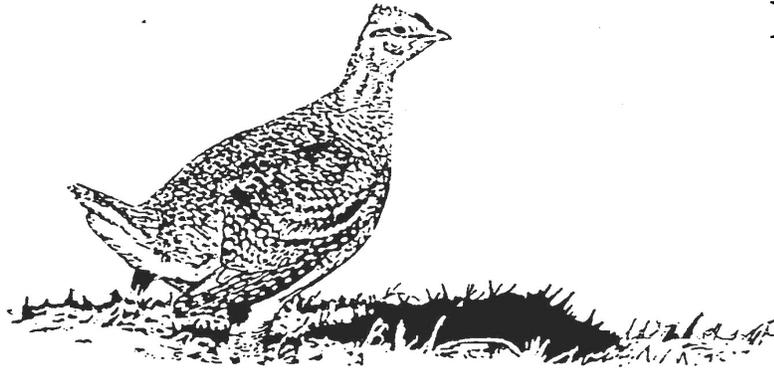


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 87

Fall 2018

2018 ANNUAL WSGS MEETING

The annual membership meeting was held on May 19, 2018 at the Legendary Waters Casino and Resort in Red Cliff and was called to order by President Dave Evenson at 1:30 p.m. with 17 persons in attendance. Jim Evrard gave the Secretary and Treasurer's Reports which will be published in the next WSGS newsletter. Ashly Steinke was elected to the Board, but was not present due to a planned family vacation in Canada. Ken Jonas reported on efforts in developing planning procedures for ecological landscapes.

Evenson reported on attending the annual meeting of the Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Society in Michigan's far eastern Upper Peninsula. Sharptails are hunted there on private land being used to graze cattle and grow hay. Evenson and others also attended the annual meeting of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society held in Minnesota's St. Croix State Park. After a severe windstorm, hundreds of acres were cleared of downed trees and the area burned. Sharptails appeared (from nearby Minnesota or Crex Meadows). Male and female sharptails were seen displaying and a sharptail brood was observed. Evenson also reported on recent research to determine fire frequencies by examining burn scars on tree stumps. Fred Strand reported on attending a meeting of the Wisconsin Forestry Association including a major stop in the Barnes Barrens project (the WSGS contributed \$300 for printing of a brochure used at the meeting).

Andrew O'Kreug, Bayfield County Forester, gave a presentation of the Barnes Barrens Management Area within the Bayfield County Forest. Fuelbreaks, 0.25 miles wide and 3 and 6 miles long, were originally developed to combat wild crown fires in the pines of the county forest. The new management plan is a 1,000-acre core area of brush prairie surrounded by 4 zones totaling 10,500 acres with some stands within the zones harvested on a 12-year rotation.

Besides supporting sharptails, the management area also supports Karner Blue butterflies. Hopefully the new plan will also increase sharptail numbers along with other plant and animal species of "greatest conservation needs". Answering a question from the audience, Andrew said the white paper stapled to the terminal buds of young jack pine is designed to deter deer browsing (needed for planted jack pine but not aerially-seeded jack pine).

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

As we were eating lunch after a recent DNR Sharp-tailed Grouse committee meeting, a new member asked how long each of us had been part of that group. Going around the table, most had a few years, less than a decade. When it came to my turn I looked at the youngest two and said: “probably longer than you’ve been alive – 35 years”. They chuckled and agreed.

Only later did I think that’s nearly half my life, I’m 72. But your WSGS Board has even more experience, both in years and in hands-on sharp-tailed grouse management. Even your youngest member has experience including more hands-on experience, going back to his graduate school days. Ken Jonas mused at our last board meeting about what the cumulative number of years was. We didn’t take a count right there, but I’m guessing about 260 years, averaging about 30. And that doesn’t count our past board members who stay active in meetings and discussions, and have long histories with sharptails as well. When John Zatopa stepped down this year to become more fully involved with Trout Unlimited, we told him he now was on that emeritus board, and thus he is. We’re pretty much in this for life, it seems like you have to die to get out of it!

What a lot of changes in attitude I’ve seen during those 35 years! Early on, I had a conversation with a forester who asked whether DNR wildlife management was really serious about the Namekagon Barrens. When I assured him we were, he grinned and said: “It’d make a helluva [tree] planting site!” Actually the Namekagon Barrens we know is what is left. The Hamerstrom’s 1952 “Sharptails into the Shadows” was written while the greater landscape around that area, known generically as the “barrens”, was being planted to trees. But last month your board met on a site with two industrial foresters – industrial foresters mind you, the people that have to make money off the land - who showed us the prettiest biggest clearcut you’ll ever likely see. Probably not big enough for sharptails yet, but they have plans for more clearcuts next to it. They get it. They understand that good forestry and good barrens management go together.

And within the DNR there is a general knowledge of how rare barrens are and how important they are. I recently commented on the master plan for the Northeast Sands and found not much to say – they’re already incorporating what we’ve been advocating for the entire lifetime of the WSGS.

There will always be challenges and opportunities for the WSGS. So much habitat has been lost to other uses, through intent or neglect, and it’s hard to get it back. But ecological awareness has come a long way.

THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) is a private, nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of the sharp-tailed grouse and its habitat in Wisconsin. Questions about the WSGS should be directed to the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840.

WSGS OFFICERS

President: Dave Evenson
Vice President: Tom Ziegeweid
Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Evrard

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mike Cole Ken Jonas
Paul Kooiker Bruce Moss
John Probst Ashley Steinke

Newsletter Layout: Lauren Finch

(continued from page 1)

Brian Heeringa, wildlife biologist for the Washburn District of the Chequamegon/ Nicolet National Forest summarized sharptail management in the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area. Seven cooperators (including the WSGS) are involved in the project. Only 2 displaying male sharptails were counted in 2016. To bolster the population, the plan was developed to capture 200 (100 male-100 female) sharptails in NW Minnesota in 3 years (2016, 2017, 2018) and release them in the Moquah Barrens. His presentation was illustrated with maps and photos of the capture and release techniques. They plan to monitor the released sharptails through 2020.

Alexandra Lehner, Biological Technician for the U.S. Forest Service, then discussed the results her sharptail telemetry and census work in the Moquah Barrens. Radio-telemetry started April 17th and continues. In 2016 five males were radioed (three killed by avian predators, 1 unknown and 1 reappeared in 2017). In 2017 five males and five females were radioed (two killed by avian predators, two slipped radio collars, one female nested 22 miles away, one male moved to the Ashland airport, seven are still on the air. This year (2018) ten males were radioed and ten females were radioed (two mortalities, six still “on the air”, birds moved as far as Oulu and Iron River).

Lek surveys showed that this year, the FR 241 Lek had 23 different sharptails including, 13 males and 5 females seen on the lek. Another lek, the Three Poles Lek, had three males displaying. Track surveys showed the problem of identifying sharptail tracks from ruffed grouse tracks. Six to eight students from the Northland College Student Chapter of the Wildlife Society cooperated in the sharptail census funded with a DNR grant for citizen wildlife monitoring obtained by WSGS Board Member Paul Kooiker.

DNR Wildlife Biologist Greg Kessler made a presentation about the NW Sands Habitat Plan developed under the direction of DNR Wildlife Biologist Bob Hanson. Kessler also gave the preliminary results for the state-wide census of displaying male sharptails:

Crex Meadows WA -18 (22)	Namekagon Barrens WA – 44 (47)
Douglas County WA – 23 (14)	Unit 2 & 9 – 49 (??)
Barnes Barrens MA – 12 (23)	Riley Lake WA – 20 (21)
Moquah Barrens WA – 16 (10)	Pershing WA – 0 (1)
Kimberly-Clark WA – 0 (0)	

Totals: 2018: 182 males; 2017: 138 males plus an unknown number of males in Units 2 & 9. Number in parenthesis () are the number of cocks counted in 2017.

Kessler also provided a handout from Bob Hanson that summarized preliminary habitat activities on the projects managed for sharptails. Minnesota St. Croix State Park – 1,400 acres burned; Crex Meadows and Fish Lake WAs – 3,300 acres burned + timber sale clearing; Deer Lake Fuel Break, Douglas County – 400 acres burned in 6 units; Namekagon Barrens WA – acres burned: 144 in 2018, 500 in 2017; Five Mile Barrens, owned by Hancock Timber (formerly Lyme) 700 acres cut with more planned for cutting in the Douglas County portion of Five Mile Barrens; Douglas County WA - 199 acres burned; Hancock Timber land in German Road fire – permission given to DNR to manage sharptail leks; Brule River State Forest Mott’s Ravine will increase by 65 acres; Barnes Barrens, Douglas County Forest – timber sales planned in the core area and surround area, 307 acres burned in the core area and 190 acres burned in the Blue Lake Fuel Break; Moquah Barrens area, 15,000 acres of active management on 30,000 acres in the new NEPA Green Wood area; and finally Kimberly-Clark WA – 550 acres burned (60 acres of the burn sheared) in 2017 and 2,000 acres in two units planned for this year.

President Evenson announced that Bill Berg and Jodie Provost of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society were honored with WSGS awards acknowledging their support of the Moquah Barrens WA sharptail translocation project.

The meeting program ended at 4:45 p.m. with the drawing of door prizes. The annual meeting ended Sunday morning following a tour of the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area.

I was unable to attend the tour so detailed minutes of the tour are not available.

WSGS FINANCIAL STATEMENT

01/01/17 through 12/31/17

Checkbook Balance as of 01/01/17. \$6,519
Certificate of Deposit as of 10/16/16 \$2,662

Total cash assets as of 01/01/17. \$9,181

2017 INCOME:

Memberships. \$3,420.00
Cap, patch, decal, print sales \$209.50
Art print raffle/auction \$460.00
Certificate of Deposit interest (10/16). \$28.48
USFS Moquah Barrens Partnership \$20,666.91

Total Income \$24,785

2017 EXPENDITURES:

Grants--Crex Meadows WA - habitat. \$2,000.00
Namekagon Barrens WA - habitat \$3,000.00
Printing - Friends of the NW Barrens . . . \$300.00
Coop. Moquah Barrens Project \$20,666.91

Total Grants \$25,967

Dues -- N. Am. Grouse Partnership. \$35
Friends of Crex Meadows \$55
Friends of the Bird Sanctuary. \$50
Friends of the Nam. Barrens. \$50
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. \$125

Total Alliance dues \$315

Membership Services - Newsletters. \$1,032.90
Website maintenance. \$62.64
Office supplies. \$55.46
Recognition Plaques. \$73.74
Art Print Raffle \$37.03
2017 annual meeting. \$175.00
Sales. \$ 0.00

Total Membership Services \$1,437

Non-profit report to Wis. Secretary State. . . \$10.00
Raffle License \$25.00

Total Expenditures. \$27,754

Checkbook Balance as of 12/31/17 \$3,627.20
Certificate of Deposit as of 10/16/17 \$2,690.48

Total Cash Assets as of 12/31/17. \$6,317.68

Submitted by James O. Evrard, Secretary/Treasurer, 12/31/17

WANTED: VOLUNTEER WEBSITE MANAGER

The WSGS needs a volunteer to ‘manage’ the WSGS Website – “wishartails.org” in an effort to reduce administrative costs and provide more funds for sharptail management. Our past volunteer website manager is no longer available and hiring a for-pay manager would reduce the limited money that the WSGS raises. The Website Manager would need to visit the WSGS website two/three times/year to add the latest newsletter and add other WSGS informational material. Many younger members have the technologic savy needed to manage the website. Members interested in this volunteer position should contact Jim Evrard.

THE WSGS RECEIVES U.S. FOREST SERVICE AWARD

The WSGS was invited by Brian Heeringa, wildlife biologist for the Washburn District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest to attend a ceremony in Milwaukee this past winter to receive an award from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) for the WSGS' cooperation in the project to trap sharp-tailed grouse in northwest Minnesota and transport and release them in the Moquah Barrens in Wisconsin's Bayfield County. WSGS representatives did not attend the ceremony due to the distance on winter roads, but Heeringa presented the award (a certificate and a clear glass desk memento) to Dave Evenson and Jim Evrard at a meeting held in February 23rd at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland.

The certificate stated that the Eastern Region/Northeastern Area 2017 Honor Award for Sustaining Forests and Grasslands – Sharp-tailed Grouse Restoration Project was presented to the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. Despite sharp-tailed being misspelled, the WSGS gratefully accepted the award in recognition for their efforts in this cooperative project to save the Moquah Barrens sharptail population.

THE WISCONSIN BREEDING BIRD ATLAS

By Jim Evrard

Some years ago, the WSGS was asked to sponsor the sharp-tailed grouse in the first Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas (WBBA). The Breeding Bird Atlas was an attempt to systematically census the entire state of Wisconsin to document the presence of as many breeding bird species as possible. A team of amateur and professional ornithologists (i.e. bird watchers) was recruited to scientifically census the state and report their findings to another team that would synthesize the data. The results were printed in hard cover book form and available to anyone needing that information.

The cost to 'sponsor' a bird species at the time was \$500. The WSGS Board met and discussed the request. We approved the request and \$500 was sent to the Wisconsin Society of Ornithologists (WSO) who sponsored the entire Atlas project. Some time later, a hefty book was produced and serves as a valuable source of information about Wisconsin birds. However, no really new information about the sharptail was gained from the Atlas.

A few years ago, the WSGS received another request from the WSO for more funds to again sponsor the sharptail in the second WBBA. WBBA-II was being produced to update the information contained in WBBA-I. However, this time the sponsorship cost was \$2,500, five times higher than the cost of WBBA-I. The WGS Board decided that we could better spend our relatively scarce funds on projects that would have a direct benefit for Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse. However, we did donate \$500 on the condition that would be our total contribution, not the first of five annual \$500 contributions.

The following year, we received a letter from the WSO that our second \$500 donation was due. I responded that the initial \$500 contribution was our total contribution with the reason again given that our scarce funds should benefit sharptails more directly.

I recently received an email for the WSGS from the WSO that 22 bird species still needed a sponsor and among those species was the sharp-tailed grouse. And if we responded by a certain date, there would be a reduction in the funding requested. Again I responded saying that our funds would be better spent to directly benefit sharptails in Wisconsin. End of story.

The WSGS website, "wisharptails.org", describes our goals and objectives, projects, members of our board, membership and contact information, and electronic copies of recent newsletters.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND SHARPTAILS

By Jim Evrard

Theodore Roosevelt has long been one of my conservation heroes. Besides being President of the United States, he was a U.S. Vice President, an Asst. Secretary of the U.S. Navy, Spanish-American War hero, New York Governor and Legislator, North Dakota rancher, hunter-naturalist, President of the Boone and Crocket Club, and one of the first important American conservationists.

My wife gave me a 940-page book for Christmas that has provided me much reading pleasure during the long winter. The book, **The Wilderness Warrior – Theodore Roosevelt and the Crusade for America**, was written by Douglas Brinkley and published in 2009 by HarperCollins.

I found a reference of Roosevelt hunting sharp-tailed grouse hunting in the book. Riding his horse alone across the high plains from a successful hunting trip in Wyoming's Bighorn Mountains to his ranch in the Badlands of western North Dakota, Roosevelt was caught in a blizzard. He was near his ranch, the Elkhorn, but forced to find shelter for the night in a deep coulee on the western edge of the Badlands. Roosevelt spent a cold and hungry night in the snow. He forgot to take food with him when he left his guide who was driving a chuck wagon following Roosevelt. The following paragraph and sentence was quoted from the book.

“Having endured the wintry ordeal, a famished Roosevelt grabbed his shotgun and hunted sharptail grouse in the sparkling white snowdrifts. Pioneers in the Dakota Territory and Minnesota used to claim that the brushland was so filled with sharptails that when they flocked the sun was blocked (although this was a dubious claim, because grouse don't rise [fly] that high), and indeed Roosevelt bagged five that day. Roosevelt wrote: “The sharptails fly strongly and steadily, springing into the air when they rise, and going off in a straight line, alternately sailing and giving a succession of rapid wing-beats. Sometimes they will sail a long distance with set wings before alighting, and when they are passing overhead with their wings outstretched each of the separate wing feathers can be seen, rigid and distinct.” Immediately, Roosevelt roasted two grouse over a small fire. They were uncommonly tasty.”

In a book written by Roosevelt titled, **Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail**, published in 1888, Roosevelt wrote about a trip down the Little Missouri River in pursuit of thieves who stole his boat from the Elkhorn Ranch. It was in the winter with snow on the ground and ice floating in the river. Roosevelt, along with two of his ranch hands, boated down the river for several days in pursuit of the thieves, but failed to take enough food with them. While looking for wild game to supplement their meager food supply, Roosevelt wrote: “. . . but in the afternoon a sharp-tailed grouse flew across stream ahead of the boat, lighting on a low branch by the water's edge. Shooting him, we landed and picked off two others that were perched high up in leafless cottonwoods, plucking the buds. These three birds served us supper.”

The next day, Roosevelt wrote: “For supper we again had prairie fowl, having shot four from a great patch of bilberry bushes late in the afternoon.” and “. . . occasionally we shot prairie fowl, but they were not plentiful.”

SUPPORT THE WSGS – BUY A CAP

We still have a small supply of embroidered tan or blaze orange caps for sale. The front of the cap features a colorful dancing sharp-tailed grouse under the black letters, WSGS. A strip of camouflage cloth covers the lower half of the cap and extends around the outside edge of the cap's bill. The size of the cap can be adjusted using a sturdy Velcro closure.

The cost of the cap is \$15 (shipping free) and can be ordered by using the renewal form on the back page of this newsletter.

Please indicate the color you desire.



AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

By Thomas C. Ziegeweid

A Hunting Primer for Upcoming Fall Hunt: Today is July 19, 2018. We are well past the summer “hump” of July 4th. Hunting seasons are only a long month away. Nothing stays static in the natural world. In the last few years I have had to adapt my hunting regime to changes in the environment and natural trends. I will portray this issue on a species by species examination.

Sharp-tailed Grouse: We are not going to have a season this year in Wisconsin [in early August, the DNR decided to issue 25 hunting permits for Unit 8]. Want sharpies! I suggest two places to go to: Northwestern Minnesota, namely Kittson, Marshall and Roseau counties. There is ample public land available, and there is a good population on both private and public lands. You might even bag some next-of-kin birds they sent to Moquah translocation project. Information sources for this area are Thief Lake WMA, Middle River, MN and Karlstad MDNR office in Karlstad, MN.

My second choice would be North Dakota. My hunting experience in North Dakota is limited, but North Dakota has a decent population of sharpies and would take some fact-finding and phone calls to get the lowdown on where to hunt

South Dakota has sharp-tails, but the population is fragmented across the whole state. The western part of the state, namely the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands, experienced a precipitous drop in population the last few years mostly due to extreme drought conditions.

Don't choose South Dakota as a go-to-destination for sharpies! But be prepared to get some nice bonus birds while hunting other upland game.

Prairie Chickens: No brainer! Fort Pierre National Grasslands is the place of destination for chickens. I wouldn't even consider going elsewhere. This is the best area to hunt on the continent for chicken hunting, plus you can also bag sharp-tails and pheasants too.

Pheasants: Want pheasants! For many years hunters went to the Dakotas pheasant hunting and usually hunted public land or private land that they could “get on”. Due to conversion of CRP to row crops, rising costs of guided hunting and drought, pheasant hunting has drastically declined.

But there is good news! One of the best kept secrets is the great pheasant hunting in the Fort Pierre National Grasslands. But you have to go out later in the season, from middle November to end of December.

There is not an abundance of pheasants in the grasslands, average population perhaps. But they don't get hit hard early in seasons, they are all wild birds. Many pheasants shot in South Dakota the last few years are ‘plants’ put out by outfitters.

You have to locate cattail sloughs, cattails adjacent to ag land and you will find concentrated birds, gobs of them. Plus, you can shoot chickens and sharpies to boot.

Ruffed Grouse: Last fall I saw seven ruffies total, all fall, everywhere I drove by to and from. I usually see this many birds on one day in good habitat. I bagged one bird. This is scary!

I think widespread deluge rains in June were the big cause of their decline. The understory in the woods is disappearing, has been for a long time.

Throw in West Nile Virus as the X factor. Do I really want to shoot any? At least in Wisconsin? Destination: anywhere north of Highway 2 in Minnesota.

Have a safe and fun Hunt, Tom



The Namekagon Barrens

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL - The last line in your mailing label is the expiration date of your membership. Renew your membership if it has expired or is about to expire. Dues are the main source of income for our small all-volunteer organization.

Name: _____ Would you like to volunteer for:
Street/PO Box _____ Board of Directors
City: _____ State: _____ Newsletter articles
Zip: _____ Other
Phone: _____

WSGS WEBSITE, "wisharptails.org", has been recently updated. Those members wishing to receive their newsletters electronically should check the appropriate line below when renewing memberships. Each change from paper to electronic newsletter will save the WSGS more than \$1.

Email: _____ Electronic Newsletter

Enclosed:

\$ _____ Dues (Regular - \$20, Supporting - \$30, Organization/Business - \$25, Contributing - \$50,
Sustaining - \$100, Sponsor - \$200)
\$ _____ WSGS Logo Decal (\$1.50) (Dues are fully tax-deductible)
\$ _____ Four-color Cloth Patch (\$3.50)
\$ _____ Tan or blaze orange Cap (\$15 – indicate color choice)
\$ _____ King sharptail limited edition print (\$60) (all prices include postage and handling)

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AND RETURN THIS APPLICATION TO:

Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840

