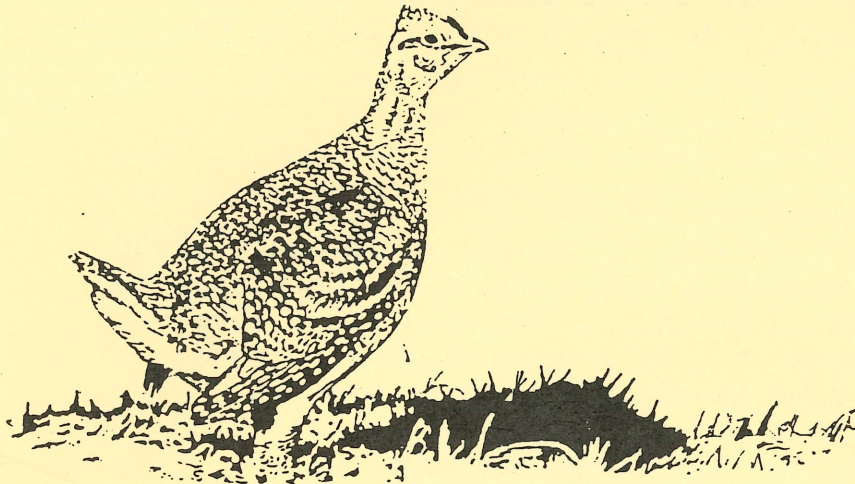


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



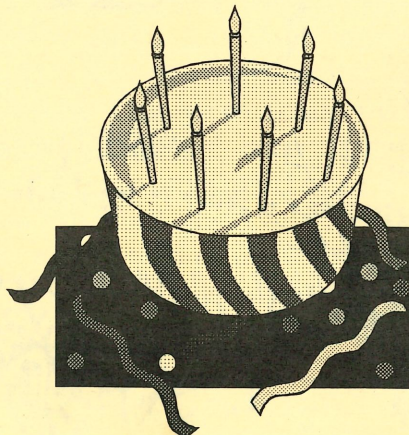
Volume 29

FALL, 2000

WSGS is Ten Years Old

When this organization got started in 1990 I'm not sure any of us knew what we might evolve into. Ten years later, we can look back and see that WSGS has been a player in the setting up of the modern hunting season structure. We've been involved in planning efforts on state, county, and federal lands, we have a permanent seat on the DNR Prairie Grouse Committee, and our survey efforts are instrumental to the state's determining how many sharp tails we have. It's a good record, and it looks to continue even better.

Thanks to Jim Evrard, our new President for going through our history and picking out the high points. This history makes up the bulk of this fall newsletter. It's good reading for those of you who have been part of it all, and also for those of you who have come on board more recently.



THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY HAS A
BIRTHDAY!

by Jim Evrard

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) is ten years old and it's time to take a look at our history.

The Beginnings

Dave Evenson was the catalyst who, after discussing the possibility of forming an advocacy group for Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse, took the plunge in early 1990 by sending a memo to DNR wildlifers involved in sharptail management. He suggested developing a newsletter to be sent to all perspective members describing the formation of the WSGS and summarizing the latest news in the Wisconsin sharptail world. Dave, indeed, is the "Father" of the WSGS.

The first newsletter was mailed to perspective members in the Fall of 1990. Twelve persons (Myron Anderson, Bob Dreis, Ray Anderson, Jim Evrard, Ray Biller, Neal Niemuth, Donald Bronk, Jim Shurts, Dave Clausen, Ken Von Ornum, Tom Davis, and Jim Wilson) volunteered to serve as the first board of directors. Newsletter items of interest included a proposal to increase the size of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area in Burnett County; Prof. Stan Temple's minimum viable population theory; and a new habitat initiative on the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area of the Chequamegon National Forest in Bayfield County.



The second newsletter in the spring of 1991 discussed the future of sharptail hunting in Wisconsin and the proposed integrated management plan for the Douglas County Forest, which would benefit sharptails.

The very first WSGS project was to jointly man a booth with the Minnesota sharptail group at the Douglas County Sport and Gun Show in Superior in January 1991.

The first annual meeting was held in mid-April at Lake Holcombe amid a late-season blizzard. Twelve people braved the snow for that first meeting. Tom Ziegeweid of Eau Claire was elected President, Jim Shurts of Madison, Vice President, and Dave Evenson, Secretary/Treasurer/Newsletter Editor.

A total of 362 male sharp-tailed grouse were counted on nine managed sharptail areas in the state and another 267 were counted on unmanaged land in that year.



Early Issues

Some of the sharptail issues of the time were the renewal of the DNR lease on the Namekagon Barrens in Burnett County; the Moquah Barrens sharptail translocation project; and support for the concept of sharptail hunters needing to record bagged birds on a season report card.

The WSGS held its second annual meeting at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area in late April of 1992. The weather for sharptail watching wasn't good, but definitely better than the previous year. The WSGS had grown to 160 members. One of our first projects was to donate \$800 for ten radio transmitters for sharptails translocated to the Moquah Barrens. None of the ten radioed sharptails survived the winter --- most were killed by raptors. Dancing sharptails on the state's

managed properties dropped to 182 and 85 on unmanaged land, with the decline attributed to the 10-year cycle that affects grouse and snowshoe hares.

Getting Organized

Attorney and WSGS Vice President Jim Shurts developed the articles of incorporation and by-laws, which called for a seven-member executive board. At the 1993 annual meeting at the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center, Jim Shurts and Bob Dreis were elected for a 1-year term; Dave Evenson and Tom Davis for 2-year terms; and Jim Evrard, Dan Dessecker, and Tom Ziegeweid for 3-year terms. The WSGS continued to grow adding nearly 40 members during the year. A Metro or Bogs and Barrens Chapter was formed by Tom Jancoski. Dancing sharptails declined further to 146 males on managed properties and 67 on unmanaged lands in Wisconsin.

A major issue was an initiative to maintain a viable population of sharptails in central Wisconsin. Some of our projects included supporting a Wisconsin Grouse Symposium in Madison and a Pine Barrens Workshop in Solon Springs. Tom Davis developed the color brochure used to promote the WSGS and encourage membership. Tom Ziegeweid developed the beautiful display board that we use to promote our group at outdoors-related events.

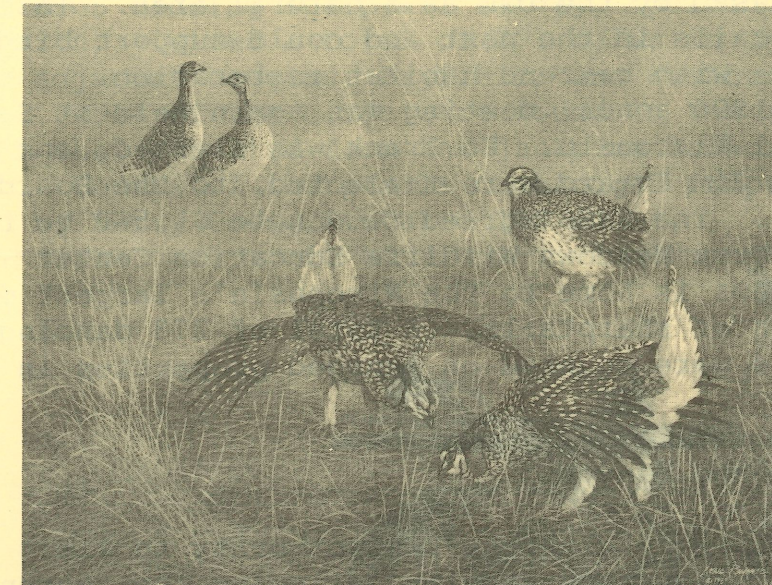
The Beginning of Modern Regulated Hunt

In mid-1993, the WSGS submitted a resolution to the DNR, calling for a controlled sharp-tailed grouse hunting season with a limited number of permits based upon dancing male sharptails counted in deer management units.

Our 1994 annual meeting was again held at Sandhill. Jim Shurts and Bob Dreis were reelected to the Board. Membership in the WSGS exceeded 260. The Bogs and Barrens Chapter of the WSGS, headed by Tom Jancoski, lobbied for increasing the upland acres at the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge and restoring oak savanna habitat. We also went on record supporting the Quincy Bluff Natural Area acquisition in central Wisconsin. Sharp-tailed grouse numbers began their cyclic upswing with 167 males counted on the 9 managed properties in the state.

The struggle to prevent the closure of the sharptail hunting season continued. Some WSGS members went to the DNR's spring hearings to testify against the proposed closure. State-wide, persons who attended the hearings voted to close the season, but where there was WSGS testimony, those counties voted to keep the season open. The sharptail hunting season would close in 1996.

The 1995 annual meeting was held in Solon Springs for the first time. Features of this event included a steak dinner at the historic field trial building on the Douglas County Wildlife Area and an area-wide dancing sharptail survey which was incorporated into Neal Niemuth's graduate research project. The biggest source of income for the WSGS, the annual art raffle, had its beginnings at the 1995 meeting.



Edition size: 900
Image size: 16" x 20"

Spring Dance at Crex

By Louis Raymer

Starting to Put our Money to Good Use

Tom Davis was reelected to the Board and was joined by newcomer Shane Walstrom. Tom Ziegeweid remained as President, Jim Shurts, Vice President, Dave Evenson, Newsletter Editor, and Jim Evrard became Secretary-Treasurer. The board decided to provide \$600 as part of the cost of a brush mower to be used for sharptail management in the Sandhill/Meadow Valley/Wood County Wildlife Areas. Another \$500 was donated to

sponsor the Sharp-tailed Grouse in the Wisconsin for Ornithology's Wisconsin Bird Atlas project. Tom Ziegeweid wrote letters to several counties that were rewriting their county forest ten-year plans, asking them to consider the sharptail and its habitat during their planning process.

Sharptail numbers continued their upswing with 259 dancing males on managed properties and 204 dancing males on unmanaged clearcuts in Bayfield and Douglas counties alone.

In early 1996, the process of reopening the sharptail hunting season began by supporting legislation that would give the DNR legal authority to limit the number of sharptail hunters. Despite spring surveys showing sharptail populations on managed areas to be the highest in ten years, the hunting season was closed. The Spread Eagle Barrens in Florence County was purchased by the DNR as a natural area. This area had sharptails in the past and could support birds in the future with barrens habitat restoration.

Our 1996 annual meeting was again held at Sandhill in central Wisconsin. Ed Frank was elected, and Don Bronk and Jim Evrard were reelected, to the Board of Directors. The WSGS agreed to donate \$1,500 to the proposed Crex Meadows Wildlife Education Center since Crex Meadows is home to the Wisconsin's largest managed population of sharptails. A total of 273 dancing male sharptails were counted on managed properties in the state.

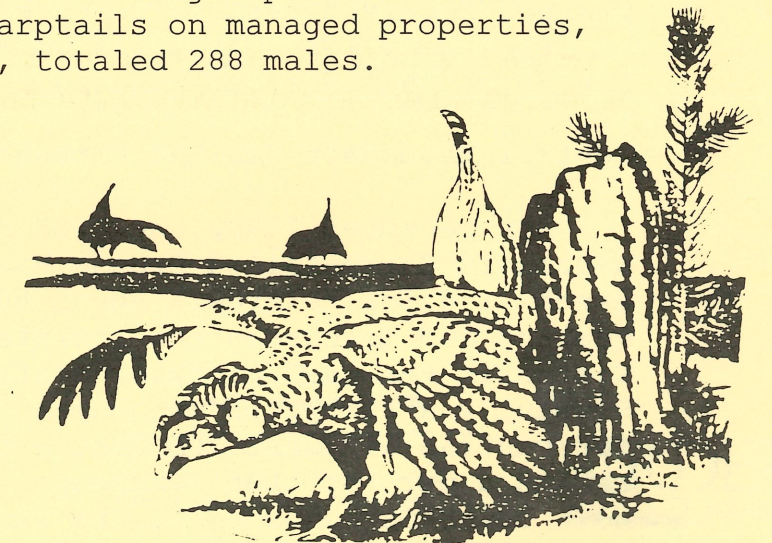
Reopening the Season

The bill to give the DNR authority to limit sharptail hunters became law, allowing the reopening of the sharptail hunting season in 1997. Ed Bodde and Jim Shurts of the WSGS should be given recognition for the key role that they played in the passage of the bill. Briefly, any deer management unit where at least 25 dancing male sharptails were counted in the spring would trigger a hunting season in that unit in the fall. The quota or number of sharptails that could be shot in that unit without affecting the subsequent spring population could not exceed 25% of the projected fall population.

Leading through Education

We returned to Solon Springs in late April for the 1997 annual meeting. We again enjoyed a fine steak dinner at the field trial building on the nearby Douglas County Wildlife Area (known locally as the "Bird Sanctuary") following our business meeting. Bob Dries and Dan Dessecker were reelected to the Board. Ed Frank became President, Bob Dries, Vice President, Jim Evrard, Secretary/Treasurer, and Dave Evenson, Newsletter Editor. We agreed to cosponsor the Midwest Oak Savanna and Woodland Conference at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. We also agreed to join the Wisconsin Stewardship Network in order to have more of an effective political voice on broad conservation issues in Wisconsin. Membership continued at the 250-300 level.

The WSGS dancing sharptail survey, coordinated by Neal Niemith, yielded a total of 291 males in unmanaged lands in adjacent Douglas, Bayfield, and Washburn counties. Most of the birds were found in the large clearcuts that resulted from the jackpine budworm outbreak. Counts of sharptails on managed properties, reported by Larry Gregg, totaled 288 males.



A cherished tradition returned with the reopening of the sharp-tailed grouse hunting season, however limited, in October of 1997. Eighty-five of the 316 hunters who received permits, returned questionnaires reporting bagging 83 sharptails during 118 hunting trips. It was estimated that a total of 137 sharptails were shot. Safe harvest recommendations by the DNR resulted in a quota of 660 birds.

We again returned to Solon Springs for our 1998 annual meeting. Tom Ziegeweid and Tom Jancoski were elected to the Board of Directors. The Board decided to give \$1,200 to the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to support graduate student Tim Connally's radio-telemetry study of nesting sharp-tailed grouse in the northwest pine barrens.

Dancing sharptails counted during the WSGS Sunday morning survey that followed the Saturday business meeting and Bird Sanctuary steak dinner increased to 363 birds! Sharptails counted on the managed properties increased substantially to 371 birds.

A problem with the new hunting season developed after the DNR Board decided to add the sharptail hunting permit application to the list of items included free with the Conservation Patron license. Some 25,000 patron license buyers said they would like to receive the sharptail hunting application form. However, only 2,500 actually sent applications and about half of those were for units where there were no sharptail hunting permits available. About 1,500 persons received permits compared to only 316 the year before. Only 178 sharptails were bagged with many of the permit holders not hunting.

Central Wisconsin Habitat Workshop

In December 1998, the WSGS hosted the central Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat Workshop at Sandhill Wildlife Area. About 80 persons attended the meeting and discussed the sharptail in central Wisconsin --- its' past, present, and future. Hopefully a sharptail management plan will be developed for central Wisconsin to insure that the species will remain a part of that landscape.

The WSGS returned to the Sandhill Wildlife Demonstration Area for its 1999 annual meeting and another catered feast by John Kubisiak. Board members Ed Frank, Don Bronk, and Jim Evrard were reelected. The Board again decided to give \$1,200 to support the continuing sharptail research at UW-Stevens Points that is being conducted under the direction of Prof. Neal Niemuth. Another \$200 was given to support the Pine Barrens Research and Management Workshop held in Ashland. On behalf of the sharptails, the WSGS had input into the planning process for the Powell Marsh Wildlife Area, the Brule River State Forest and the

Chequamegon National Forest. Sadly, the group saw more turkeys than sharptails on the traditional annual meeting survey in the central Wisconsin area. A special sharptail survey was conducted in the Solon Springs area the week following the annual meeting. We counted 266 sharptails in deer management units 2, 8, and 9, 27% less than the previous year. The number of dancing males counted on managed areas in the state dropped to 325, which was a 12% decline from 1998.

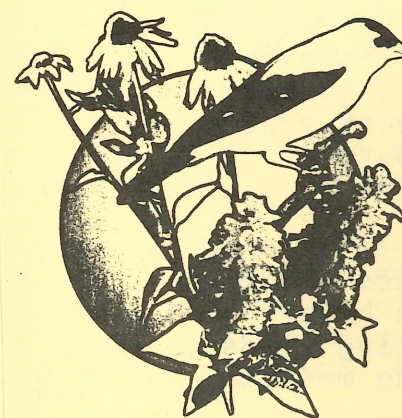
The Board met in Florence County in September and was treated to a tour of the Spread Eagle Barrens led by project manager Stu Boren. Boren and Florence County Administrator Dave Majewski wanted sharptails translocated to the newly restored barrens habitat.

Due to ideal conditions, over 6,000 acres were prescribed burned on six sharp-tailed grouse management areas, probably a modern-day record for fall burning.

The 1999 sharptail harvest dropped to 119 birds, a reflection of the lowered spring counts. Apparently, the downward portion of the grouse cycle has begun.

So ended the first decade of the existence of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. Hopefully the coming decade will be as productive as the past one for our group.

Announcing ... the NEW



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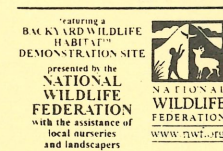
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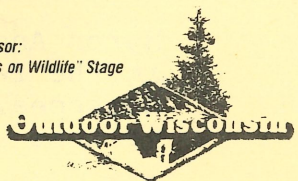
Get the answers to your questions HERE!

HOURS	TICKETS	
Oct. 13 (Fr) Noon - 9 pm	Adult (16 yrs +)	\$6.00
Oct. 14 (Sa) 9 am - 9 pm	Youth (6-15)	\$3.00
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MINUTES OF THE WSGS ANNUAL MEETING

April 29, 2000, St. Croix Inn, Solon Springs

The meeting was called to order by President Ed Frank at 1 p.m. Four Board members were present in addition to Frank - Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard, Bob Dreis, Tom Ziegeweid, and Tom Jancoski. Twenty-six other members and guests attended the meeting.

The minutes of the 1999 annual meeting and the 1999 financial report were published in previous newsletters so were not read. The net worth of the WSGS as of April 21, 2000 was \$7,948.75 (CDs = \$1,808.21, Checkbook = \$6,103.48, cash = \$37.06).

An apology was offered to the membership for the late mailing of the recent newsletter which was complicated by poor service from the post office (some newsletters apparently were lost).

Ed recounted the Board's visit to the Spread Eagle Barrens in September, 1999. At that time, the Board decided to possibly support a sharptail translocation project in the future when adequate broken grassland habitat has been restored.

The Central Wisconsin Initiative was discussed. Neal Niemuth of the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point proposed to hire a student to use GIS to identify sharptail habitat management opportunities in the area. With specific sites identified, public land managers could again be contacted to determine potential sharptail management projects and partnerships. The group felt there is a need to form a committee to work on this initiative. Potential members identified were Niemuth, Tom Jancoski, and Tom Ziegeweid.

Ed discussed the various lobbying activities undertaken by the WSGS in the past year. He contacted legislators on political issues involving the DNR and was involved in planning efforts in the Chequamegon National Forest. There was also input into the Brule River State Forest Management Plan. Ed will also again inform the DNR of our opposition to the procedure presently used to issue sharptail hunting permits as it pertains to patron license holders. Bruce Moss discussed the Northwest Sands ecosystem management planning effort.

Myron Anderson suggested habitat management of abandoned farmland in the red clay area near Ashland for sharptails which have disappeared in the area. He also suggested transplanting birds to that area, generating considerable discussion at the meeting.

After discussion of WSGS' involvement in the 1999 Ducks Unlimited Great Outdoors Festival, it was decided not to participate in this year's event.

The need for a statewide annual sharp-tailed grouse spring census was also discussed.

Funding requests were discussed. Pete Engman, Crex Meadows Manager, requested \$1,000 over 2 years to help fund a \$118,000 barrens habitat restoration project in Burnett County, primarily on state and county properties. The bulk of the funding would come from the federal government with additional funds from the state and from the National Wild Turkey Federation which has approved \$25,000 for the project. The Board met and later approved this request.

Evrard requested \$500 for the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education Center. The WSGS previously donated \$1,500 but additional funds are needed for a building of adequate size. The building has been approved and construction will begin in 2001. The Board also approved this request.

The group also approved joining the recently formed North American Grouse Partnership organization at the \$35 membership level.

President Frank announced the election results. Bob Dreis was reelected to the Board and Paul Hayes was elected to fill the position vacated by Dan Dessecker. Congratulations! Dave Biegel and Jeff Flatness should be also congratulated for agreeing to serve as Board candidates.

The drawing for the art raffle was conducted. Mike Vogel won the original acrylic painting of a pair of black ducks donated by Minnesota artist Louie Raymer. Leo Mortenson won the framed limited edition print of flushing sharptails by the late Owen Gromme. And finally, Herb Behnke won the framed limited edition of dancing sharptails by Louie Raymer. The print was donated by the Friends of Crex. The art raffle netted \$735 (less sending the two prints by UPS) for the WSGS.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m. Another great steak dinner was enjoyed at the newly refurbished field trial building in the Douglas County Wildlife Area southwest of Solon Springs. Neal Niemuth and graduate student Tim Connelly provided an excellent summary of their sharptail research following dinner. Many thanks to them, caterer Bob Provost, and host Fred Strand for a memorable evening. Dinner costs exceeded registration fees by \$1.

Very early the following morning, many of the group spread out in pine barrens habitat from Bayfield County to Washburn County to count dancing sharptails. With good weather, approximately 250 birds were counted by the group. Coordinator Niemuth will report the final tally in an upcoming newsletter.

Following the census debriefing brunch at the St. Croix Inn, our annual gathering ended at 10 a.m. and the members returned to their homes throughout Wisconsin.

Submitted by Jim Evrard, Secretary/Treasurer

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