

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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BOARD MEMBER UPDATES

The 2024 WSGS Board of Directors election results re-instated Paul Kooiker and Ashly Steinke, both seasoned, long-time members.

Paul serves as the WSGS Secretary, is a retired wildlife biologist and former supervisor of the Crex Meadows/Glacial Lake Grantsburg suite of properties. He has worked with sharp-tailed grouse and provided beneficial habitat management for over 30 years. Paul is a charter member of WSGS and has been a Board member for a very long time.

Ashly is a Grassland Ecologist for the National Audubon Society where he promotes and implements the Audubon Conservation Ranching Program throughout the state of Wisconsin. He is currently involved with projects to expand habitat for both Prairie Chickens and Sharp-tails in Wisconsin. In addition, he runs a beef operation that relies on rotational grazing which also provides habitat benefits to grassland wildlife. This is his third term on the Board of Directors having been initially elected in 2018.

The membership unanimously elected first time Board member Mark Parman. Mark is a bird hunter and English setter owner who escaped to the north woods after retiring from the University of Wisconsin where he taught English. He knows a bit about grouse hunting and has authored three books that speak the language of dogs, wild birds, guns and the magic that happens when you put them all together. He has also written a number of articles for Project Upland and Covers, the RGS and AWS publication. We are very pleased to have Mark on board and look forward to his participation.

Around the time of the WSGS annual meeting I received a communication of resignation from WSGS Board member Trevor Hubbs. He informed me he had taken a new job with the Mule Deer Foundation and felt he could not continue to actively contribute. We very much appreciate the effort and insight that Trevor has shared on the Board of Directors during his term of office and wish him all the best in his new position.

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Trevor's resignation obviously created a vacancy on the Board as his term in office was not up until 2025. The decision was made to have the President appoint a replacement Board member from a pool of several interested volunteers. After much discussion and consideration, Paul Cook of Danbury, WI was appointed to fill the vacant Board position for the remainder of the term. Paul is very well qualified for this vacant position, bringing a wealth of applicable experience. He is a retired Burnett County Conservation Specialist, currently serves on the Board of Directors for Friends of Namekagon Barrens and is the owner of Alder Fork Kennel, raising and training English Setters. Paul's insight and experience in conservation and training dogs at Namekagon Barrens WA will be especially helpful as we dig deeper into the sometimes controversial subject of the impact of dog training on wild sharptails. ■

FIND US ONLINE!

Facebook: *Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society*

Instagram: *wisharptails*

Website: *<http://www.wisharptails.org/>*

Email: *information@wisharptails.org*



2024 WSGS ANNUAL MEETING

By: Paul Kooiker

The 2024 Wis. Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Annual Membership meeting started at 10:45 a.m. on July 20th with 23 people present.

Botanist Paul Hlina and Crex Meadows Wildlife Biologist Joe Dittrich presented a slide show program and field tour entitled “Barrens of the Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape”. Paul explained that the original 2.3 million acres of barrens has declined to less than one percent today. He and two of his fellow botanists have conducted field research on eight managed NW Sand Barrens properties during the growing seasons of 2017 thru 2022. They collected 2,213 plant specimens representing 71 families, 217 genera and 404 unique species overall. Plant diversity a.k.a. species richness, is highest at the southern end of this landscape, with Fish Lake and Crex Meadows wildlife areas having the highest rankings of the eight sites sampled. Managed barrens properties to the north and east such as Motts Ravine and Moquah Barrens have progressively lower numbers of individual species likely due to the influence of Lake Superior and the adjacent northern forest landscape. Of interest was their finding that even a newly restored barrens had over 120 plant species, and the fact that red pine plantations in the same general area had a very low plant diversity, i.e. averaging only 35 species.

Paul and Joe then led a field tour to the north end of Crex Meadows looking at several managed barrens sites. Paul described how botanists document plant diversity on both a qualitative and a quantitative scale and worked with participants to identify native species on site.



Botanist Paul Hlina and Crex Biologist Joe Dittrich lead “Plants of the Barrens” field tour

Joe described some of the habitat management techniques used in restoring and maintaining barrens habitat with a focus on prescribed fire.

Back at the Crex Mess Hall attendees enjoyed a typical Wisconsin lunch of brats, burgers and beans.

The afternoon session featured three speakers:

Bob Hanson, DNR Northwest Sands Biologist, described the recently approved “Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan”, and emphasized how important partnerships were in getting this plan approved.

Mike Amman, Bayfield County Forester, described the innovative work that Bayfield County has done in creating a core barrens management area surrounded by a “rolling barrens” that is maintained by rotational timber sales. Sharptails have already found this new habitat and are being monitored for population status.

Ashly Steinke, Grassland Ecologist with the Audubon Society, described a new effort to promote private land habitat restoration project in Oulu township of northern Bayfield County. This is an area of small grassland farms in private ownership that historically had strong sharptail numbers. Over the years woody succession has greatly reduced the quality of sharptail habitat and as a result sharptails have virtually disappeared. Ashly is contacting landowners to talk about restoring grassland wildlife, focusing on sharp-tailed grouse and how their needs were once met in the Oulu area. Many landowners have fond memories of seeing sharptails on their property and expressed interest in exploring options for grassland management that would create habitat attractive to sharp-tailed grouse. WSGS has contributed \$5000 to assist with funding of this project.

At closing, raffle drawing prizes were awarded and President Jonas wrapped up the annual meeting, thanking members for attending, and speakers for their excellent presentations.■



NW Sands Biologist Bob Hanson presents STG Mgmt Plan



Ed Frank, Charter WSGS member and current advisor, wins Maple Syrup and Wild Rice raffle



Mike Johnson, decoy carver, with decoy raffle winner

LAUREN THOMAS WILDLIFE EDUCATION SPECIALIST RECEIVES WSGS RECOGNITION AWARD

Lauren has been organizing and assembling the Wis. Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Newsletter getting it into a print-ready condition ever since she came to Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. Her efforts have allowed the WSGS newsletter to be published on quarterly basis, thus providing a wildlife education venue with a focus on sand barrens and the adapted wildlife community to reach 200+ persons with every issue.

Lauren was a major player in facilitating the tri-state Prairie Grouse Conference held at Crex and co-sponsored by WSGS, in the Summer of 2023. She made sure the organizers were prepped ahead of time with all they needed to know for use of the Crex facilities. Speakers and attendees had access to the necessary classrooms, AV equipment, mess hall, cabins and overnight camping areas, due in a large part to Lauren's efforts.



WSGS also recognizes and commends Lauren for all her wildlife and natural resource educational outreach to the interested public in the greater Crex Meadows and NW Wisconsin area. Through this outreach effort, countless numbers of adults and kids have been given new insights to the natural world and expanded their appreciation of nature to a higher level.

We know that Lauren will continue her efforts in wildlife education well into the future. Next year as spring comes rolling around, she'll be setting up reservations for public use of observation blinds to watch sharp-tails on their traditional dancing grounds, thus contributing to a citizen science survey effort that assists managing this special resource. We know she will be setting up workshops and planning tours that will kindle a new interest or expand knowledge of the outdoors for many. And we also hope she will be figuring out a way to fit all those articles and pictures into the latest edition of the Wis. Sharp-tailed Grouse Society newsletter.

Congratulations Lauren! The membership and Board of Directors of WSGS greatly appreciates all you do for wildlife and people in the NW Sands.■

THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

Officers

President: Ken Jonas
Vice President: Mike Amman
Secretary: Paul Kooiker
Treasurer: Mike Cole

Newsletter Compositor

Lauren Thomas

Board Members

Paul Cook
Bruce Moss
Ashly Steinke
Trevor Bellrichard
Mark Parman

NORTHWEST SANDS PRESCRIBED BURN REPORT

Despite a mostly dry late summer and early fall, timely rains allowed Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources burn crews to successfully conduct 6 prescribed burns on Northwest Sands properties. Those burns totaled 1537 acres, maintaining and enhancing vegetative habitat conditions for sharp-tails and other early successional barrens wildlife. Of special note is the fact that the Douglas County Wildlife Area burned over 600 acres, making it one of the larger burns on this DNR managed property. Additionally, Bayfield County with the assistance of WDNR forestry burned 130 acres on the Barnes Barrens property creating a total 1667 acres of sand barrens habitat rejuvenation thus far in the fall burn program. ■



US FOREST SERVICE WASHBURN DISTRICT UPDATE

By: Aaron Fahlstrom

The United States Forest Service, Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, Washburn Ranger District continued habitat management on the Moquah Barrens this past summer. 20 acres of brushing and mowing occurred on and around historic sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds. A 200-acre brushing contract was recently awarded and the brushing work will take place during the month of October on core Barrens habitat. Prescribed burns on the district totaled 1,853 acres for the year. Technicians will continue to cut brush for habitat improvement and maintenance thru late fall and early winter in the Barrens, until the snow becomes too deep. ■

WSGS T-SHIRTS

Go to <https://wsgs.myspreadshop.com/> and proudly wear our logo.



WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY **REPORT TO THE NORTH AMERICAN GROUSE PARTNERSHIP**

The Wis. Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) has worked to move Wisconsin forward on many fronts involving sharptails over the course of the past 12 months.

We had our first major public relations/fund raising effort beginning the first day of March when WSGS worked a booth during the 3-day National Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic in Sioux Falls S.D. While a long way from our home state, there was no shortage of folks interested in talking Sharp-tails. As our Treasurer Mike Cole said in his report, “We met interesting people, we played with dogs... sold half of our total merchandise inventory and signed up new members”. A truly successful event no matter how you look at it.

On the 10th of April, The Wisconsin Natural Resources Board unanimously approved the latest version of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan in its entirety. This plan has been in the making since May 2022 and has been the major focus of the WDNR Sharp-tailed Grouse Advisory Committee of which the WSGS is an active member. Significant direction for implementation of the approved plan include:

- Focusing management on the existing core range of sharp-tailed grouse in northwest Wisconsin.
- Developing cooperative partnerships between public and private organizations.
- Implementing landscape-level habitat strategies to sustain long-term populations of sharp-tailed grouse.

As part of the plan, new education, public outreach, and updated research priorities for STG are also provided.

Following a recent trend and despite having a nearly snowless winter depriving sharp-tails of snow roosting opportunities, the spring lek surveys showed a 30% increase in dancing males on managed properties and was the highest count since the year 2000.

WSGS also contributed significant funds to partnering projects. The first was working with Bayfield County Forestry Dept. to provide additional partner dollars for the purchase of a portable roller chopper that will be used for open barrens habitat improvement projects on the forest as well as leased to other governmental agencies on similarly managed lands. We have entered into a partnership with the National Audubon Society to partially fund a private landowner grassland initiative in an area recently occupied by sharp-tails. The objective is to work with willing landowners in the area, facilitating “on the ground” habitat projects that will increase suitable grass acreage attractive to a wide variety of avian species that hopefully includes sharp-tails.

We have been active providing comments and gathering support from our members on several proposals that would have significant impacts to prairie grouse and other wildlife in the state. Early in the year, both houses of the state legislature passed a bill that would have allowed dog training year-round in the northern part of Wisconsin that is now closed to protect wildlife during breeding, nesting, birthing and rearing of

young. With a strong campaign from WSGS and like-minded partners and individuals, Governor Tony Evers vetoed the bill on March 29th. We've also been active along with many other organizations and individuals in urging changes on a proposed 6000+ acres solar farm adjacent to Buena Vista WA that is last best place for Greater Prairies Chickens in the state. The final hearing has come and gone with final outcome of the proposal to be determined by the Wis. Public Service Commission and is now pending.

And lastly, we had our annual meeting this past July at Crex Meadows WA with featured presenter, botanist Paul Hlina, providing an insightful look into adapted native plants of the sand barrens.■



WSGS TREASURER'S REPORT **JULY 16, 2024– OCTOBER 8, 2024**

Starting Balance July 16, 2024

17,287.49

Expenditures

USPS—Mail 25 hats, 1 book, 1 knife, 2 prints, (20 postcard, 36 1st Class)	211.02
Food for Annual Meeting	83.76
Duluth Screen Printing (25 each Autumn, Spring, Summer, Flying Sharptail WSGS Hats)	1,976.75
Duluth Screen Printing (30 waxed canvas WSGS hats)	469.50
Red Fox Creations (100 WSGS patches)	281.00
Prairie Moon Nursery (lupine seed— closes out Jim Evrard Memorial Account)	460.00
Lauren Thomas award plaque	58.45
Total	3,540.48

Income

Memberships	5,626.62
Merchandise (not including spreadshirt t-shirts)	696.35
Spreadshirt t-shirts	0.00
Donations (Ugly Dog, Annual Meeting raffle & lunch, Bird-A-Thon)	1140.95
Total	7,463.92

Net Gain for Period

3,923.44

Ending Balance October 8, 2024

21,210.93

Membership Totals

- 7/16/24 203 (includes 61 life members, 9 courtesy)— 34 were removed (Jan/Feb renewal dates), 15 pending renewal (Mar/Apr renewal dates) will be removed from membership roll if not renewed by 9/1/24
- 10/8/24 224 (includes 70 life members, 9 courtesy)— 12 were removed (Mar/Apr 2024 renewal dates), 8 pending renewal (May/Jun/Jul 2024 renewal dates) will be removed from membership roll if not renewed by 11/1/24

Submitted by Mike Cole

10/8/24

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

We are going to a primarily electronic newsletter, with hard copy only on request.

Name: _____
Street/PO Box _____
City: _____ State: _____
Zip: _____
Phone: _____

Would you like to volunteer for:
_____ Board of Directors
_____ Newsletter articles
_____ Other

Email: _____

_____ Electronic Newsletter _____ Hard Copy Newsletter

Dues Enclosed:

\$ _____ Regular - \$30 (receive decal)
\$ _____ Family - \$50 (receive 2 decals)
\$ _____ Sustaining - \$100 (receive hat & decal)
\$ _____ Life - \$300 (receive decal, patch & hat)

***Specify which color hat you want (see <https://wisharptails.org> for hat photos) or let us pick one for you!

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AND RETURN THIS APPLICATION TO:

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

Or visit our website for membership and merchandise orders at <https://wisharptails.org>

Questions? Please e-mail WSGS President, Ken Jonas: kenjon@centurytel.net

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

