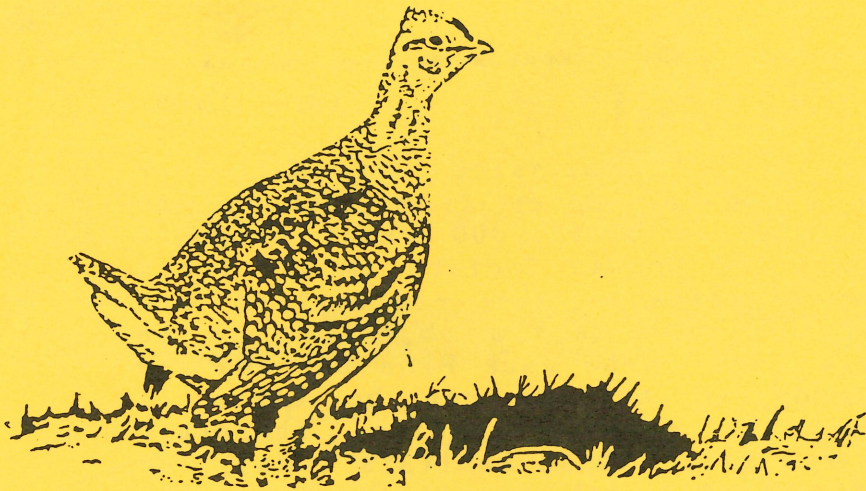


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Volume 19

Spring, 1997

SPRING NEWS

Annual Meeting The birds will be dancing their age old courtship ritual once again as we meet at Solon Springs on April 26th and 27th. If you haven't been to one of these meetings before make this your first. If you have been before, come back and enjoy the camaraderie you know will be there. We'd like a good turnout to survey as many dancing grounds as possible. A sign-up sheet is included in this newsletter. See you in Solon!

Board of Directors Inside this newsletter you will find your ballot for voting for the members of the board. You may mail in or bring your ballots to Solon Springs. All ballots through the mail must be in by April 25th. Please vote.

Wildlife Art Raffle Again this year we have a great series of limited wildlife art prints. You can buy tickets at the meeting or send in your tickets you received in the last newsletter.

Ticket prices are 1 for \$5.00, 3 for \$10.00, or 10 for \$25.00. Please legibly write your name and the name of the purchaser, if different, on each of the stubs. If you cannot attend the meeting, please send the payment and stubs to Bob Dreis, 632 Smith St., Spooner, WI 54801. This is our only fund raiser. Buy a bunch for the birds!

WSGS Patch The unveiling of the WSGS patch will also occur at Solon. These four color patches depict the dancing sharptail logo. You can get one for \$3.50, either at the meeting or by mail.

Membership As always, check the date on your mailing label and renew if it's due. Consider stepping up to a higher level if you can afford it. Dues are tax deductible. We do thank all of our faithful members who year in and year out keep themselves paid up. Thanks!

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

PUBLICATION OF THE MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY



P.O. BOX 3338
DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55803

WINTER 1997



MSGS SAVANNA PROJECT

JAMIE SLADE

Last summer, the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) (which allocates money from lottery and cigarette tax proceeds) approved a \$30,000 grant proposal from the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) for a project entitled "Savannas suitable for restoration and management for sharp-tailed grouse." The objective is to identify areas where there used to be Jack Pine Barrens and Northern Conifer Scrublands so actions can be taken to restore these habitats to support native sharptail populations. You may not recognize these habitats today, for only remnants remain. And that's not surprising, for the natural wildfires that maintained these types for centuries are largely gone, and trees have been planted in many areas.

Those who are familiar with the Crex Meadows area in Wisconsin (southeast of Hinckley) will recognize the pine barrens habitat that is maintained by Wisconsin DNR. This habitat type was common in eastern Minnesota, and extended far eastward across Pine County and into Anoka and Sherburne Counties. Today, only barely recognizable vestiges remain.

The field and map work will begin in July, 1997, and the project runs for 2 years. The methods include the examination of original land survey notes and bearing tree data, and the reconstruction of the the savanna type boundaries, especially in Pine, Carlton, and southern St. Louis Counties. Work will be in conjunction with DNR's Natural Heritage Unit, which has already mapped original savannas and barrens north of the Twin Cities. Upon completion, the project will provide the information to DNR, MSGS, The Nature Conservancy, and other groups that will be able to promote the necessary management efforts. Anyone wanting more information, or having an interest in working on the project, can call 612-343-0310 (days) or 612-928-9599 (evenings).

BALLOT - WSGS BOARD (Vote for 2 members)

_____ Bob Dreis

_____ Dan Dessecker

_____ Write-in

MAIL IN OR BRING TO ANNUAL MEETING



Challenger
by Buzz Balzer



Spring Dance at Crex
by Louis Raymer



Great Possessions
by Jonathon Wilde



Sharptail Cock
by Karen Smith

Third Annual Art Raffle

1 for \$ 5.00

3 for \$10.00

6 for \$25.00

Drawing at Solon Springs

MICHIGAN NEWS

FROM THE NORTHWOODS CALL

December 4, 1996

East UP seen as last stand

DNR concludes sharptail habitat is losing cause

While most biologists see efforts to sustain sharptail grouse as futile, predictions that they are doomed in Michigan are discounted by wildlife research chief John Hendrickson.

Hendrickson is confident a few sharp-tails will hang on, primarily in the Seney and Soo areas, due to natural openings and some habitat efforts by the Dept. of Natural Resources, Hiawatha National Forest and Seney Wildlife Refuge.

Responding to criticism from the Michigan Sharptail Grouse Association that the DNR is abandoning sharp-tails, Hendrickson says, "We are abandoning major, major efforts to maintain grasslands. Not the birds."

Hendrickson points out that in the last half century, the DNR has spent the equivalent of \$1.2 million in a bid to retain or create sharptail habitat on 15,541 acres, in the UP and northern Lower Peninsula.

Despite this effort, the birds have virtually disappeared below the Straits, in the western and central UP and only remnant populations survive in the east UP.

"It is tough to fight nature. Nature just won't let us do it," Hendrickson says.

Sharptails require large swaths of grasslands. These can be created with chemicals, machines and fire. But they are temporary, with brush, then trees, reclaiming them.

Biologist Greg Soulliere, Sault Ste. Marie, estimates that 92 percent of the former sharptail habitat in the eastern UP has reverted to forest.

In some areas, this was accelerated by planting of pine after logging, Sharptail Assoc. leader Rick Baetsen says.

The "prairie grouse" are thought to have moved into northern Michigan, from Wisconsin and southern states, after logging and the following fires created vast grasslands. DNR northern game bird specialist John Urbain does not consider them "native" to Michigan.

From the 1930s into the early 1950s, huge flocks of sharptails were common. Hunters had a 20-day season, with a three-bird daily bag limit.

Though soil conditions are more favorable for natural grasslands in



A male sharptail grouse on dancing ground (lek). Males gather in early spring, usually just before last snow, for a frantic courtship display. Biologists typically gather population data by visiting the leks to count males and the female onlookers.

some limited areas in the northern lower than in the UP, efforts to retain the birds there have failed.

Biologist Bob Odom, Traverse City, quips that cougars are more common than sharptails on their former range in the northern lower. A handful of birds may survive in the Fletcher Burn area of Kalkaska County and on Camp Grayling, according to Odom.

From the 1960s to 1980s, the DNR made a last ditch effort to prop up dwindling flocks in the Fletcher Burn and off Old State Rd., south of Gaylord.

A remnant flock held on at Lake Harold (now Lakes of the North), near Mancelona. It disappeared before 1980, doomed by subdivision development, local conservationist Bud Jones reports.

Mio district wildlife chief Bob Hess, former state endangered species

and nongame chief, has some areas in his district where early surveyors identified natural grasslands. But, Hess says, it just isn't in the financial cards to restore and maintain them. If it were, they might not be big enough to support viable sharptail flocks.

Why can the state and Huron National Forest get funds for thousands of acres of jackpine management to benefit Kirtland's warblers, but not sharptails?

Managing the jackpines for the warblers, Hess explains, produces revenue from timber sales. Cutting down trees and maintaining grasslands does not. The legislature and governors have ordained that the DNR's forest management budget be driven by earning income from selling timber.

The warblers also qualify for state and federal endangered species funding, because the world's entire

population is dependent on the

northern Michigan jackpines.

In contrast, sharptails continue to thrive in states with natural prairie habitat to the west of Michigan.

The Sharptail Association's Baetsen points out that species other than sharptails require grassland habitats. Birds native to grasslands, he says, have suffered greater losses than the more publicized neotropical species.

Rather than continue a feeble effort to maintain some open lands on the Danaher Plains, in northern Schoolcraft County, Baetsen says the DNR should focus its effort at the Bullock Ranch, west of Seney. Bullock Ranch, he explains, ties in with the nearby Diversion Farm area on the Seney Refuge, where 1,500 acres of grasslands is maintained.

"If wildlife managers are unwilling or unable to manage habitats for

wildlife," Baetsen says, "then we need to retrain them as naturalists, so they can document changes in ecosystems and the resulting population changes."

"If we chose to manage only those species that manage themselves, then we have failed as wildlife managers. We need to maintain habitats for native species, so that we do not have to import exotic species to fill ecological niches voided by the loss of species that have disappeared."

Baetsen points out the DNR has spent millions importing pheasants and several partridge species that were never native to the state. It would be cheaper, and more productive, he contends, to manage habitat for sharptails.

Wildlife biologists point out they were prodded into the recent costly pheasant re-introduction program by the legislature, which ordered them to spend funds on it. If the Sharptail Association gets them money for grasslands development, they say they will be glad to spend it.

Baetsen is also peeved that the DNR refuses to list sharptails as a "special concern" species under the endangered species law. Biologists say that because they are thriving in other states they don't qualify for listing.

This is some kind of double standard, according to Baetsen. He points out that spruce grouse are listed as a special concern species in Michigan, yet in Minnesota they are so abundant that hunters take up to 40,000 birds annually.

Another factor suppressing sharptails, biologist Soulliere points out, is increased predation. There has been an increase in hawks, owls and ground predators in the last 20 years. Sharptails, due to their preference for open habitat, are thought to be more vulnerable to predation than birds that prefer thick cover.

Soulliere and Hendrickson feel eastern UP farmlands may end up as the last stronghold for sharptails. These lands are mowed and burned to keep them open.

But even this is iffy, Soulliere concedes. Much of that farmland is being reforested or fragmented by development.

NORTH WOODS

RAMBLING



with Shep



I sure hope Ford Kellum isn't reading this.

Ford died in 1991. So he, probably, isn't.

The story (on page 3) about the Dept. of Natural Resources, in substance, writing off sharptail grouse would bring the legendary wildlife biologist's pipe smashing onto the heel of his hand, hot ashes spraying onto his boots.

Those who remember Ford connect him to his historic, gutsy, resignation in 1971 to battle oil drilling in the Pigeon River Country. Then Gaylord district wildlife chief, Kellum had been with the DNR since 1935.

His nose-to-nose with Big Oil, and for sharptails, started long before the drillers started wrenching the bowels out of the Pigeon.

It was in the mid 1960s that Ford introduced me to the plight of sharptails and the need to challenge the developers. He was trying to make a stand, then, in the Deward Tract. Or "Stump Country," southeast of Mancelona. Some called it "Lake Harold."

Ford loved this desolate wasteland. It had been Big Pine's last stronghold in the Lower Peninsula. The David Ward heirs didn't start logging it until 1901. By 1912 they had stripped it. Into the 1970s virtually all that remained was stumps.

And sharptails.

Ford loved it. It haunted him, as a classic example of Michigan's conservation heritage. And he haunted it, repeatedly, taking upstart conservationists to gawk at the still-visible ruts left by the huge, oxen-



Ford Kellum setting up his sharptail blind in "Stump Country," probably around 1968.

hailed, logging wheels more than a half century before.

Unlike the rest of the northland, this country refused to recover.

A persistent guy, Ford convinced the Conservation Commission to dedicate 80 acres of state owned land along the upper Manistee River as a (get this) "Stump Preserve."

In the 1940s and 1950s he hammered on his Conservation Dept. superiors to buy the more than two townships of wasteland from David Ward's heirs.

For \$35 an acre!

They didn't see its beauty. Or the wonder of its sharptails.

A company called American Central did. They bought much of it. Renamed it Lakes of the North. Slashed it into suburban-size lots and peddled it to city folks, setting off the biggest tax-reversion debacle in recent times.

At the same time, the oil drillers swept across the stumplands. Two-tracks became hardened, widened, highways. Machinery bellered and screeched around the clock. Ugly, stenching, pits pocked the boondocks.

And Ford pined for his sharptails.

He'd been cooing to them since the 1930s. He knew they were doomed.

We'd hunker in this bubble of burlap he spread over the tops of stumps, squinting thru slits. (I've been more comfortable in foxholes.)

Sharptails would flit in; sometimes almost within reach. Then they'd square off; feather-to-feather, beak-to-beak.

Gawd! It was raw and bleak. Bare bones Nature.

Ford would tell you that this was their requiem. Man, he would explain, wouldn't give this creature a chance to survive.

And, of course, the Stump Country sharptails are gone. Their last holdout was on a hummock across from what is now an airport and the site of a second home no one really needs.

Some wildlife managers, pragmatically, contend we don't, really, need sharptails. They aren't worth the cost of maintaining sweeping vistas of grass and brush lands.

They've never watched a late winter dawn seep over the stump barrens and felt Ford Kellum's passion for Nature reach out to grumpy partridge stomping on the season's last snow.

If you accept their verdict, sharptails, and Ford Kellums, are rusty relics the world can no longer afford.

Second Annual Regional Oak Savanna Meeting

Research Review and Partners Meeting Advance Program

Florence County, Wisconsin was the site of the second Sand County Foundation sponsored regional oak savanna meeting. A network of oak savanna ecosystem sites has been organized and coordinated for several years by Sand County Foundation.

Scientists renowned in grassland and savanna ecological study spent two days in Florence County, near the spectacular Spread Eagle Barrens which Governor Thompson dedicated as a 6,000 acre and growing State Natural Area one year ago. Their mission was to evaluate the status and direction of research at Spread Eagle Barrens and five other sites participating in the regional research and restoration program.

Dennis Knight, University of Wyoming - Laramie; Linda Wallace, University of Oklahoma - Norman; and Mark Boyce, University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point; teamed up with a new member, Johannes Knops, University of Minnesota - St. Paul to comprise the Research Review Team.

Combined with that evaluation was the annual partners' meeting which brought together land managers from

U.S. Army Fort McCoy, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, The Wisconsin Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Electric Power Company, Wisconsin Power and Light, Florence County, and Sand County Foundation.

The meeting also witnessed the first assembling of GIS technicians representing each of the sites. GIS (Geographic Information Systems) is a sophisticated way of organizing and presenting large sets of spatially referenced data. Technicians now understand which stage each of the other sites is at in its development of base maps and ecological data layers. They also agreed to a broad framework for standardizing formats and ecological attribute types.

Graduate students from UW - Stevens Point provided overviews of their site specific research projects which range from studies of flood plain occurrences of swamp white oak savanna to evaluations of the effect of oak wilt disease on savanna communities.

Most of the graduate students will be completing their thesis papers in the summer of 1997.

As sponsor for the partnership Sand County Foundation pledged to:

- Evaluate technology applications
- Continue Research Review
- Seek new partners and sites
- Provide guidance for completion of GIS systems for each site
- Direct future research projects
- Develop ecological management contracts

Partners pledged to:

- Plan and execute monitoring on a periodic basis
- Develop and execute a management plan
- Consult with botanists or other experts to evaluate ecological responses to management
- Institute an adaptive management protocol
- Share data with partnership
- Present findings to Research Review team at each convening

SAND COUNTY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

201 Waubesa Street, P.O. Box 3037

Madison, Wisconsin 53704 (608)242-5237

Sand County Foundation Newsletter is published semi-annually and contains information about continuing programs and items of specific interest among the initiatives sponsored by the foundation for the benefit of its contributors, supporters and the land.

Board of Directors
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MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Please join us in supporting Sand County Foundation programs by returning your membership envelope today, and by making your contribution an especially generous one.

Your financial support will help advance our work in improving and preserving natural habitats and environmental quality through education, good science and land management planning.

Contributors to Sand County Foundation at the \$1,000 level will receive a beautifully bound, illustrated and slipcased edition of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*. Each volume contains a special introduction by Frederick Leopold, Aldo Leopold's brother, and has been signed by each of Aldo's children. A limited edition of 200 signed copies, each volume is truly a collectors item.

If you wish to make a "non-cash" contribution to Sand County Foundation this year, please call us for suggestions. All gifts are tax deductible contributions.

Sand County Foundation greatly appreciates your support.

Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Financial Statement

1/1/96 through 12/31/96

Checkbook Balance as of 12/31/95.....\$2,685.15

INCOME:

Memberships - 83 regular @ \$10.....\$830.00
17 supporting @ \$25.....\$425.00
2 contributing @ \$50.....\$100.00
2 sustaining @ \$100.....\$200.00
Total Memberships.....\$1,555.00

Sales - 9 Stickers @ \$1.50.....\$13.50
5 Caps @ \$14.....\$70.00
Total Sales.....\$ 82.50

Interest on Checking Account.....\$47.67

Art Raffle\$1,052.22

Donations.....\$32.00

Total Income.....\$2,769.39

EXPENDITURES:

Projects - Crex Wildlife Education Center.....\$500.00
(first of 3 annual gifts)
WSO Breeding Bird Atlas.....\$100.00
(second of 5 annual gifts)
Total Projects.....\$600.00

Newsletter - Printing.....\$575.65
Postage.....\$146.38
Office supplies.....\$5.14
Total Membership Service.....\$727.17

Raffle - Ticket refund.....\$25.00
Wilde painting frame for 1996 raffle...\$100.00
Painting prints for advertising.....\$37.87
License from Wis.Gaming Comm.....\$25.00
Total raffle expenses.....\$187.87

Plaques for retiring officers.....\$98.38

Non-profit report to Wis. Secretary of State.....\$10.00

Total Expenditures.....\$1,623.42

Checkbook Balance as of 12/31/96.....\$2,763.96
Petty Cash Balance as of 12/31/96.....\$4.53
Certificates of Deposit as of 12/31/96.....\$1,505.32

Total Assets as of 12/31/96.. ..\$4,283.81
Submitted by James O. Evrard, Secretary/Treasurer, 4/20/96.

MIDWEST OAK-SAVANNA & WOODLAND CONFERENCE

Opportunities for Community

Memorial Union - University of Wisconsin - Madison

30 July - 2 August 1997



Scientists, land managers, naturalists, recreationists, and private landowners will share information about the ecology and management of midwest oak-savanna and woodland ecosystems in a two-day symposium fostering opportunities for integrated approaches to their management and restoration.

● **Plenary Session: 30 July - Invited speaker will address:**

- Efforts to save an endangered ecosystem - *Steve Budiansky, U.S. News & World Report*
- Overview of midwestern oak-savannas - *Dr. Roger Anderson, Illinois State University*
- Natural history of midwestern oaks - *Dr. Marc Abrams, Pennsylvania State University*
- Importance of oak-savannas & woodlands as wildlife habitat - *Dr. Stanley Temple, University of Wisconsin*
- Humans and savannas - *Dr. Timothy Allen, University of Wisconsin*

ROUNDTABLE: Making good restoration decisions.

● **Concurrent Presentation Sessions: 31 July - Call for papers on the topics below**

- The ecology of rare and exotic species
- Oak-savannas/woodlands as wildlife habitat
- Ecological processes in oak-savannas/woodlands
- Wildlife impacts on savanna/woodlands
- Comparison of management practices
- Role of fire vs grazing in restoration
- Opportunities for private land management
- Interpretive & educational values

Abstracts for oral and poster presentations should be submitted in the requested format compiled in Word \leq 6.0 or ASCII and submitted on 3.5" disk or by e-mail to Nancy Braker, Director of Science and Stewardship, The Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Chapter, 633 West Main St., Madison, WI 53703, 608/251-8140; nbraker@tnc.org. For format details visit our homepage (see below) or request abstract submission form from the above address.

● **Field Trips: 1 - 2 August** - Following the conference there will be field trips to various oak-savanna and woodlands to illustrate management in Wisconsin and further the discussions of conference topics.

Two-Day Field Trips: to oak and pine barrens of northern Wisconsin

One-Day Field Trips: to several central and southern Wisconsin oak-savanna & woodlands

- | | |
|--|--|
| • Ft. McCoy State Natural Area | • Rush Creek Natural Area |
| • Necedah & Sandhill Wildlife Areas | • Lower Wisconsin River private lands |
| • Leopold Reserve & Internatl. Crane Foundation | • Avoca and Blue River State Natural Areas |
| • Baraboo Hills and Devils Lake | • Dane County oak woodlands |
| • Rocky Run, John Muir, Token Creek oak openings | • Southwest Wisconsin savanna pastures |
| • LuLu Lake Preserve and Kettle Moraine Areas | • UW Arboretum and Lake Kegonsa State Park |

Information on local, self-guided tours to oak-savannas and woodlands will also be available.

For further information visit our homepage: <http://www.uwsp.edu/acad/cnr/oaksavan/wiconf97.htm>.

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

Saturday and Sunday, April 26 and 27, 1997
St. Croix Inn, Solon Springs, Wisconsin

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society invites you to their annual meeting. Those who attend the meeting will have the opportunity to census the thriving population of sharp-tailed grouse in Burnett, Douglas and Bayfield counties. Teams of sharptail enthusiasts will be assigned to specific areas to count male sharptails on their dancing grounds in the early morning hours. For the first time, these counts will be used to regulate the sharptail hunting harvest in that area. A special feature of the event will be a steak dinner served in the historic log field trial building on the Douglas County Wildlife Area. The dinner speaker will be Bill Berg of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

AGENDA

April 26 - 1:00 p.m. Annual Meeting - W.S.G.S. - St. Croix Inn

5:00 p.m. Social hour and dinner - Douglas County WA

7:00 p.m. Sharptail Census Briefing and Assignments

April 27 - 5:00 a.m. Sharptail Census

9:30 a.m. Census Debriefing Brunch - St. Croix Inn

Registration Deadline is April 11, 1997. The registration fee of \$20 includes the hardwood coal-broiled steak dinner and refreshments on Saturday evening, a brunch on Sunday, and registration materials. Payment must be made by the registration deadline. A detachable registration form is attached.

Room reservations must be made directly with the St. Croix Inn (\$40 per night, double). To reserve your accommodations, call the Inn at (715)378-4444 and indicate you will be attending the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse meeting.

For more information, contact Jim Evrard (715)463-2893.

(cut on dotted line)

REGISTRATION - W.S.G.S. ANNUAL MEETING

Name: _____ Affiliation: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Daytime Phone: (____) ____-____

Make check/money order (\$20) payable to: Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

Send form and payment to: Jim Evrard, W.S.G.S.
Box 367
Grantsburg, WI 54840

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

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL
(1997 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 Address:
_____ Newsletter Writing
_____ Bird census work
_____ Publicity
_____ Education
_____ Fund Raising

_____ Four color cloth patch (\$3.50 postage inc.)
_____ Deluxe corduroy dress cap (\$14.00 postage inc.)
_____ WSGS logo window sticker (\$1.50 postage inc.)
_____ 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

NONPROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO. 83 CUMBERLAND, WI 54829
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