

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

PUBLICATION OF THE MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY



P.O. BOX 3338
DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55803

SPRING 2013



JOINT MSGS & WSGS SPRING FLING-WORKSHOP APRIL 26-27

The first-ever joint meeting of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) and the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS). These two "home grown" conservation groups have championed the way for sharp-tailed grouse and brushland management for more than 25 years. One can only ponder where Wisconsin and Minnesota sharptails and their respective open land ecosystems would be today if these two organizations hadn't come along.

What makes this joint meeting so special is that it happens at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center on the Crex Meadows Wildlife Management Area, at Grantsburg, Wisconsin, just a little over an hour from the Twin Cities, where most of MSGS members reside. The event is a two-day affair, with presentations, field trips, presentations, and social interaction. Inside this newsletter you'll find a registration form and tentative agenda.

Friday: On Friday April 26, there is the joint WSGS and MSGS Technical Workshop that will address habitat management, connecting corridors, genetics, and partnerships. It is intended for both professional resource managers and sharptail and brushland enthusiasts alike. As you see by the enclosed tentative agenda, the day is jam-packed with great presentations and a field trip. It will be followed in the evening by a social, dinner, and fund-raiser.

Saturday: Saturday April 27 follows with the joint Spring Fling and Annual meetings of both WSGS and MSGS. For the early risers there will be visits to blinds and a field trip, and breakfast on your own. The joint meeting itself will feature more presentations on Minnesota and Wisconsin brushland management, as well as progress reports on various management activities. In the afternoon there will be separate annual meetings of each group. See tentative agenda.

Registration and meals: The registration mailer is enclosed. Just complete it, enclose your check (you can also pay at the meeting), fold, and be sure to mail before April 18. The \$10 registration fee covers the cost of the Friday evening social and all breaks on both days. There are nominal costs for the catered lunches and Friday dinner (see form). Checks should be made payable to the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society.

Lodging: There are rustic cabin and bunk room lodging facilities right at Crex, available on a first-call basis, phone 715-463-CREX. Also, a block of 10 rooms has been reserved at the Wood River Motel for \$56/night, 715-463-2541. Rooms are also available in Siren The Best Western Northwoods Lodge, 877-349-7800 and at The Lodge at Crooked Lake 877-THE Lodge.

Other information: You can find additional and updated information both at the MSGS (www.sharptails.org) and WSGS (www.wisharptails.org) websites. For directions to Crex, see www.crexmeadows.org. If you have any questions please call Daye Evenson 715-822-3397. Both groups will have merchandise for sale, and a fundraiser. You are encouraged to bring used, new, and handmade items to donate for the fundraisers. It's also best to bring more than one check, to simplify the work of the MSGS and WSGS treasurers.

This promises to be an educational and fun event. You are encouraged to come for any one day, or both. Your attendance and support are appreciated!

dedicated to the management and restoration of sharptails
in Minnesota for the benefit of hunters and non-hunters

WANTED: A PLACE TO DANCE FOR SHARP-TAILED GROUSE IN EAST-CENTRAL MINNESOTA

Jodie Provost

Minnesota's east-central sharp-tailed grouse population continues a gradual, long term decline due to loss of suitable brushland habitat. Places to "dance" and raise broods for this species in greatest conservation need have slowly been lost through the cumulative impact of natural succession, conversion of hay and pasture-lands, tree planting, and development. Preliminary "sharp-tail" genetic analysis from northwestern Minnesota to Wisconsin has shown higher genetic diversity in northwest Minnesota and poor genetic diversity in Wisconsin, with east central Minnesota diversity values lying in between.

In an effort to reverse this trend and keep Minnesota and Wisconsin brushlands and sharp-tail populations connected, several conservation partners have combined resources to increase brushland protection, enhancement and restoration. Each partner has brought different and valuable resources to the table, varying from technical expertise and financial resources to boots-on-the-ground power.

State Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), State Forests, County lands, National Wildlife Refuges, State Parks, and other public lands where open landscape habitat is managed, serve as secure, core areas for sharp-tails and other brushland dependent wildlife. A notable addition to this network of public conservation lands has occurred, thanks to Pheasants Forever (PF) and the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs) securing grants through from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund. They have protected over 2000 acres of habitat and more land is in the protection process with the nearly \$4 million obtained to date. These lands will be managed as WMAs by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Pine barrens and oak savanna restorations are also underway at St. Croix State Park on the Wisconsin border. Blow down events there in 2008 and 2011 have provided opportunities to open up habitats through timber harvest, bio-baling, mowing, and prescribed burning.

To truly increase the probability that sharp-tail populations will persist in east-central Minnesota, however, public brushlands must be buffered and connected through targeted encouragement and support of private land habitat management. Thus conservation partners including the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners (USFWS) for Fish and Wildlife Program, DNR Wildlife Habitat Program, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), St. Croix Watershed, Minnesota Forest Resource Council (MFRC), and Farm Service Agency are collaborating to identify target areas, interested private landowners, and potential projects to implement.

Resources brought to the joint venture include information sharing and planning through MFRC landscape and watershed steering committees; lek surveys, preliminary habitat modeling and connectivity analysis data, and technical expertise from DNR to identify target areas; and funding and field assistance from NRCS, SWCDs and USFWS. NRCS has been especially supportive, setting aside a pool of Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program or Environmental Quality Incentive Program funds for the past several years. Landowners competitively apply for these funds to implement activities such as shearing, mowing, tree removal, prescribed burning, and improved pasture management. NRCS staff suggested, and now display, a unique sharp-tail "Wanted" poster at their offices to capture their customers' attention.

To really crank up the private land habitat effort, landowners with suitable and potential habitat within a targeted area of Kanabec and Pine Counties are being contacted by NRCS to inform them of opportunities to enhance and restore brushland habitat and several positive responses have been received. Interested landowners are encouraged to attend a workshop on April 6 in Hinckley where sharp-tail habitat needs and brushland management techniques will be explained, aerial photos provided, individual project ideas discussed, and a tour of brushland projects and lek sites led.

PROVOST CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Partners in this east-central Minnesota brushland venture know there is much work ahead to secure sharptail and other brushland wildlife's future and there are several collaborative opportunities to conduct more habitat management with increasingly better science. For example, 1) Outdoor Heritage funds for protection, enhancement and restoration are available for 20 more years, 2) the DNR will begin a sharptail nest and brood rearing habitat selection and survival study this spring, 3) MSGS and the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) will host a joint meeting at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area on April 26-27 to share information and increase interstate collaboration, and 4) the Wisconsin DNR and WSGS are working hard on their side of the border. Together, we'll save many places for the sharptail to dance.

SHARPTAIL HUNTER BAG CHECK HISTORY

Bill Berg

Only older and hard core sharp-tailed grouse hunters, and some really old Department of Natural Resources Biologists, will recall the sharptail hunter bag checks of yesteryear. These were done to get a handle on hunter effort and sharptail age and sex ratios, in the face of what the old Minnesota Conservation Department (forerunner to DNR) saw as a gradual decline in sharptail habitat and numbers. They began in 1949 range-wide, in both the east-central and northwest sharptail ranges. Initially, data was obtained by Wildlife Managers and Game Wardens as they checked hunters. Beginning in 1960 bag check data was derived from both roving checks and from hunter survey cards and wing envelopes that hunters picked up. Around 1963, bag checks were discontinued in the east-central range due to sharply declining sharptail numbers.

In 1962, the (then) Conservation Department initiated a comprehensive sharp-tailed grouse hunting and population study in two northwestern Minnesota townships, Cedarbend in Roseau County, and Lakewood in Lake of the Woods County. The Lakewood Township study area eventually became part of the area closed to upland game bird hunting north of State Highway 11 to protect the black grouse that had just been imported from Sweden. Once the black grouse stocking and survival were deemed a failure, all grouse hunting was restored north of Hwy. 11 beginning in 1972. The temporary closure north of Highway 11 gave DNR the opportunity to compare sharptail populations in a closed area (Lakewood Township) to the rest of northwestern Minnesota, but mainly, Cedarbend Township.

The intensive population studies in the two study townships were conducted from 1962 to 1978. Many old sharptail hunters remember these; they consisted of roadblocks where all hunters were stopped and interviewed (opening weekend only), roving checks, and "wing and tail" boxes which asked hunters to complete cards and deposit sharptail samples. Biologists and Wildlife Managers state-wide came to the northwest to operate these hunter checks. That gives one some idea how much effort went into these hunter bag checks.

After the Lakewood and Cedarbend studies were over, it seemed that sharptail hunter interest waned. Certainly, sharptail numbers declined. Eventually, there was only one remaining hunter bag check, located in northern Kittson County, and the Karstad DNR Wildlife Office kept this functioning until 1995. Sadly, there were no sharptail hunters to interview in 1995, and this last surviving bag check was discontinued forever.

The sharptail hunter effort and harvest data comprise an interesting comparison of what happened from 1949 to 1995. Sharptail harvests declined drastically, as did the number of sharptails bagged. However, parameters like birds seen per hour and birds killed per hunter day showed no obvious trends in the five decades. It appeared back then that if there were about two-thirds juveniles in the bag, there would be enough recruitment to sustain the following year's population. But some years, such as 1965 when only 11% were juveniles predicted a total bust the next year. And so ends another chapter in sharp-tailed grouse history.

----- Complete form below, enclose payments if applicable, fold & mail **before April 18**-----

**2013 WSGS & MSGS
JOINT TECHNICAL SESSION & MEMBERSHIP MEETING
PRE-REGISTRATION FORM**

Friday & Saturday, April 26-27, 2013
Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Conference Center
Grantsburg, Wisconsin

Name _____ Address _____

Organization _____ Phone _____ E-Mail _____

REGISTRATION FEE INCLUDES BOTH DAYS: \$10.00

MEALS: Please circle meals you will eat:

Friday Lunch- \$6.00

Friday Supper - \$12.00

Saturday Lunch - \$6.00

Total amount enclosed \$ _____ (Make checks for registration and meals payable to WSGS.)

I'd rather pay when I arrive: _____

MEMBERSHIP DUES: Please circle dues you will pay: (Dues can also be paid at the meeting.)

WSGS membership – Regular \$10, Supporting \$25, Contributing \$50, Sustaining \$100, Sponsor \$200
(Make check payable to WSGS)

MSGS Membership – Regular \$5, Supporting \$15, Contributing \$50, Sustaining \$100, Sponsor \$200,
Life \$500 (Make check payable to MSGS)

**Please enclose checks, if applicable, fold (so the address on the reverse side of this mailer shows),
And mail before April 18 to:** WSGS, Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, 102 E. Crex Ave., Grantsburg, WI,
54840

Additional Information:

- I would like to attend a Saturday morning tour or help survey for sharptails – Circle: Yes or No
- Room Reservations – First come, first serve at Crex (715-463-CREX) or in Grantsburg @ Wood River Motel (\$56/night, 715-463-2541, mention the grouse meeting), or in Siren @ Best Western Northwoods Lodge (877- 349-7800) or The Lodge on Crooked Lake (877-THE LODGE)
- Directions – See www.crexmeadows.org
- For agenda details, see MSGS (www.sharptails.org) or WSGS (www.wisharptails.org) web sites
- Questions – Contact Dave Evenson at dave3397@centurytel.net

**Minnesota & Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Societies
Joint Habitat Management/Technical Workshop Friday April 26, 2013
Joint Spring Fling and Annual Meeting Saturday April 27, 2013
Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center
Grantsburg, Wisconsin**

FRIDAY APRIL 26 (tentative schedule)

- 8:30 Registration, Coffee and Visiting**
- 9:00 Presentations, workshop participation**
- 12:00 Catered lunch at Crex Wildlife Education and Visitor Center**
- 1:00 Guided tour---a closer look at Wisconsin brushland ecosystems**
- 5:00 Social and networking, compliments of WSGS and MSGS
Fundraising**
- 6:00 Catered dinner/banquet at Crex Wildlife Education and Visitor Center**

SATURDAY APRIL 27 (tentative schedule)

- 5:00 Field trip, sharptail watching, lek searching (tentative, depends on weather and interest, sign up on Friday evening)**
- 8:15 Registration, fundraising**
- 9:00 Presentations and audience participation**
- 12:00 Catered lunch at Crex Wildlife Education and Visitor Center**
- 1:00 Fundraising**
- 1:30 WSGS and MSGS General membership meetings**
- 3:00 Dispersal to your home territory**



SHORT SHOTS

-----What? No brush cutting project? A few years ago, MSGS had to make the painful decision that in years of a MSGS Spring Fling, there would not be a MSGS brush cut. There have been lots of calls, but there you'll just have to wait for next winter to cut brush for sharptails!

-----Welcome to Charlotte Roy, DNR's new Grouse Biologist. Char began her DNR career in Bemidji in 2007, where she was a biologist with the Wetlands Populations and Research Group. She is now based in Grand Rapids with the Forest Wildlife Populations and Research Group. She came to Minnesota from the Cooperative Wildlife Research Lab at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. Welcome to the grouse world, Char.

-----Wanted: a new newsletter MSGS editor. After 28 years and more than 112 issues, the present editor is retiring. Duties include publishing 3 or 4 MSGS newsletters a year, and maintaining the MSGS membership database. The job takes around 4 days for each issue. The new editor is needed before summer, 2013. The only compensation is the good feeling that MSGS has helped the sharptail in Minnesota.

-----Farewell to three of the most dedicated Area Wildlife Managers in the East-Central sharptail range. Rich Staffon retired from the Cloquet Wildlife Office and is succeeded by Chris Balzer. Dave Pauly transferred from the Cambridge Wildlife Office to the northeast Minnesota moose project, and he is succeeded by long-time grouse biologist Ted Dick. Dave Dickey retired from the Aitkin Wildlife Office, and he is succeeded by veteran Assistant Area Wildlife Manager Dave Kanz, who has 30+ years of experience in the Aitkin area. Welcome, Chris, Dave, and Ted.

PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

As you can see in this issue of *The Minnesota Sharptailer*, 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. **Please check the mailing label date to see if your membership has expired** or about to expire and maybe consider an upgrade. An application and envelope is included in this issue. You can keep abreast of MSGS happenings on the web, www.sharptails.org.

MSGS IS ON THE WEB AT www.sharptails.org

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 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

Treasurer: Ward Julien

Web Page: Matt Breuer

Director at Large: Dave Dickey

Director at Large: Brian Goodspeed

Membership Secretary/Newsletter: Wayne Hoshal

Volunteer Habitat Development Coordinator: Bill Berg

Special Projects: Jamie Slade

Student/College relations: Dr. Bill Faber

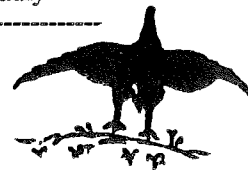
Merchandise: Vacant

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

Private Lands: (ex-officio volunteer) Dave Pauly

Membership expiration note:

Please pay special attention to the date after the date on your mailing label. It is your expiration date. If you are delinquent or nearly so, please renew your membership in MSGS today.

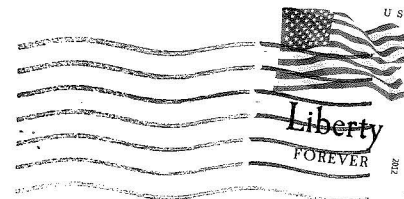


FROM:

**MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED
GROUSE SOCIETY**

**P.O. BOX 3338
DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55803**

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POSTMASTER: ADDRESS CORRECTION

REQUESTED



TO:

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

-----Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society April 20, 2013. 40th Anniversary Annual Meeting at the USFWS Wetlands Center in Fergus Falls. This will be a gala celebration event, full of history. Check their website for details www.prairiechickens.org.

-----Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society joint workshop and meeting with Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society April 26 & 27, 2013. See inside for details.

-----Prairie Grouse Technical Council (PGTC) 30th Biannual Meeting October 10 to 12, 2013, at the Northwest Research and Outreach Center, University of Minnesota, Crookston, Minnesota. The PGTC is comprised of prairie chicken, sharptail, and sage grouse resource scientists and just plain grouse enthusiasts over North America.

