

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



VOLUME 33

FALL, 2001

Wisconsin's Sharptail Hunters Help Research

Wisconsin sharptail hunters will be helping with a continent-wide genetic study of sharp-tailed grouse. Karen Mock of Utah State University is conducting this survey. She is especially interested in Wisconsin since these birds are at the edge of sharptail range, and would likely show the most difference from other populations.

Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse hunters received instructions with their permits to send in a wing to be analyzed. Keith Warnke, Wisconsin Upland Wildlife Specialist will collect these and forward to Utah State. You can bring your wings to a local biologist in the hunting zones, or mail directly to Keith. His address is:

**Keith Warnke
WM/4
Wisconsin DNR
PO Box 7021
Madison, WI 53707**

SUCCESSFUL ANNUAL MEETING

The 2001 annual meeting of the WSGS held in Ashland on April 28 and 29 was a success. About 50 persons attended the meeting on Saturday afternoon in the auditorium of the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center.

Following the business meeting, the election results were presented. Tom Ziegeweid was reelected to another three-year term and we welcomed new board member, Dr. Tim Connolly.

The highlight of the meeting was the program presented by Bruce Moss of the DNR, Quita Sheehan from the U.S. Forest Service, Prof. Gus Smith from Northland College, and Todd Naas of the DNR, Ashland.

Moss spoke about the recently completed Northwest Sands Landscape Level Management Plan and how the WSGS might incorporate future projects into the plan. Sheehan talked about barrens and savanna management in the Chequamegon National Forest in the Bayfield Peninsula. She had the good news (especially for the sharptail) that the U.S. Forest Service is planning to expand the Moquah Barrens to about 10,000 acres.

Smith described the history of sharptails and sharptail management in the Moquah Barrens. In cooperation with the Forest Service and Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Smith and his Northland College students conduct the annual sharptail census of the Moquah Barrens.

Finally, Naas spoke about the possibility of reintroducing sharptails to the red clay agricultural area south of Ashland. The DNR is investigating the reintroduction potential based upon the urgings of Myron Anderson of Ashland and a habitat evaluation made by Greg Kessler, DNR biologist at Brule.

During the meeting's afternoon break, Myron presented the group with a beautiful sharp-tailed grouse cake made by his daughter, celebrating the tenth anniversary of the WSGS.

Following the program, an auto tour of the potential red clay reintroduction area was led by Naas and Anderson enroute to the clubhouse of the Northern Wisconsin Rod and Gun Club on Lake Superior east of Ashland. There we enjoyed a delicious catered trout boil and social that ended the first day of our annual meeting.

About 25 persons participated in an area-wide census of sharp-tailed grouse in the Moquah Barrens northwest of Ashland the next morning. The weather cooperated and the group counted about 35 sharptails. This compares favorably with the recent peak count of 40 male sharptails last year.

Following the survey, the group convened at Gus Smith's home on the edge of the Moquah Barrens for a super breakfast prepared by Gus and his wife. Gus also organized the morning's sharptail census. Following breakfast, the meeting officially ended and we returned to our homes.

This meeting was one of the more successful in recent years. Meeting attendance was good and was well covered by the Ashland Daily Press. The weather was good for the successful sharptail survey. Income from meeting registrations exceeded expenses by \$52. Twenty-nine persons renewed their memberships adding \$490 to our income. Income from the annual art raffle was below recent years, but still netted \$640.

We plan to hold the 2002 annual meeting of the WSGS in the new Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center if it is completed by next April. The WSGS has donated \$2,000 for the building. We held our second annual meeting at Crex Meadows in 1991, but haven't returned since.



RESULTS OF STATEWIDE SHARPTAIL SURVEY

By Jim Evrard

This was the first year that the WSGS attempted to coordinate a statewide census of displaying sharp-tailed grouse. The concept is that the WSGS would recruit volunteers who would then work with DNR biologists in counting displaying male sharptails.

The number of displaying males is used primarily as an index to the total sharptail population. All things being equal, the numbers counted give trend information, whether the population is going up or down, but also be used in a crude model to roughly estimate total numbers.

Persons who had indicated that they would volunteer to count sharptails when they renewed their WSGS membership were contacted by mail. An announcement asking for volunteer counters was also placed in the WSGS newsletter. A similar announcement was planned for the newsletter of the Wisconsin Society of Ornithology, but was never published due to a change of editors at that time.

Regardless, twelve persons volunteered to census sharptails. I sent them forms and instructions and the name of the DNR biologist in the area where they would like to work. Five biologists were involved. I also instructed the volunteers to contact their biologist for maps and final instructions and asked for copies of their completed forms.

Ten persons contacted their biologists and two dropped out of the survey. Of the ten persons, seven actually looked for sharptails in their assigned area and three persons dropped out of the survey. I received copies of forms from three of the seven volunteers despite a second mailing reminding them to send me a copy.

You can see the survey was not a resounding success, but it is a start. One problem is getting the results of the survey. Individual biologists apparently have good records of the census for their areas of responsibility, but I have not seen a statewide summary. Larry Gregg, who retired from the DNR Research in 1999, had the responsibility of maintaining statewide sharptail records. After he retired, I assumed that DNR Wildlife Management Staff would assume the record-keeping responsibility. Hopefully this issue has been resolved.

Talking to individual DNR biologists, I learned that the numbers of displaying sharptails declined significantly from 2000 to 2001. This was the third year of decline. Hopefully this or next year will be the bottom of the cyclic low and the populations will start rebuilding. One certain factor is that the large number of sharptails found in the huge jackpine budworm clearcuts in Douglas and Bayfield counties will not return. That habitat has been largely replaced with red pine plantations. Sharptails will soon disappear from those areas, barring wild fires, wind storms, disease, or other natural catastrophes.

We will again be looking for volunteers for the 2002 statewide census. I spent several mornings looking for the birds and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I hope some of you can join me next spring.

Sharptail Population 2001

Sharptail dancing ground surveys showed declines across Wisconsin's populations. This mirrors Minnesota's surveys where they found 37% fewer sharptails from a year ago. And it also mirrors ruffed grouse, which certainly seem to be at the low of their cycle. Survey results will be published in the next issue of this newsletter.

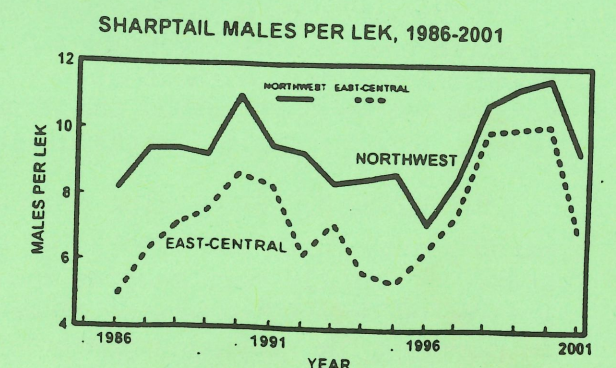
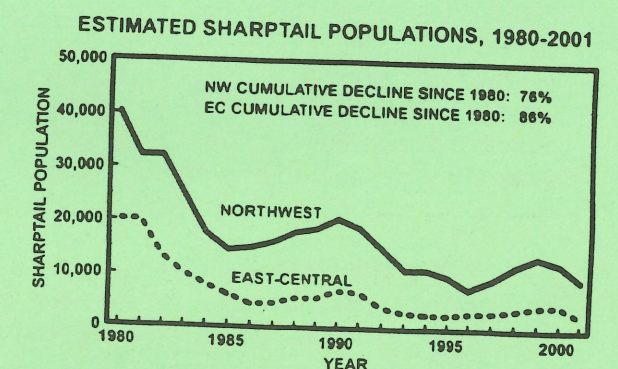
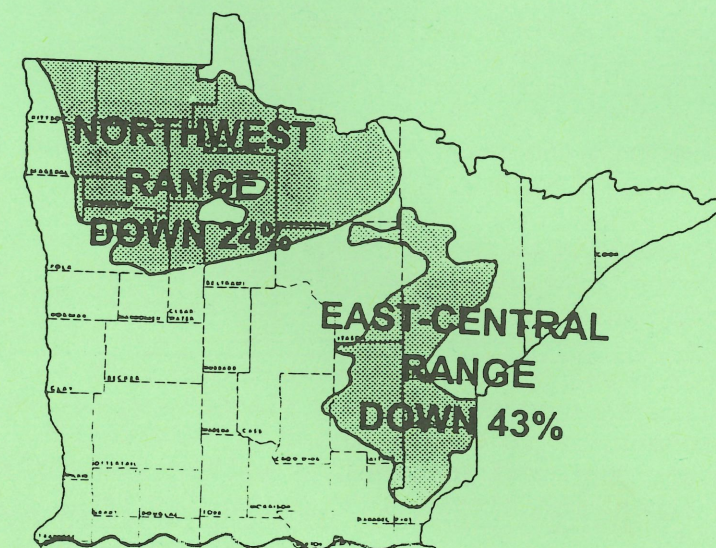
In addition to lower breeding numbers as defined by the dancing ground surveys, the early brood rearing weather was inhospitable. At Spooner there was measurable precipitation on 14 of the first 21 days of June and 12 of those 21 days had lows in the 40's or 30's.

Another factor which enters into Wisconsin sharptail populations is that for the past decade or so, one of the strongholds has been the industrial and county forest lands of Northwest Wisconsin. With the jackpine bud worm outbreak of the early 1990's, many of these forests were harvested. Now the natural and planted pines are growing to a size that precludes sharptails from the landscape.

The Wisconsin DNR issued sharptail hunting permits for three units this year. Unit 10, which includes Crex Meadows, has 200 permits and units 2 and 9, which include the bud worm area have 265 and 165 permits respectively.

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

PUBLICATION OF THE MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY



EARLY WISCONSIN SHARPTAIL RESEARCH 3rd in a series compiled by Jim Hale

"The Central Wisconsin Game Project, Necedah, is a hundred thousand acres of sand and peat. Lumbered off in the '50s, it has been drained, burned, farmed, abandoned, and is now being developed for wildlife."

This is the opening paragraph of a 1939 report by Frederick N. Hamerstrom titled "A Study of Wisconsin Prairie Chicken and Sharp-tailed Grouse." His project was part of the U.S. Farm Security Administration effort to reclaim abandoned lands and re-settle poverty-stricken farmers. Today, the study area includes public lands known as the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge and the State of Wisconsin's Central Wisconsin Conservation Area. The FSA began a wildlife research program in January, 1936, but abandoned it in August, 1937.

Prairie chickens and sharptails were the most important wildlife species on the project lands. Hamerstrom estimated grouse numbers on the project area in the winter of 1936-37 at one grouse per 85-100 acres, with 3 sharptails to every prairie chicken. He noted that these numbers were for a population just past a cyclic low and on a badly damaged range.

Studies were made of sharptail dancing behavior and sites, nesting chronology, egg fertility and viability, clutch sizes, and nest cover types. Here are some quotes from Hamerstrom's discussion of his research:

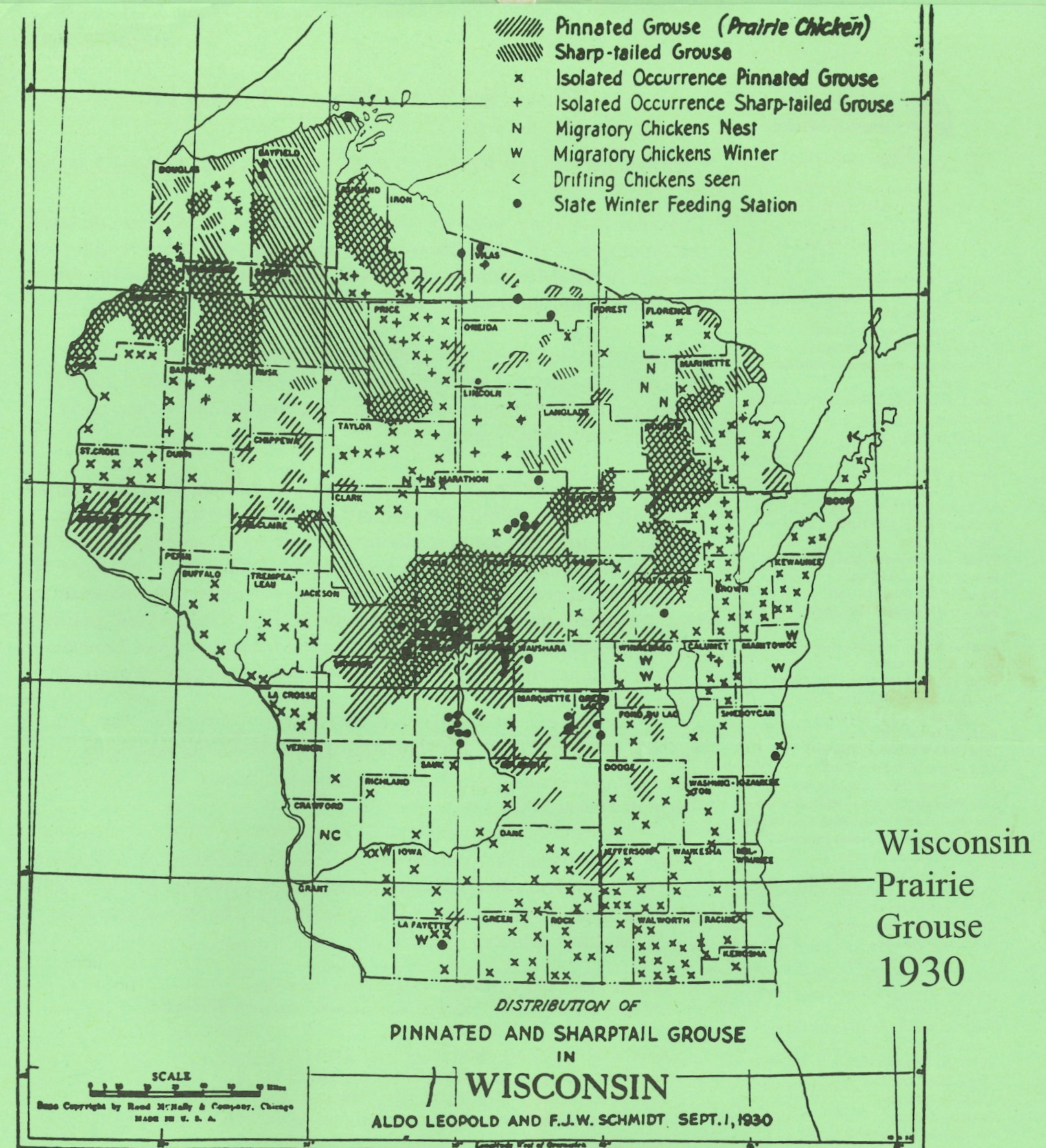
"Many plants were included in the cover at the nests. A few however, occurred again and again at the nests.... They were: bluejoint, sedges, goldenrod, dewberry, bluegrass, willows, blueberry, sweet fern and aspen.... More important than the individual cover plants is the fact that most of the nests were in cover mixtures rather than in pure stands."

"What was the origin of these cover mixtures? Everyone knows what a cover edge is. One glance is enough to tell where the woods end and the meadow begins, a second to see the fringe of brush between. But the significance of that combination of woods, brush and meadow is not to be grasped in a casual moment. The key lies in the fringe of brush. It is a battle ground with the grass of the meadow in the role of defender. The shrubs of the brush zone act as skirmishers: trees generally cannot invade grassland directly, brush must go before. When it has weakened the sod and taken over the battle zone trees come in from behind. With the heavy fighting won, shrub is shaded out by tree, and the edge of the woods has advanced another notch. Grass retreats before brush, woods advance from the rear. It is one step in plant succession."

"It was in the zone of mixed plants between brush and open, and between grass and herbs, that nearly every nest was found. Prairie Chicken and teal preferred the more open nesting sites, Sharp-tails, Ruffed Grouse, and Mallards the heavier brush."

"Man-made changes have provided just these types of cover, but they must be directed toward a better balance. Wildlife management is mainly planned regulation of plant succession: without it, on the Project, it is only a matter of time until succession has gone beyond the proper stage for booming, dancing, and nesting ground cover. Brush invasion, particularly by aspen, has already been pushed too far."

"The water restoration program has begun to win back some of the aspen flats to marsh grass. With the removal of resident farmers, provision must be made to mow, graze, or lightly burn meadows and marsh edges to keep them open. Probably all three will be necessary, as mowing alone tends to make a sharp edge between brush and grass in place of the natural gradation from one to the other."



Those counties shown on the map with a large number of crosses have prairie chicken or sharp-tailed grouse reported for nearly every township but the density of population is not sufficient to indicate an unbroken distribution.

On the basis of these reports the total number of prairie chickens in Wisconsin is estimated to be 54,000 and the total number of sharp-tailed grouse to be 55,000.

August 28, 2001



THE ALLIANCE FOR
THE STEWARDSHIP FUND
P.O. Box 1642
Madison, WI 53701

Aldo Leopold Foundation
Aldo Leopold Nature Center
Bayfield Regional Conservancy
Cable Natural History Museum
Citizens for a Better Environment
Citizens Natural Resources Association
The Clearing
Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation
Door County Land Trust
Drumlin Protection Alliance
Eau Claire Lakes Conservation Club, Inc.
Florence Wild Rivers I.C.
F.O.R.T. Inc.
Fox Cities Greenways, Inc.
Friends of Harrington Beach
Friends of Kohler - Andrae
Friends of Mead/McMillan Association
Friends of Pheasant Branch
Friends of Rib Mountain, Inc.
Friends of Wisconsin State Parks
Gathering Waters, Inc.
Geneva Lake Environmental Agency
Goose Pond Sanctuary
Green Lake Conservancy Foundation
Howards Grove Rod & Gun Club
Ice Age Park & Trail Foundation
Kenosha-Racine Land Trust
Kiap Chapter of Trout Unlimited
Kinnickinnic River Land Trust
Kishwaukee Nature Conservancy
Lake Waubesa Conservation Association
Last Wilderness Conservation Association
Madeline Island Wilderness Preserve
Madison Audubon Society
Muskego Lakes Land Conservancy
Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin
The Nature Conservancy
Newport Wilderness Society
Northland Bowhunters
1000 Friends of Wisconsin
1000 Islands Environmental Center
Ozaukee Washington Land Trust
Pheasants Forever
Pine View Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
Raptor Education Group, Inc.
Red Cedar Pheasants Forever
Ridges Sanctuary, Inc.
The River Alliance
Riveredge Bird Club
Riverside Hunting & Fishing Club
Riverside Urban Environmental Center, Inc.
Sheboygan Area Land Conservancy
Sheboygan County Conservation Association
Soaring Eagle Wildlife Rehabilitation Ctr.
Society of Tympanuchus cupedus pinnatus
Star Prairie Fish & Game Association
Trust for Public Land
Two Rivers Fish & Game Club
Urban Open Space Foundation, Inc.
Waukesha Environmental Action League
Wisconsin's Environmental Decade
Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
Wisconsin Wetlands Association

THANKS TO YOU -- WE DID IT!

STEWARDSHIP FUND INCREASED BY \$112 MILLION!

Governor McCallum announced this week that he would sign into law the expansion of the state Stewardship program. His support will increase funding for land acquisition to \$60 million each year for the next eight years, up from the current level of \$46 million a year.

This would not have happened without strong public support for the Stewardship program. Last week, the Governor's office reported that they have received 20,000 contacts from citizens regarding the budget, many about the Stewardship Fund.

This increase will help Stewardship protect an additional 50,000 acres of parks, forests and wildlife habitat and recreation areas. As our state continues to grow and the pressure increases on our remaining conservation lands, this funding boost will help Stewardship continue to protect some of the best natural gems in our state -- places like our remaining wild lakes and river shorelines, the Middle Kettle Moraine and the Ice Age Trail, prairie savanna remnants, and the bluffs above Lake Michigan in Door County. Thanks to your support, Stewardship will be able to protect more of these places.

The reason the Governor and legislative leaders supported expanding Stewardship is because they heard that their constituents -- people like you - support Stewardship.

Please consider sending a note to Governor Scott McCallum, and Senators Chuck Chvala, Brian Burke, Russ Decker, Kevin Shibilski and Gary George thanking them for their support and leadership for the Stewardship Fund and Wisconsin's outdoors.

Governor McCallum's E-mail: wisgov@gov.state.wi.us
Office of the Governor 115 East State Capitol Madison, WI 53702

Senator Chuck Chvala Sen.Chvala@legis.state.wi.us
Sen. Brian Burke Sen.Burke@legis.state.wi.us
Sen. Russ Decker Sen.Decker@legis.state.wi.us
Sen. Kevin Shibilski Sen.Shibilski@legis.state.wi.us
Sen. Gary George Sen.George@legis.state.wi.us

All Senators: PO Box 7882, Madison WI 53707

Thanks again! We will try to keep you informed about future developments with the Stewardship Fund. If you have any questions about this budget and Stewardship, please feel free to contact Dave Cieslewicz at 1000 Friends of Wisconsin at (608) 259-1000, Vicki Elkin at Gathering Waters Conservancy at (608) 251-9131 or Jordy Jordahl at The Nature Conservancy at (608) 251-8140.

WSGS RECEIVES AN AWARD

The WSGS recently received an award from the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) for "outstanding support of a resource". The framed certificate was presented to WSGS President Jim Evrard at the annual meeting of the WCC in Mishicot.

Jim and his wife made the long trek across Wisconsin from Grantsburg to Mishicot to receive the award. They and other award winners were guests at a small luncheon of the WCC Executive Council and DNR officials at the Fox Ridge Convention Center where the meeting was held.

Following the luncheon, Jim was presented with the award along with Ducks Unlimited (DU) and seven local conservation clubs and groups. The WSGS was runner-up to DU in the competition for the 2001 Wisconsin statewide conservation organization.

The presentation ceremony was a bit unorganized. Despite receiving a letter inviting the WSGS to the ceremony and having the plaque on hand, the WSGS was not on the list given to the WCC Chairman to read to the group. Last minute "corrections" placed the WSGS into the group of local organizations rather into the statewide category with DU.

As a result, Jim was presented with the plaque as a nameless representative of the "Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society of Burnett County". There was no opportunity to accept the award on behalf of the WSGS members and past officers. Regardless, the plaque was correct and could be incorporated into the WSGS exhibit board. Jim also had an opportunity to meet with DNR and WCC officials he knew during his career with the DNR. He and his wife also enjoyed a "free" lunch despite driving more than 600 miles to eat it!

BOARD MEMBER DIES

By Jim Evrard

WSGS Board Member, Don Bronk, died of degenerative heart disease in Wausau on May 28, 2001. Don was a charter member of our organization and one of the 12 volunteer board members when the WSGS was first organized in 1990. He braved a late season blizzard to attend the first WSGS meeting in Lake Holcombe in the spring of 1991.

Don was first elected to the WSGS Board of Directors in 1996 and reelected in 1999. He called me just before our annual meeting this spring, wanting to resign from the Board because of his declining health. I could tell by his voice that he was weak, but he didn't tell me how ill he was. I encouraged him to remain on the Board until his term expired next year.

One of Don's recent contributions to the WSGS was making the local arrangements for our successful Central Wisconsin Habitat Workshop that was held in Wausau in 1998. Another recent contribution was the development of the WSGS embroidered patch that is one of our sales items.

Don first became interested in the plight of the sharp-tailed grouse as a hunter. He observed the decline and eventual disappearance of the sharptails from the Ackley Wildlife Area located just west of Antigo.

Don worked for many years for Marathon County Parks. He was also a successful freelance outdoor writer with articles published in magazines like Wildfowl and the Wisconsin Outdoor Journal. He completed his journalistic career by writing his own eulogy.

His contributions of dry wit and sense of reality at our board meetings will be missed. After listening to the pros and cons of an issue, Don had the ability to cut through the verbiage with a succinct, real world summarization.

Dedicated to the last and knowing of his impending death, Don asked that any memorials be directed to the Nature Conservancy. In his memory, the WSGS made a financial contribution to the Wisconsin Chapter of that organization.



Organizational meeting of WSGS. Don Bronk is fourth from left, standing.

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- Gary Gaard, BRAW (Bluebirds)
- Greg Butcher (Berries For Birds)
- Scott Craven (Coping with Problem Wildlife)
- Marilyn Leys (Living with Wisconsin Wildlife)
- Rebecca Christoffel (Bats...Natural Mosquito Control)
- Eileen Herrling (Bird & Wildlife Photography)
- Rick Bonney (Project Feederwatch, Classroom Feederwatch)
- Tom Hall (Optics ...Beginners to Experts)

Get the answers to your questions **HERE!**

HOURS

Nov. 2 Noon - 9 pm
Nov. 3 9 am - 7 pm
Nov. 4 9 am - 5 pm

TICKETS

Adult (16 yrs +)
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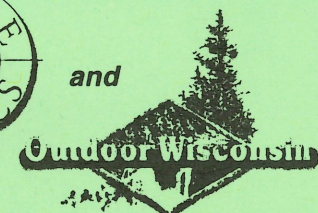
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Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, P.O. Box 1115, Cumberland, WI 54829**

Volunteer Activities

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_____ Bird census work

_____ Publicity

_____ Education

_____ Fund Raising

_____ Four color cloth patch (\$3.50 postage inc.)

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