

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

PUBLICATION OF THE MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY



P.O. BOX 3338
DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55803

SPRING-SUMMER 2012



SHARPIES DOWN SOME, RUFFS TUMBLE

The spring 2012 grouse surveys did not bode well for either sharp-tailed grouse or ruffed grouse. There were several contributing factors, including the "poor grouse winter" and "the 10 year cycle is on the downward side." For the last 2 years, sharptail males on dancing grounds have declined slightly, and 2010 continued that trend, but the 9.2 males per lek range-wide was similar to the long-term average since 1980. Counts declined from 2011 by 18% in the Northwest Survey Zone, and 33% in the East-Central. In the last 25 years, the range-wide number of males per lek have ranged from 7.0 to 13.6

Ruffed grouse drums declined to 0.9 drums per stop in the Norwest Survey Zone and to 1.1 drums per stop in the Northeast. Declines were much less in the Central Hardwoods and Southeast, to 0.6 and 0.7 drums per stop, respectively. The 2012 range-wide average of 1.0 drums per stop was far less than in 2010 (1.5) and 2011 (1.7). The above information was provided by Dr. Mike Larson, who heads up the DNR grouse surveys.

Following is added commentary by Bill Berg, who coordinated the grouse surveys from 1971 to 2001, and who still stays involved. The "10 year cycle" pertains more to ruffed grouse than sharptails, but still affects both species. It affects sharptails less because of their varied diet, compared to the ruff's reliance on mainly aspen for habitat and diet. The ruff's almost catastrophic decline from 2011 to 2012 was also due to the record-mild winter. Energy-budget-wise, that should benefit both species. But the absence or lack of adequate roosting snow doomed ruffed grouse, both in terms of energy budget but especially, predation. Whereas sharpies can roost in any tall grass or sedge, ruffs were exposed to the elements nearly all winter.

On top of that, the flooding caused by the heavy rains of mid-June, especially in east-central and northeast Minnesota, likely wiped out most of the ruff and sharptail broods. In contrast, in the northwest, numerous grouse broods are being seen.

The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Board of Directors

The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) is a private, non-profit 501-C-3 conservation organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Minnesota. MSGS is dedicated to the management and restoration of sharptails in Minnesota for the benefit of hunters and non-hunters. www.sharptails.org.

President: Roche Lally

Vice President: Vacant

Secretary: Greg Nelson

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Director at Large: Brian Goodspeed

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Volunteer Habitat Development Coordinator: Bill Berg

Special Projects: Jamie Slade

Student/College relations: Dr. Bill Faber

Merchandise: Perry Nichols

Private Lands: (ex-officio volunteer) Jodie Provost,

Private Lands: (ex-officio volunteer) Dave Pauly

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MAY 9 MSGS BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Your MSGS Board met on May 9, 2012, in the meadow of the Kroschel WMA northwest of Hinckley. The spectacular views of sharptail country, highlighted by the calls of sandhill cranes and bobolinks, a watchable black bear, and a great meal (compliments of Dave Pauly and Jodie Provost) made for a special evening.

-----Bill Berg reported on the ending of the Heritage Enhancement Grants, and the closure of the Habitat Developments Account. Except for the winter brush cut, MSGS is now (sadly) out of the habitat management business (except for the Winter Brush Cut), but it is in the habitat acquisition business. See the Accomplishments Report in this issue.

-----Wayne Hoshal has now received from Bill Goldberg (MSGS CPA) two batches of renewal and new member forms. Delayed check cashing continues to be a problem during tax return season.

-----The next newsletter will likely be a combined Spring-Summer issue. The annual Magazine issue will likely be a combined Fall-Winter issue; content tabled for the August Board meeting.

-----Jodie Provost provided an update on the proposed USDA Grouse-Woodcock position to be located at Aitkin, and that full funding from partners has not yet been obtained.

-----Ward will check on the availability of MSGS caps and t-shirts, and report back to the Board.

-----Ward, Dave Pauly, and Jodie Provost reported on the proposed acquisition of private brushland tracts using Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council grants. There is one now acquired, one near completion, and there are several more on the DNR and MSGS "wish list."

-----Private landowners who have permitted observation blinds on their land will receive "thank you" DVD's of sharptails dancing, compliments of MSGS.

-----The MSGS By-Laws are old (1986) and in need of updating. For example, there is no mention of as much as a MSGS Board of Directors. The subject of e-voting on crucial issues needs to be discussed and implemented. A By-Laws Revision Committee was formed, to present its recommendations to the Board at the next meeting.

-----Whereas 2012 was an "off year" for a Spring Fling, there should be one in 2013. The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society has expressed interest in a joint meeting with MSGS.

-----Bill Berg transferred much of his MSGS inventory to Ward Julien, and distributed complete collections of newsletters dating back to 1986 to all Board members. The possibility of digitizing the entire collection was discussed, with no action taken.

-----The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for August 15, location to be on the MSGS web.

2012 WINTER BRUSH CUT

The brush cut is history. Due to a heavy snowfall, the site was moved at the last minute from the Soo Line to the Wagner Brushland Unit. Forty-four MSGS folks volunteered their Saturday to help DNR open this brushland tract, and around 35 acres were flattened. Students from Central Lakes College and Vermillion College provided much of the muscle power, fueled by bog burgers and bog brats grilled by MSGS "cooks." Elsewhere in this issue are photos of this good time.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

As you can see in this issue of *The Minnesota Sharptail*, the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society is a busy place. From meager beginnings, MSGS stays involved in many activities, and had accomplished so much, and all with volunteers. But in order to continue this work, MSGS needs your membership renewal, or better yet, your's and your brushland-sharptail enthusiast friend's. Please check the mailing label date to see if your membership has expired or about to expire and maybe consider an upgrade. An application is included in this issue. You can keep abreast of MSGS happenings on the web, www.sharptails.org.



2012 MSGS Brush Cut "Just One More"

To Aitkin County's brushlands,
forty-four hearty souls did flock,
to forage at Palisade Café,
and share in sharptail talk.

A passionate crew we were,
of teacher, student, biologist, hunter and more,
with dedication and age ranging
from seventeen to eighty-four.



At Wagner Brushland,
we scattered widely across the bog.
An army with tools for woody destruction,
we whacked, snipped and sawed.

Good natured chortles and chuckles
breezily floated over bog birch.
"Hey, you need some Advil?"
"Nah, my back don't hurt."



Time flew as we wandered
over nature's lab tea covered floor.
"Time for bog burgers already?"
Wait, I've gotta cut, just one more!"

Through humor and sweat, old friendships grew stronger,
while new bonds were tied.
Like a battle field, spruce and tamarack fell ("Timber!"),
and the vista grew beautifully wide.



Come mid afternoon,
our task had met with success.
Thirty-two acres were leveled
- what a sweet mess.

So bring on the sharptail!
Let them nest, raise their young and explore.
It was time to head home,
"Oh, but wait, I've gotta cut, just one more!"



By Jodie Provost



MSGS ACCOMPLISHMENT SUMMARY

When the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) was founded in 1985, its goal was to keep the sharptail from going extinct in Minnesota. MSGS hoped that by educating the public and working with natural resource managers, renewed interest in the sharptail and its habitat would generate additional funding from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for habitat work on public and private lands. Fairly soon, MSGS had a membership base of about 300 members and a Board of Directors. MSGS adopted bylaws and became incorporated, and was approved by the IRS as a 501-C tax-exempt organization.

MSGS soon had various fundraisers. For a few years there were annual raffles for a shotgun, a dog, and other prizes. While there was never a bulging treasury, MSGS was able to get a lot done for a small conservation organization. Following is a summary of some accomplishments.

- **Donated \$500 to DNR for repair of a J-7 Bombardier tracked vehicle for use in prescribed burning.
- **Obtained small grain seed for landowners to seed food plots on private land.
- **Donated \$1,000 to DNR for equipping support trailers for helitorch prescribed burning.
- **Purchased promotional materials for cooperators in Conservation Reserve Program sign-ups.
- **Printed a MSGS Sharptail Habitat Management Guide for private landowners.
- **Assisted DNR in publishing Wildlife Research Bulletin No. 10, *The Sharp-tailed Grouse in Minnesota*.
- **Hosted biannual Spring Fling Meetings at various locations around the state.
- **Donated \$700 to DNR to pay DNR Technicians for overtime in prescribed burning.
- **Donated \$500 to DNR for printing its Sharp-tailed Grouse Management on Private Lands brochure.
- **Recipient of the Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society Conservation Award in 1999.
- **Donated building materials to DNR for building sharptail observation blinds.
- **Helped obtain a \$200,000 LCMR grant to research the feasibility of brush biomass for energy.
- **Received a \$30,000 grant from LCMR to evaluate brush savannas in east-central Minnesota.
- **Donated to the Long Lake Conservation Center building fund.
- **Helped form sharptail advocate organizations in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Manitoba.
- **Participated in DNR's Long Range Sharptail Management Planning process, and the Hunting Roundtable.
- **Since 1986 sponsored annual hands-on winter brushland habitat projects, which has resulted in the management of hundreds of acres of habitat.
- **Received over \$850,000 in Heritage Enhancement habitat grants from DNR since 2002 which enabled MSGS to manage tens of thousands acres of open land habitat using shearing, hydroaxing, prescribed burning, mowing, and hand cutting. Heritage Enhancement Grants ended in 2010.
- **In 2010 received a \$30,000 Conservation Partners Legacy Grant from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund for habitat work on the Roseau River WMA.
- **Beginning in 2010, MSGS, through collaboration with other Conservation Partners, began looking at the acquisition of critical parcels of private land, and making them WMAs. The first of these was a direct purchase of 80 acres near Palisade, which became the Gun Lake WMA. Then MSGS and Pheasants Forever collaborated to purchase two private holdings through the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund, a 1,285 acre parcel (Holy Cow Ranch) adjacent to the Kroschel WMA, and a 960 acre parcel (Pomroy Pastures) both near Hinckley. There are several others planned, each of which will greatly enhance the habitat quality in the east-central sharptail range.

MSGS IS ON THE WEB AT www.sharptails.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

Please renew or become a new member in the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society today. There are several membership types (see below). Complete the form and mail with remittance to: Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, P. O. Box 3338, Duluth, Minnesota, 55803.

NAME _____ PHONE _____ - _____

ADDRESS _____ E-MAIL _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____ - _____

NEW MEMBER _____ RENEWING MEMBER _____ ENCLOSED IS \$ _____ FOR ONE OF

THE FOLLOWING MEMBERSHIPS: REGULAR _____ SUPPORTING _____

CONTRIBUTING _____ SUSTAINING _____ SPONSOR _____ LIFE _____ (See category listing)

MSGS MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:

REGULAR: Annual dues of just \$5. Includes newsletters and window decal.

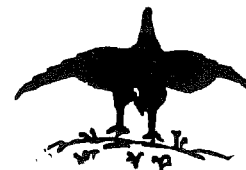
SUPPORTING: Annual dues of \$15. Includes newsletters and window decal.

CONTRIBUTING: Dues of \$50. Includes MSGS cap (specify tan or orange), newsletters, and decal.

SUSTAINING: Person or organization initially paying \$100. Includes MSGS t-shirt (specify green or tan and size). Includes unframed MSGS 17" x 22" Karen Smith sharptail print, newsletters, and window decal.

SPONSOR: Person or organization initially paying \$200. Includes framed 17" x 22" MSGS sharptail print by Karen Smith, newsletters, and window decal.

LIFE: Person or organization paying dues of \$500 once. Includes a framed 17" x 22" MSGS sharptail print by Karen Smith with inlaid engraved plaque of appreciation, newsletters, and window decal.



The four DNR (and retired DNR) folks who took a Saturday away from their families to make the 2012 brush cut tick. Left to right: Jodie Provost, Dave Dickey (retired), Dave Pauly, and Dave Kanz.

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**POSTMASTER: ADDRESS CORRECTION
REQUESTED**



TO:

MEMBERSHIP EXPIRES ON THE DATE AFTER YOUR NAME. PLEASE RENEW TODAY!



Most of the 2012 winter brush project crew. Vermillion (Ely) and Central Lakes (Brainerd) Colleges provided many of the workers, and each received a 2012 year tab insert for their MSGS Karen Smith sharptail print. Photo by Gregg Nelson.