

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 107

Fall 2025

2025 SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SEASON UPDATE

By: Ken Jonas

In the last newsletter I reported on the sharp-tailed grouse (stg) spring dancing ground surveys for 2025. The results of the spring survey for the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area met the criteria for the DNR Sharptailed grouse committee to start a discussion on a possible harvest season for the coming fall. That committee recommended moving forward with a 2025 hunting season with 24 harvest tags to be issued. That recommendation passed DNR’s administrative review process and directed the DNR licensing section to move forward with beginning an application. The goal of the application process was the drawing of successful applicants for a hunting permit in what is designated as sharp-tailed grouse management unit 10, that encompasses Crex Meadows WA. As with any hunting season established within the boundaries of the ceded territory designated in the 1837 and 1842 treaties with the Ojibwa nation, half of any state of Wisconsin harvest quota in the ceded territory are allotted to those tribes. That action left a total of 12 permits remaining for state hunter awarding. Because of existing regulations, sharp-tail permits for state applicants are issued via a preference point system, where each year a person applies for a permit, one point is accumulated. This results in only individuals with the highest number of preference points for sharp-tail grouse permits being considered for the hunting draw. In Wisconsin 11 applicants had accumulated 3 preference points and were issued tags. One of the 59 people with 2 pts. also won the tag lottery. A grand total of 790 persons applied for a 2025 stg harvest permit.

Obviously, most applicants will now have only one or two preference points based on this year’s application. With the assumptions of low or no permits available for future hunting seasons in any zone, the odds of ever getting drawn for a harvest tag are low. To level the playing field, a legislative rule change is necessary to create a truly random drawing for future stg harvest tags. WSGS is aware of what it takes to change the current process and is considering options to pursue that change. Stay tuned! ■

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DRONE HERBICIDE APPLICATION

This is a follow-up on the project at Crex Meadows that WSGS helped fund (\$5000).



Herbicide applicator Native Resource Preservation LLC (NRP) completed 105 acres of drone herbicide application on Crex Meadows on August 28, 29, and September 5. The entire application took less than 2 full days, but weather (rain) stopped the application on August 29.

View the overview map showing the treatment areas on page 3 (86W = 55.6 acres, 86E=47.8 acres, NF Island = 1.25 acres). We were targeting woody vegetation in all three

treatment areas.

Both 86W and 86E were targeted to kill and reduce the coverage of aspen and hazel (and oak and willow). The goal of the treatment was to discourage woody vegetation and encourage grass and forb growth. If successful, the areas will become more grass dominated leading to a more open viewshed, improved prescribed burn efficiency, and less need for mechanical treatments (mowing/roller chopping). In the past it has been difficult to get fire to carry through these areas, especially backing fire. These two areas were treated with Milestone (7oz/acre) and Escort XP (1oz/acre). We are anticipating 80% control on the aspen.

The North Fork island treatment was conducted to kill hazel (dominant woody veg), increase grasses and forbs, and improve burn efficiency. This island is managed mainly for the benefit of nesting waterfowl. The treatment was completed with 5 pints/acre Garlon 3a. ■



THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

Officers

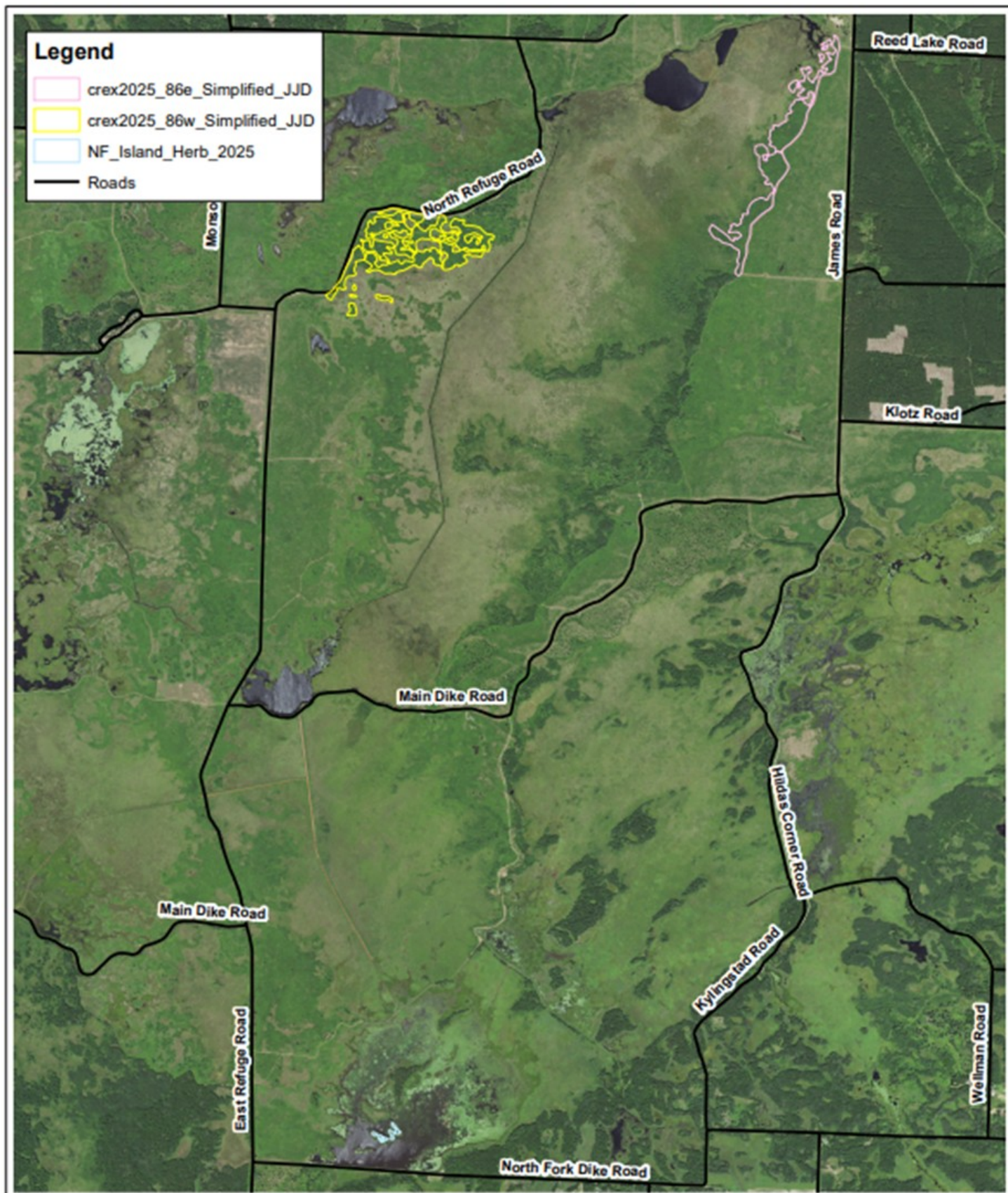
President: Mike Cole
Vice President: Mike Amman
Secretary: Paul Kooiker
Treasurer: Mark Parman

Board Members

Paul Cook
Ken Jonas
Ashly Steinke
Trevor Bellrichard
Steve Straub

Newsletter Compositor

Lauren Thomas



Crex Aerial Herbicide 2025 Overview

RECENT PODCASTS FEATURING WSGS

WSGS was recently featured on two podcasts. VP Mike Amman is the guest on both, so you know they will be informative and entertaining. You can watch and/or listen to these at the links listed.

Birdshot Podcast Episode #325 “*Conserving Sharp-Tailed Grouse Habitat in Wisconsin with Mike Amman*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0lwQfrIcZQ>

The Flush Podcast Episode #275 “*Grouse Hunting from Wisconsin to Montana*”

[https://podcasts.apple.com/dk/podcast/grouse-hunting-from-wisconsin-to-montana/id1497704723?
i=1000720011939](https://podcasts.apple.com/dk/podcast/grouse-hunting-from-wisconsin-to-montana/id1497704723?i=1000720011939)

WSGS ANNUAL MEETING **JULY 19, 2025** **NAMEKAGON BARRENS WILDLIFE AREA**

WSGS and the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (FNBWA) co-hosted the “Blueberries in the Barrens” event at the NBWA pavilion.

WSGS Business Meeting

Present: Ken Jonas, Mike Cole, Mike Amman, Bruce Moss, Trevor Bellrichard, Ashly Steinke, Mark Parman, Paul Cook, Paul Kooiker.

Board emeritus members included Dave Evenson, Dave Clausen, and Tom Zeigeweid.

Total attendance was 18 members. Meeting started at 9:20 am

- Reviewed and approved June 3, 2025 BOD minutes (BM/PC).
- Treasurer’s report by Mike Cole (June 3 – July 19, 2025): beginning balance was \$26,436 and ending balance was \$26,724. A pending expense is \$5000, WSGS’ contribution to the Crex Meadows herbicide aspen treatment project. Current membership is 253, of which 77 are life members. Nearly all membership renewals are now by auto renewal, which has proven to be very successful. Treasurer’s report approved (PK/MP).
- Archiving WSGS Board of Directors meeting minutes: past BOD minutes exist as both hard copies and electronic files and are stored in several locations. It was suggested that we consolidate past minutes in one location. Recently Trevor B. was able to scan WSGS newsletters going back to 2015 and posted them on our website. Trevor stated he would be able and willing to do this with past minutes, including scanning all the hard copy versions. They can then be posted on the WSGS website, like the newsletters. Mike C. and Paul K. offered to consolidate all electronic and hard copy minutes and transfer them to Trevor. Paul will talk to Crex staff about a permanent storage location at Crex for all past hard copy newsletters

(Continued on page 5)

going back to 1990. There was consensus to proceed as discussed.

- Celebration of STG hunting season: Ashly S. proposed that WSGS host a fundraiser event to celebrate the upcoming 2025 sharptail hunting season (limited to the Crex Meadows sub-population) which is a measure of the positive trend in STG population numbers. The last sharptail hunt in Wisconsin was in 2018. The goal would be to attract 100 attendees at \$200 each, generating \$20,000, to be held the weekend of the sharptail opener. A discussion ensued addressing the timetable, potential turnout, venue, meals, and general logistics. An ad hoc committee of Mike C., Ashly, Trevor, and Paul K. will follow up on this proposal.
- Ken J. announced the results of the election of BOD candidates. The three candidates, incumbents Trevor Bellrichard and Paul Cook, and Steve Stroub, were all elected for three-year terms to the BOD. Bruce Moss, a long time Board member, had elected not to run again. Many thanks to Bruce for his service to WSGS; he will continue as an Emeritus board member.
- 2025-2026 BOD officer election: Ken J. had advised the BOD earlier that he intended to step down as President following this annual meeting, although he would stay on as a board member. Thanks to Ken for his leadership over the past several years. Mike Cole was then nominated (KJ/PK) and was unanimously elected as the next BOD President. Mike Amman was then nominated (AS/PC) and was unanimously re-elected to continue as Vice President. Paul Kooiker was nominated (MA/AS) to continue as Secretary and was unanimously re-elected. Mark Parman was nominated (MA/AS) to replace Mike Cole as Treasurer and was unanimously elected to that position.
- ADDENDUM (Submitted September 15, 2025):
 - ⇒ A week after the July 19, 2025 annual meeting, Trevor Bellrichard e-mailed the Board with a proposal to enhance public reporting of sharp-tailed grouse on managed barrens properties. WSGS would fund the production of up to 30 signs to be placed at the discretion of property managers. These signs would have a QR code that could be scanned by birders, dog trainers, hunters, and other property users. The QR code would take the observer to the Department's Sharp-tailed Grouse Survey site, where they could quickly record the details of their encounter with sharptails. WDNR staff have already approved the concept and the design of the sign. Trevor has obtained a quote of \$420 for 30 color, aluminum composite signs.
 - ⇒ An e-mail discussion ensued, with general support for the proposal, along with some comments on verbiage, over-signage of properties, potential vandalism, and potential value of the data collected.
 - ⇒ Mike Cole made a motion to approve the project, as follows: **"I move that WSGS purchase these signs for \$420, along with funding the purchase of signposts as needed. These signs can be placed at the discretion of the Property Manager and Bob Hanson to achieve maximum effect. Total WSGS expenditure not to exceed \$1000."** The motion was seconded by Mike Amman. No formal vote was taken, but the motion was approved by consensus.

WSGS BOD Meeting adjourned at 10:14 am (BM/MC)

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Joint Meeting of WSGS and FNBWA

Meeting started at 10:42 am, with approximately 85 people in attendance.

Gary Dunsmoor welcomed the group to Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area and introduced the speakers.

- Ken Jonas briefly described WSGS's history and noted that the goals of both organizations are the same, the restoration and maintenance of the globally endangered pine barrens, and their associated flora and fauna.
- Kyle Johnson, Lepidopterist with the Minnesota Biological Survey, led a very interesting question and answer session on moths and butterflies, with special emphasis on barrens dependent species. An interesting factoid is that leps are the largest class of animals in terms of both species and total biomass.
- Bob Hanson, WDNR Northwest Sands Biologist, described the recently approved Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan. This plan emphasizes the importance of sharptail habitat connectivity, i.e. connecting managed barrens properties with smaller barrens "steppingstones". The goal is to restore and maintain a minimum of 50,000 acres of quality sharptail habitat in northwest Wisconsin. Bob also explained the rationale for a limited sharptail hunt at Crex Meadows this coming fall of 2025. This hunt reflects a positive trend in sharptail numbers on managed properties. The last sharptail hunt in Wisconsin was in 2018.
- Dave Clausen talked about the long-term monitoring project of bluebird houses on the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. This effort began in 2010, and Dave and his wife took over monitoring in 2018. Currently 24 bluebird houses are being checked several times each spring and summer. Of interest is the great variability in nest success and chick survival, fluctuating from a low of 12 to a high of 95 chicks produced. This variability between years is largely due to spring and early summer weather conditions, with cold and wet conditions having a negative effect on survival.
- Dave Evenson gave an update on the Northwest Sands Auto Trail. This auto tour is comprised of 47 stops retracing the historic trail from St. Croix Falls to Madeline Island in Bayfield County. This was originally an overland Indian trail, then later a stagecoach route.
- Gary Dunsmoor spoke on behalf of the FNBWA, which currently is 400 members strong. He described some of the activities of the organization, including trash pickup, providing sharp-tailed grouse viewing blinds, and hosting Natural Resource Foundation field trips.
- The formal program ended at 12:10 pm, followed by lunch and door prizes. Thanks to Ashly for providing grass-fed beef hamburgers, and to everyone who donated gifts for door prizes.■

Submitted by Paul Kooiker

August 11, 2025



WSGS TREASURER'S REPORT
JUNE 3, 2025– JULY 19, 2025

Starting Balance June 3, 2025

26,436.29

Expenditures

USPS — Shipped 4 prints, 4 hats, (90) first class stamps (newsletter & flyer)	122.25
Newsletter Printing	184.00
Print Annual Meeting flyers	12.55
Amazon (shipping labels for hats, knives, prints, etc.)	16.48
Total	335.28

Pending Expenditure– \$5,000 for Crex Meadows herbicide aspen treatment

Income

Memberships	463.40
Merchandise	34.66
Donations (Dhein, Camp Co.)	125.00
Total	623.06

Net Gain for Period

287.78

Ending Balance July 19, 2025

26,724.07

Membership Totals

6/3/2025 246 (includes 76 life members, 9 courtesy) — 11 were removed (March 2025 re-newal date), 7 pending removal (April/May 2025 renewal dates) if not paid up by 7/19/25.

7/19/2025 253 (includes 77 life members, 9 courtesy) — 1 was removed (February 2025 renewal date), 2 pending removal (April/May 2025 renewal dates) if not paid by 7/20/2025.

Submitted by Mike Cole 7/19/25



*Photo Credit:
Alan Toczydlowski; taken at
Crex Meadows in Spring 2025*

SHARPTAIL SIGNAGE

By Trevor Beltrichard

The Wisconsin Sharptailed Grouse Society (WSGS) has partnered with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to place these signs on public lands where Sharptails are known to reside. Each sign was designed by our team to help connect bird enthusiasts, hunters, and conservationists with vital information about these incredible birds.

Our goal is simple: when you spot a Sharptail, scan the QR Code on the sign and report your sighting. While we have learned a lot about these birds and their habitat, there is still much to discover about their behavior, movements, and the landscape they call home. Your observations help fill in those gaps and provide important data to guide conservation efforts.

For the easiest experience, we recommend downloading the ArcGIS Survey123 app before heading out to the barrens. With the app ready, scanning the QR Code will take you directly to the survey, making it quick and simple to submit your sighting in the field.

Reporting is straightforward and does not require creating an account, so anyone can contribute to this important effort.

Thank you for helping us better understand and protect Sharptails—your participation makes a real difference! ■



FIND US ONLINE!

Facebook: *Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society*

Instagram: *wisharptails*

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

Email: information@wisharptails.org

NOTES FROM THE NEW GUY

By Mike Cole

Hi, you probably have not seen my name before unless you happen to pay close attention to the WSGS Treasurer's report, which I have submitted regularly since 2022. I have been a member since 2008. Over the years I have hunted STG in North Dakota with Jim Evrard, Dave Evenson and Bruce Moss. I hunted with those same gents in Wisconsin when there was a season and harvested a bird in 2015 at Namekagon. The Board of Directors "kicked me up" to President at the Annual Meeting in July. I will work hard for the organization to continue assisting the rebound of STG in Wisconsin.

Two members of the WSGS BOD drew a 2025 tag to hunt STG in Wisconsin (Ashly Steinke and myself). Ashly plans to use Mike Amman's well-trained and very stylish setters (just the dogs, Mike is not allowed to hunt) to help improve his odds. Ashly and Mike both live a distance from Crex (in opposite directions) so they won't have unlimited time to hunt. I happen to live about ten minutes from Crex, so it is feasible for me to hunt for a short period each day. For that reason, I plan to use my eleven year old Shorthair for this hunt. Arthritis is starting to take its toll on Remi. He has hunted STG in North Dakota for years, but this is his first chance for a Wisconsin bird (given his age, it will almost certainly be his only). So the plan is to hunt a few hours every day that we can, moving regularly to new areas if we are not finding birds. If we harvest one, great. If we don't, the goal will be to have a heck of a good time not doing so!

We hope you enjoy this issue of the newsletter. As always, there is a lot going on with STG in Wisconsin and WSGS trying to stay involved where we can. Have a safe and enjoyable fall season! If you happen to be in the NW Sands area doing something STG related, consider stopping at some of the local establishments for supplies and refreshments if you are able. Let those merchants know you are in the area enjoying the birds. It might just help someone see the STG as a more valuable component and give them incentive to support.■



*Photo Credit:
Alan Toczydlowski; taken at
Crex Meadows in Spring 2025*

WSGS UPDATE FOR NORTH AMERICAN GROUSE PARTNERSHIP MAGAZINE

- Wisconsin's big news in 2025 is the limited STG hunting season (Crex Meadows only, small number of permits), after seven years of none. This first milestone is the result of hard work and support from many people!
- Spring dancing male counts in WI were 271, versus 253 in 2024. Crex Meadows count was 119 versus 102 in 2024 (this increase, along with meeting other criteria led to approval of a hunting season on Crex).
- Crex, Namekagon Barrens, Douglas County WA and Barnes Barrens accomplished 4729, 1290, 313 and 161 acres respectively of prescribed burns in spring of 2025.
- WSGS funded 100 acres of herbicide application on Crex Meadows for aspen using a drone to pinpoint locations. Also funded Lupine seeding at Crex on newly-constructed firebreaks and sites within Karner Blue butterfly refugia.
- We are partnering with Wisconsin DNR to gather STG info from users of Barrens properties. WSGS designed and purchased approved signage for WDNR to place at select areas on NW WI barrens. When someone encounters a STG (hunter, dog trainer, bird watcher) they can scan the QR code on the sign to record the details on-line.
- Members of WSGS BOD appeared on several national podcasts in 2025, most recently "The Flush" with Travis Frank.
- Our Annual Meeting was held at the Namekagon Barrens in conjunction with their Friends group. Presenters discussed updates from both organizations, insect-life on the Barrens and STG management updates. Likely a record attendance and certainly an outstanding lunch!
- WSGS' partnership with the National Audubon Society to partially fund a private landowner grassland initiative in the far northern part of the state paid off as a Federal grant for \$200,000 was awarded to the project.
- WSGS was one of many organizations and individuals urging changes on a proposed 6000+ acres solar farm adjacent to the Buena Vista Wildlife Area, home to the last 400 Greater Prairie Chickens in the state. The most critical 750 acres were removed from the development and \$1 Million was donated by the developer for habitat restoration and land acquisition. ■

DOG TRAINING IN WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE COUNTRY

Northwest Wisconsin's population of sharp-tailed grouse has responded positively to habitat improvements in recent years. Bird dog owners and professional dog trainers have realized the opportunity to train dogs on wild prairie grouse in this remote pocket of the badger state.

People who experience these amazing native game birds in their natural setting often become advocates for the conservation of this rare species. The remnant coveys we have represent a tiny percentage of the flock that once graced Wisconsin's grasslands and barrens. We owe it to the birds to ensure that we minimize negative impacts of human and dog interactions while providing the chance to partake in training.

In August 2025, Wisconsin DNR staff, along with Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society volunteers, conducted interviews with people training bird dogs at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area and the Namekagon Barrens. Questions profiled trainers, and gained insights from the trainers regarding the amount of pressure on the resource, and timing of the training window.

The effort to secure trainer input was led by Cody Strong, Area Wildlife Supervisor out of the DNR Spooner Service Center, and Bob Hanson, Senior Wildlife Biologist at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. In the months ahead, survey input from this qualitative research will be analyzed by Lauren Bradshaw, Natural Resources Sociologist from the Bureau of Environmental Analysis & Sustainability.

Look for more information from the analysis in a future issue of this newsletter.■



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL
Newsletter is primarily electronic, 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, Mike Cole: colesfour@gmail.com

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

