

# WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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Summer, 1998

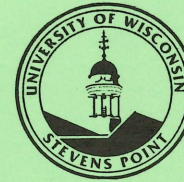
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## APPLICATION DEADLINE AUGUST 10TH

Those of you who wish to hunt sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin this year are reminded that there is an August 10th permit application deadline. Permit applications cost \$3.00 and are available at larger DNR stations or through the mail from Madison.

Some 25,000 patron license buyers checked off that they would like to receive the sharp-tailed grouse application form. The DNR does not yet know how many of these will follow through and apply. It would appear that there is potential for quite a few more applicants than last year.

We have more sharptails in the state than in the last two or three decades. Several of the managed properties hit their highest spring count ever, and the large clear cuts in the northwest are still holding good numbers of birds.



## University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

College of Natural Resources

Stevens Point, WI 54481-3897 (715) 346-2853

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TO: WI DNR managers and researchers; directors of Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

FROM: Neal Niemuth, UW-SP

RE: 1998 sharp-tailed grouse survey off managed properties in Douglas County

DATE: May 4, 1998

Twenty-seven members of the WSGS surveyed known or potential sharp-tailed grouse habitat in Douglas County on April 26. Most habitat surveyed consisted of large clearcuts created by salvage logging of budworm-infested jack pine, although the Deer Print Lake Fire area was also surveyed. The Namekagon Barrens, the Douglas County Wildlife Area, and habitat patches east of Highway 27 were not included in this survey; these areas were surveyed on other dates by WI DNR personnel.

In total, 363 sharptails were counted. Most birds were congregated at dancing grounds, although non-displaying birds were also counted. Several fairly large dancing grounds were observed, with counts of 28 (Deer Print Lake Fire/clearcut), 22 (clearcut east of Gordon), 42, 29, and 25 (clearcuts along Highway 27).

Five sharptails were found in Deer Management Unit 8; 182 were found in Unit 2; and 176 were found in Unit 9. Approximately 116 additional birds were present in Unit 2 east of Highway 27 in clearcuts and the Bayfield County Firebreaks (Greg Kessler, personal communication).

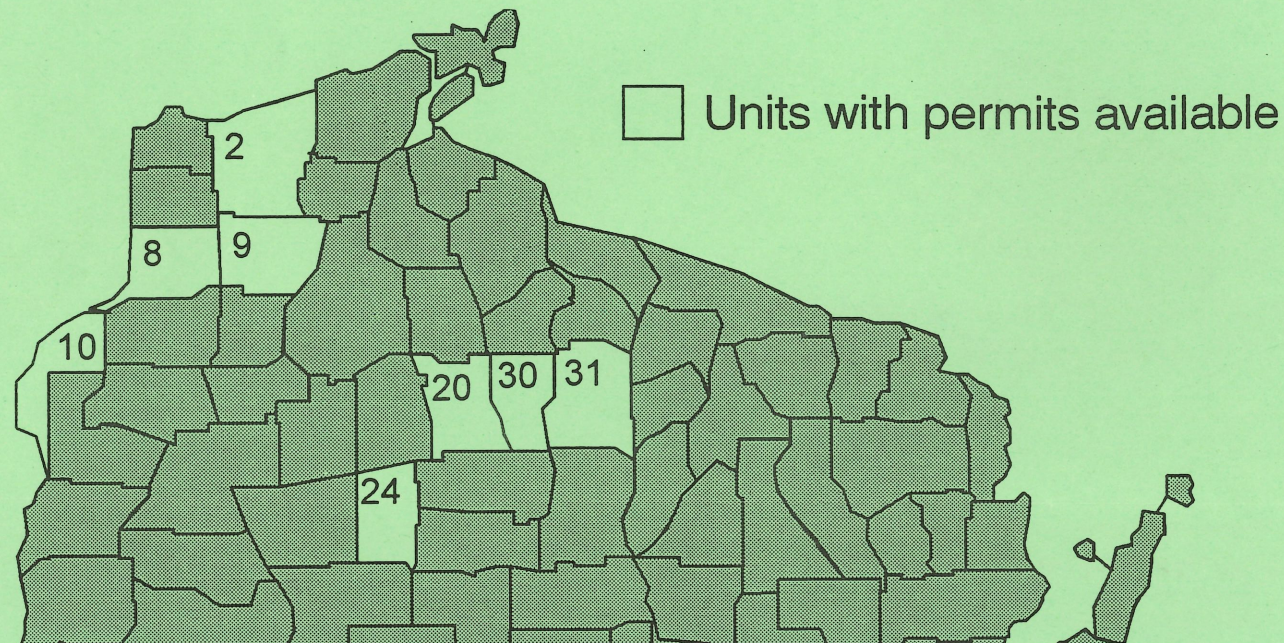
Several factors should be considered when evaluating these numbers:

- 1) The majority of birds counted were flushed from dancing grounds. It is likely that most are males, but the sex ratio is unknown. However, Amman (1957) felt that the average number of birds of both sexes flushed from a ground was a "workable substitute" for the maximum number of males attending a lek.
- 2) Some birds that were flushed early in the day may have been counted later at other sites, although observers tried to avoid double counts.
- 3) Many birds were heard but not seen. These were usually counted as one individual, certainly underestimating the number of birds present.
- 4) The numbers are from one morning of sampling. Lek attendance varies from day to day, which will influence counts.
- 5) Some habitat within the region was not surveyed. The area is simply too large to adequately survey in one morning with 27 people. I'm certain that more birds and dancing grounds exist in the cutover areas of Douglas/Bayfield counties.

I thank everyone who helped with the surveys. If you have any questions, please call me at 715-346-4031 or e-mail me at [nniemuth@uwsp.edu](mailto:nniemuth@uwsp.edu).

## Sharp-tailed grouse hunting information:

There are eight (8) open sharp-tailed grouse hunting units in 1998. Open units with permits available are **not shaded**. Apply for a permit **only** in open units. Please note that a portion of Douglas County Wildlife Area is contained within unit 8. **Douglas County Wildlife Area is closed** to sharp-tailed grouse hunting. **Kimberly-Clark Wildlife Area** (in Unit 24) is **open** to sharp-tailed grouse hunting.



### PERMIT AVAILABILITY

| UNIT | PERMITS |
|------|---------|
| 2    | 900     |
| 8    | 200     |
| 9    | 300     |
| 10   | 200     |
| 20   | 50      |
| 24   | 50      |
| 30   | 50      |
| 31   | 50      |

Sharp-tailed grouse hunting units are the same as Deer Management Units in boundary and identification number.

MINUTES OF ANNUAL MEETING OF THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY, APRIL 25, 1998, ST. CROIX INN, SOLON SPRINGS.

The meeting was called to order by President Ed Frank at 1:35 pm. with Vice-President Bob Dreis and Secretary-Treasurer Jim Evrard present. Board members Don Bronk, Dan Dessecker, Tom Davis, and Shane Wallstrom were absent.

Program moderator Larry Gregg introduced Roger Amundson, retired wildlife manager from Marinette, who reviewed the late Leroy Lintereur's notes documenting the decline of the sharp-tailed grouse in northeast Wisconsin.

Only 3 sharptails remained at the Dunbar WA by 1978. Leroy retired in 1983 and stated that fire should not be used to managed the remaining barrens properties. A few scattered sharptails remained in the area including the Iron Mountain, Michigan airport. The DNR Prairie Grouse Committee recommended abandoning sharptail management in the northeast in 1987. However, the Spread Eagle Natural Area creation and plan in 1995 revitalized the idea of barrens management with fire and the possibility of sharptails returning to the area.

Stu Boren, the Spread Eagle DNR property manager spoke next with supporting comments by Dave Majewski, the Florence County Forest Administrator. Boren stressed that the Spread Eagle project was cooperative in nature and included the DNR, Florence County, the affected townships, and Wisconsin Electric power company. The project has an 8,800 acre goal which should be large enough to support sharptails. About 35% of the area is open now and is being managed with prescribed burning. They hope to open up another 2,000 acres by 2008. Boren reviewed the political history of the process creating the natural area. There are a few sharptails on the project now but they need a biological inventory of the area.

Paul Kooiker was the last speaker on the program. He discussed the relationship of barrens community restoration and sharptail management using Crex Meadows as an example. The sharptails have responded favorably to management, but this could be threatened by the demands of future single species management which is coming from persons interested in endangered species.

Neal Niemuth then discussed the sharptail survey that was scheduled for the morning the April 26th. Teams volunteered to census the 8 areas selected for surveys.

The business meeting began at 3:30 pm. The current financial condition (as of 4/26/98, the CD balance was \$1,619.92, checkbook balance was \$3,743.92, and cash and checks, \$849.24) was discussed in relation to a request for \$1,200 for a radio receiver to be used in sharptail research by Neal Niemuth. An additional \$500 for 100 \$5 reward bands was also requested.

Ed announced the awarding of a plaque to former sharptail researcher Jim Hale for his past work on behalf of the sharptail in Wisconsin. Hale was not present so the plaque will be given to him at a future date.

Input into the Powell Marsh Master Plan was also discussed. DNR Technician Larry Jonas thought there were 30-40 birds in the area. Ed thought the society should support management for the birds on the project.

Ed also stated that August 18th has been set for a 1-day, central Wisconsin sharptail workshop to be held at the Sandhill Wildlife Demonstration Area.

Myron Anderson had some question about the Moquah Barrens. He thought the area should be expanded and the sharptails he is seeing there are the result of the translocation from Crex.

On May 11, 1998 there apparently will be a meeting with the DNR prairie grouse committee and John Toepfer to discuss any future prairie grouse translocations. Only a very few have been successful thus far.

Jim discussed the possibility of a state-wide sharptail survey which would be largely supporting by our organization. More work is needed on this idea.

Election results were announced. Twenty-one ballots were received -- Tom Ziegeweid received 21 votes and Tom Jancoski received 4 write-in votes. Dave Evenson, Larry Gregg, Don Publitz and Bob Dreis each received 1 write-in vote. The 2 Toms were declared winners and are our new board members replacing Tom Davis and Shane Wallstrom.

In new business, Neal Niemuth suggested an invitational hunt to generate more publicity and support for the sharp-tailed grouse.

The problem of DNR patron license holders applying for sharptail hunting permits which they will not use was discussed.

Bruce Moss talked about receiving an EPA grant to begin the process of developing a management plan for the northwest pine barrens.

The drawing for the framed prints was held: Myron Anderson won the Owen Gromme print and Charles Wolf won the Louie Raymer print. The Karen Smith prints were won by Fred Strand (sharptail) and Martin Granica (prairie chicken).

The meeting was adjourned at 4:45 pm.

A short board meeting was then held with a quorum completed with newly-elected board member, Tom Ziegeweid. The board decided to grant \$1,700 to Neal Niemuth for his sharptail research project.

### Overview of Sharptail Program

They are, first of all, an anomaly amongst grouse, a strongly r selective type, with a tendency to move rapidly into favorable situations, exploiting primary and transitional communities, which like the species are ephemeral on the landscape. Thus a permanent sharptail program is a contradiction in terms, and a biological inexactitude.

Their status in the county prior to settlement is at best uncertain. Settlers then, as hunters do now, tended to confuse sharptails with prairie chicken, generally lumping both as the latter species. The first and only definitive document is Hamerstrom's '53 paper which traced the history of the species and outlined its status as of that date. He listed four centers of population for the county. These are Amberg, Athelstane, Coleman Lake, and Grandfather Lake. There were minor populations in the Cataline Rocks, and High Falls Areas.

In 1955 there were remanant birds in all these areas and as late as 1965 it was possible to flush birds randomly throughout the northern part of the county where there were straggling remnants of sharptail range. The terminal decline and ultimate extinction of birds in all areas except (the broadly) Dunbar and Goodman areas was swift and sudden, with genetic factors perhaps more significant than edaphic.

There were areas- Grandfather Lake would be one-where the failure of birds was paralleled by total loss of habitat. However, at the same time, the Athelstane segment disappeared with no apparent loss of habitat. The traditional openings were there exactly as they were in Hamerstroms time, with one great difference- the birds had vanished. Thus, it would be an oversimplification to state that the birds vanished when the habitat did. This was of course a factor and perhaps the most important but let it be said that then, as now, there were areas with openings,

complete with the somewhat specialized complex required by the birds from which they (sharptails) had vanished without trace.

The terminal stronghold-the term is extreme- for the species is and was the northern part of the county. Initially there were two loci-both within flying distance of each other. These were. The Coleman area, roughly within the boundary of the unit known by that name; the Dunbar area proper, being the area immediately north of the village on the area locally known as "the Plains".

While the two populations were discrete there was probably a degree of genetic exchange between them. They were separated by only four miles, and the two populations probably overwintered on the same range. Ca. 1965 the Dunbar openings were planted, and by 1970 the birds related to that particular population had vanished. Now, the Sharptail area birds were truly isolated, a relict community, subject now and forever to the ills that beset isolated populations. The present writer thinks it reasonable that the slow, steady decline that must eventually result in extinction of the birds in this area dates from that happening. The end it would seem is inevitable, due first of all to an imbalance of sexes, and secondly to a stagnating genetic pool.

One may question the accuracy of the major premise here, and it can be restated once more. Sharptails have undergone a decline in Marinette and Oconto county that has reached the stage where there is one isolated group of birds on the Dunbar Sharptail Management unit in the town of Goodman. In defense of this thesis, it can be stated categorically that no birds have been reported from other areas for at least ten years; there has been obviously no effort by the birds to volunteer into range and establish peripheral populations, which is to say we can be reasonably certain that their numbers are such that pressure that could result in this is absent.

Madison, WI  
June 22, 1998

As of 1980 this is the situation, and the options, never numerous, are vanishing, one might say, like the birds themselves.

Certain actions are indicated:

We should do whatever possible to hold onto the old classic openings, for a variety of reasons, but not the least being for their occupancy, should the unforeseeable happen, and they once again become sharptail range. This infers a radical shift in our numbers of birds—which at present seems unlikely.

Management of Dunbar should be held at maximum, with particular attention given to opening extension.

Encouragement should be always given to hunters and people living in the north to be on the lookout and report any birds sighted. Hunters who frequent the bird area proper should be contacted, and requested to keep a running inventory of birds flushed and bagged.

Above all, the precarious nature of the population should not be regarded as a determinative in planning for the future. Let the manager carry out his duties as if the birds' future was bright, with no thought of species disappearance. But, at the same time, it would be imprudent and unwise to shun and disregard the mechanics involved here, and this includes the nature of the species, the range, and current precarious position of the sharptails in northeastern Wisconsin.

Editors Note:

*This article was written by LeRoy Lintereur, long time biologist in the Northeast part of Wisconsin. It appears the time of writing was about 1980. I've deliberately left it in the original form, just so our younger members can see pre-computer typing. It's also interesting to read the more formal scientific style that was in use at that time. LeRoy is writing here about sharptails in Marinette County. DEE*

TO: WI Sharp-tailed Grouse Society WSGS)  
Board of Directors  
Committee of Counselors

FROM: Ed Frank, WSGS President *EJF*

SUBJECT: Tuesday, August 18, 1998 Board Meeting and Agenda

I just cancelled the August 18 STG workshop at Sandhill and rescheduled it for Wednesday, December 2, 1998 at Sandhill. (If too many presenters have a problem with Dec. 2, Thursday, Dec. 3 is being held open at Sandhill as an alternative date.)

Preparations for this workshop required a lot more work and time than I anticipated so rescheduling it for December 2 gives us additional time to develop a more effective workshop. Since many WSGS Board members were holding Tuesday, August 18 open for the workshop it seemed like a good time to hold a very necessary WSGS Board meeting. Since Spooner is convenient to a majority of Board members I will reserve space at Tony's Riverside Restaurant. Instead of a late afternoon meeting, however, let's try meeting at 1:00 PM. Tony's expects us to have a sandwich there in exchange for using the meeting room so let's do that before or around 1:00 PM. I expect to conclude the Board meeting by 4:00 PM. If the traditional late afternoon meeting (starting at 4:00 or 5:00) is preferred notify me before July 18 so I can change the time.

#### PROPOSED AGENDA

- 1) Minutes of last Board meeting
- 2) Treasurers report
- 3) Select time & place for 1999 Annual Spring Meeting
- 4) Obtaining art work for 1999 raffle
- 5) Need 3 candidates for 1999 Board election
- 6) How to build broader support for STG and its' habitat
- 7) How can spring STG surveys be expanded to larger area?
- 8) How many Conservation Patron License holders applied for STG permits?
- 9) Sponsoring part of The Winter NW Pine Barrens Mtg.
- 10) Becoming an advocate for Pine Barrens on Brule River State Forest
- 11) Becoming an advocate for STG on National Forests
- 12) Finalizing plans for Dec. 2 Central WI STG Workshop
- 13) Other new business?

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

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL  
(1998 Annual Dues \$10.00)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ dues

(Regular - \$10) (Supporting \$25)  
(Contributing \$50) (Sustaining \$100)  
(Sponsor \$200)  
Dues are fully tax-deductible

Volunteer Activities

\_\_\_\_\_ Board of Directors  
\_\_\_\_\_ Newsletter Writing  
\_\_\_\_\_ Bird census work  
\_\_\_\_\_ Publicity  
\_\_\_\_\_ Education  
\_\_\_\_\_ Fund Raising  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other

Yes! Please send me:

\_\_\_\_\_ Deluxe corduroy dress cap (\$14.00 postage incl.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ WSGS Logo Window Sticker (\$1.50 postage incl.)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Total Amount Enclosed

Thank you for your continued support,  
Board of Directors

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