minnesota meetings and expected a Michigan rep at this meeting but he couldn't make it.

Wildlife Art Raffle: This was a good fund raising effort and a good time, with about \$600 raised. Thanks to Bob Dreis for coordinating it. Winners were: Jim Helmick, Spring Dance at Crex; Bob Dreis, Creekside Solitude; E.S. Infield, Sharptail Cock by Karen Smith; and Jim Helmick, Ruffed Grouse by Larry Seiler.





**New Business:** There was much discussion about the potential closure of the sharptail season. At the Conservation Congress hearings it was a virtual tie vote. The letter from WSGS as written by Jim Shurts was read in at least some counties and did make a difference. We need to have legislation pursued to allow a permit hunt for sharptails. One difficulty might be that conservation patron license holders could flood the system and make it difficult to issue the right number of permits. Tom Ziegeweid has talked to Assemblyman Dave Zien's office about sponsoring legislation and he will follow

up on that. We will plan to have a representative at the Natural Resources Board meeting in May to further the permit hunt concept.

**WSO Breeding Bird Atlas:** The Wisconsin Society for Ornithology is embarking on a 5 year project to create an atlas of all the breeding birds in Wisconsin. All members can help out with this by documenting breeding birds as they find them or more specifically by taking on an area to search. Members voted to sponsor the sharp-tailed grouse page by pledging \$500 at \$100 per year.

#### PRESIDENT'S INVITATIONAL HUNT

**When:** Opening weekend, October 14th and 15th

**Where:** Wayside/campground on north side of Crex Meadows Wildlife Area

**Details:** This really went over big last year as fun was had by all. Bring your own food and beverage; bring some firewood too as this park is a great place to sit around a fire and listen to the wildlife. You can sleep in your vehicle or set up a tent. Motels and restaurants are also in close proximity.

**Who:** Any member of WSGS, friends, and prospective members

**Call:** Tom Ziegeweid at 715-834-2627 machine/home or 715-839-0095 work

## SHARPTAIL HUNTING LEGISLATION

WSGS Vice President, Jim Shurts, has drafted statutory changes necessary to create a sharp-tailed grouse hunting season with zones and permits. These were forwarded to the DNR to be included among items on the DNR legislative package. It is important that WSGS members identify and convince potential legislative sponsors of this drafts merits. In Jim's cover letter to the DNR he lays out this plan.

WSGS is ready to go forward and seek legislative sponsors for these changes. Our message to them would be the following: sharp-tailed grouse hunting in Wisconsin is a viable sport. However, better means of management are necessary to ensure protection of the resource. The statutory changes will allow the Department of Natural Resources to create the means to manage the resource statewide. The

Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society is willing and able to assist the department in every way possible, to the best of it's ability. This would include financial support, educational support, and if appropriate, manpower support. WSGS does not want Wisconsin hunters to lose the opportunity to pursue sharptails, even if it's on a limited basis.

Please let me know where WSGS needs to go from here. Several of the WSGS board members would be willing to talk to WDNR staff if that would help. We are also able to go on this alone if need be, but we want to work with the department. Keep in touch, and thanks for your help!

# DRAFT

### FISH AND GAME

§29.09 Hunting, trapping and fishing; licenses and other approvals; issuance.  
(9m) PROCESSING FEES FOR APPLICATIONS FOR CERTAIN APPROVALS.  
(g) Sharp-tailed grouse hunting permit.

§29.092 Fish, wildlife and wild plant fee schedule.  
(13m) PROCESSING FEES FOR CERTAIN APPROVAL APPLICATIONS.  
The processing fee for an application for a hunter's choice deer hunting permit, a wild turkey hunting license, a Canada goose hunting permit, a bobcat hunting and trapping permit, an otter trapping permit, a fisher trapping permit or a sharp-tailed grouse hunting permit is \$2.75.

§29.093 Fish and wildlife; effective periods; restrictions.  
(2) HUNTING LICENSES; PERMIT; STAMPS; CERTIFICATE.  
(cx) *Sharp-tailed grouse hunting permits.* A sharp-tailed grouse hunting permit is valid for the sharp-tailed grouse hunting season indicated on the permit.

§29.174 Conservation of fish and game; powers of department.  
(2)  
(b) 1. The department may regulate and limit the number of hunters and the maximum harvest of sharp-tailed grouse in any area, by doing any of the following:  
a. Requiring hunters to tag each sharp-tailed grouse killed with a tag issued by the department.  
b. Prohibiting the hunting of sharp-tailed grouse without a valid permit issued by the department.  
2. No preference may be given in the distribution of a permit or tags, except that any applicant who unsuccessfully applied for a permit or tags in the previous year shall be given priority over any applicant who successfully applied for a permit or tags in the previous year.



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

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL**

**(1995 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**

**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**

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**WSGS**

**Box 1115**

**Cumberland, WI 54829**

**Volunteer Activities**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Board of Directors**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Newsletter Writing**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Bird census work**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Publicity**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Education**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Fund Raising**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Other**

