30 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

Fall 2016

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

Publication of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

Jim Wilford, then Manager of St. Croix State Park, accepts the winning raffle prize Owen Gromme print from Roche Lally. Jim graciously donated the print back to MSGS.

MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

Jubilant MSGS brush cutters after cutting nearly 40 acres of brush near Cotton, 2003.

The late Lew Ohman and his son with sharptails taken in Lakewood Township in Lake of the Woods County in 1976, when DNR sharptail hunter bag checks were still conducted.

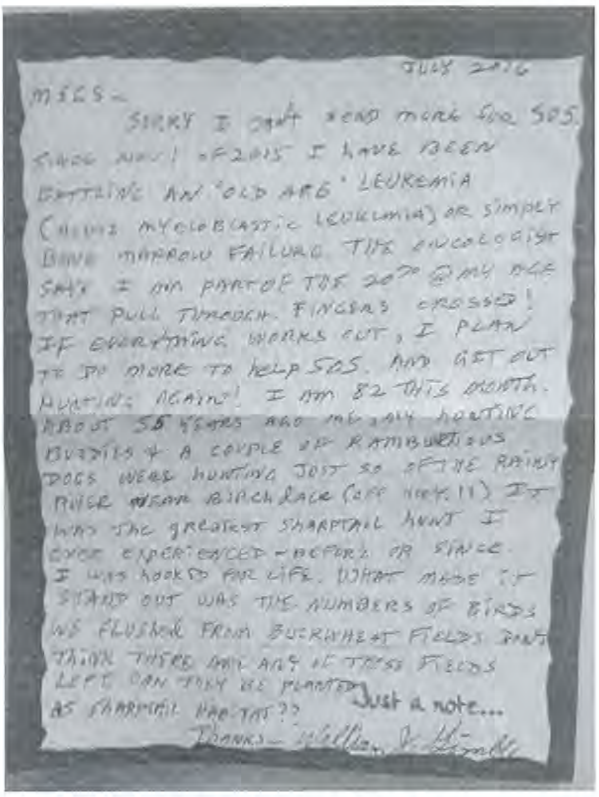
Dedicated to the management and restoration of Sharptails in Minnesota for the benefit of hunters and non-hunters.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Hello MSGS members,

When a small group of us started MSGS 30 years ago, I had no idea what type of commitment and devotion I would see in our followers thru the years. Thinking back, I can't believe all the countless letters, phone calls & meetings that have taken place. This is good time to say thank you to all the volunteers and members who have been with us through this journey.

MSGS has persevered through the years due to an almost unexplainable definition of the fascination of this bird that I have been at a loss to articulate. Is it the connection to wildfire? Is it the historical nature of large populations from year past? Is in the sound of the flush and the ensuing cackle as a flock of "chickens" leave your gun range? Is it the spring time dance? We all have our reasons, and now would like to share a letter from one from one of our time members, William J Gimble:



JULY 2016

MSGS –

SORRY I can't send more for SOS. SINCE NOV 1 OF 2015 I HAVE BEEN BATTLING AN 'OLD AGE' LEUKEMIA (CHRONIC MYELOBLASTIC LEUKEMIA) OR SIMPLY BONE MARROW FAILURE. THE ONCOLOGIST SAYS I AM PART OF THE 20% @ MY AGE THAT PULL THROUGH. FINGERS CROSSED! IF EVERYTHING WORKS OUT, I PLAN TO DO MORE TO HELP SOS. AND GET OUT HUNTING AGAIN! I AM 82 THIS MONTH. ABOUT 50 YEARS AGO MY DAD, HUNTING BUDDIES & A COUPLE OF RAMBUNCTIOUS DOGS WERE HUNTING JUST SO OFTEN RAINY RIVER NEAR BIRCH LAKE (OFF HWY 11) IT WAS THE GREATEST SHARPTAIL HUNT I EVER EXPERIENCED – BEFORE OR SINCE. I WAS HOOKED FOR LIFE. WHAT MADE IT STAND OUT WAS THE NUMBERS OF BIRDS WE FLUSHED FROM BUCKWHEAT FIELDS. DON'T THINK THERE ARE ANY OF THOSE FIELDS LEFT. CAN THEY BE PLANTED AS SHARPTAIL HABITAT?? Just a note...

THANKS – William J. Gimble

Bill, I think you nailed it! Thanks for the letter.

Enjoy this 30 year anniversary issue of the Sharptailer,

Roche Lally
President

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www.mnsharptails.org

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MSGS HISTORY: LCMR HERITAGE ENHANCEMENT GRANTS

By Bill Berg

In 2001, the Minnesota Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) authorized the implementation of the Heritage Enhancement Small Grants Program, which was intended to provide habitat improvement funding to outdoors groups like sportsmen's clubs, and larger conservation organizations such as Minnesota Deer Hunters Association and MSGS. Habitat projects originated within the conservation organization and needed to be approved by DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife. The principle of the grants was to promote volunteerism within the conservation organization, something that MSGS was good at.

MSGS began applying for these Heritage Enhancement (HE) grants in FY 2002 until they were discontinued by DNR in FY 2010, replaced by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) Conservation Partners (CP) Program in FY 2010. MSGS participated in the CP program the first year and received one grant (see below) before discontinuing CP due to revised LSOHC matching fund requirements that were beyond MSGS financial capabilities.

Over the course of the HE Grant Program, MSGS applied for and received $687,652 for 55 brushland habitat projects on Wildlife Management Areas and Brushland Management Units spread across the sharp-tailed grouse range. In FY 2010 MSGS also applied for and received $48,000 for a single CP brushland project.

Types of projects completed included brushland shearing and mowing (6,752 acres), prescribed burning (7,065 acres), planting of prairie grass (56 acres), herbicide brush treatment (50 acres), hand felling (14 acres), and 28 miles of firebreak. Total area treated with Heritage Enhancement Grants (not counting firebreaks) was 14,045 acres, in addition to 667 acres treated with the single Conservation Partners grant. Please see the MSGS Habitat Accomplishments map for approximate locations of projects.

FROM OUR MEMBERS

Dear Mr. Roche Lally,

It was a surprise to see the cover picture of our sharptail group in the last issue of your magazine.

Scott Smith (on the left) died of cancer at an early age, and Dennis Nelson retired recently as a principal at Hermantown a few years ago.

In 1979 we three and two friends got our 30 bird, two day limit, using two dogs.

In 1980 we were a bit short of a few birds, but still a good shoot. We were still raising hundreds of birds out of a blueberry bog west of International falls.

In 1995 my farmer friend was fixing a barbed wire fence and saw a nest of sharptail eggs (14 eggs) near a fence post, and noticed a crow watching from 100 yard away. He went to lunch and returned in one hour and found all the eggs broken and eaten. Crows can be mean.

In the 80's I used to walk through a hay field at 7.00 am and scare out a few hundred birds that would usually fly over my companion, Sam Williams, who would be posted in their flight path. He usually would get two each time.

It was common to walk 35 miles on a weekend using a pedometer to measure distance.

I wish I still had the legs at 86, but I still shoot pheasants at a game farm

So congratulations for all the work you do in helping the sharptail program exist.

My Best,

Joe Nowak
Ex ski coach at Cloquet high school

P.S.

I was hunting near Wrenshall for partridge when a flock of 20 or more sharpies flew over. It was a pretty sight and no shots were fired.

Editors Note, Mr. Nowak recently passed away at the age of 88. MSGS has lost a true friend and will be missed. His obituary is on page 17 of this issue.

MSGS HISTORY: THE VERY BEGINNING

By Bill Berg

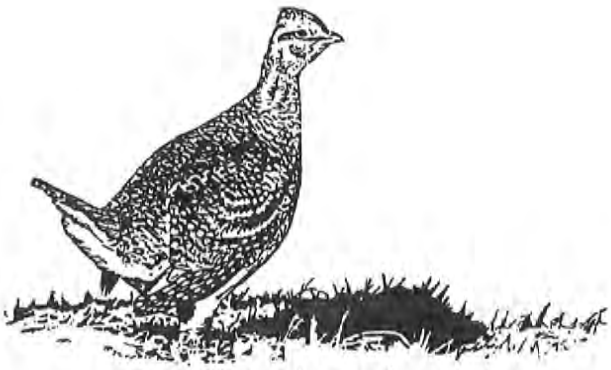
Although MSGS is celebrating its 30th anniversary with this Autumn 2016 issue, the nest began its building process long before the first egg was laid. Sometime in early summer 1985, a guy by the name of Roche Lally called Bill Berg's DNR Wildlife Research office, wondering about the decline of his favorite bird (and his Dad's favorite bird), the sharp-tailed grouse. About the same time, I heard from another sharptail enthusiast, Jay Johnson from Coon Rapids. Bill wrote back to both of them in July 1985, enclosing a copy of DNR's new Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Guidelines. One of his suggestions was to start an organization dedicated to managing sharptails. His exact words to Roche were "Perhaps there's enough of a sharptail hunting nucleus in Duluth and Cloquet to get a Sharp-tailed Grouse Hunting Society started. It would never match RGS, but it would have amazing clout. I could provide dozens of names for starters. I'll help you with all the time I've got! Go to it, Roche!"

In September 1985 Bill wrote Roche again, with the contact information for Jay Johnson and Mark Chandler from International Falls, who ended up as the first MSGS Vice-President. In January, 1986, Bill heard back from Roche, who was the new Dad of a baby boy, Reed. Roche wanted Reed to be able to hunt sharptails, too. Roche had done his homework; he had talked with Dr. Fred Hamerstrom and sent some information to Duluth Tribune outdoors columnist Sam Cook. In February Bill mailed Roche about 50 names of sharptail hunters he knew, and Roche added some, too. On March 8, 1986 Roche, Mark, and Bill had their initial "board" meeting. We first visited some dancing grounds in Aitkin County, and then went to work. We drafted an introductory letter, and enclosed was a blank form asking for additional names of sharptail enthusiasts. Between Roche and Mark, 60 copies were mailed by March 12, **just 4 days after the first meeting! And the next meeting was scheduled for the next month!**

Attendees at the April 12, 1986 meeting were Roche Lally, Mark Chandler, Con Christianson, Tom Engel, Clay Sederberg, and Bill Berg. Each person had specific duties with deadlines. The group would be named "The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society." Membership cards got printed, a news release was drafted, an MSGS brochure was readied, a $5 basic member fee was decided, and there would be four newsletters mailed per year, with the first ready for mailing by August 1, 1986.

On September 10, 1986, the MSGS "Founding Fathers" met and included: Roche Lally, Bill Berg, Keith Bergstedt, Mark Chandler, Jon Coil, Brent Gurtek, Tom Engel, Norm Moody, Rob Naplin, Larry Olson, Norm Moody, Dave Pauly, Don Pierce, and Wayne Hoshal. Con Christianson and Clay Sederberg could not make it. The group got so many things rolling, like By-Laws, fundraising, a Game Fair booth, member wood plaques, commissioning the Karen Smith sharptail print, starting a northwest chapter, filing for tax exempt status, constructing a traveling display, and ordering caps. As a result of this effort, and just a few days after the first newsletter mailing, there were already more than 130 members, with the goal of 200 by October 1, 1986.

So the MSGS nest was built, and the eggs were laid, incubating, and ready to hatch. Inside this special commemorative issue, you can follow the growth of this amazing clutch. Enjoy.



MSGS HISTORY: LOOKING BACK THIRTY YEARS

By Bill Berg

Ninety-four MSGS Newsletters over 30 years. That's a lot. When one peruses them, what a treasure chest of history and MSGS accomplishments! So here's a "short version", beginning in autumn, 1986. So many projects were done in the first two years to grow MSGS!

Although the first MSGS newsletter was in autumn 1986, the gears had turned for sixteen months already. Roche Lally and Mark Chandler were President and Vice President, respectively. The Minnesota Legislature had just authorized the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program. By winter 1986-87, MSGS had become incorporated, thanks to Attorney Ted Lundrigan (who donated $3,000 of his time) and DNR's (now retired) Don Pierce. Believe it or not, MSGS already had 200 paid members! MSGS commissioned retired USFWS Biologist Karen Smith to do our popular charcoal sketch sharptail print. Our first Raffle sold 1,650 tickets, with first prize an English setter pup. In spring 1987, we had our first Spring Fling, together with the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society (MPCS) and Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus from Wisconsin, at St. Croix State Park. The Federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was initiated, and 1,500 farmers in northwestern Minnesota had signed up. MSGS donated "farmer caps" to all RIM and CRP enrollees. In September, MSGS sponsored our first booth at Armstrong Game Fair, staffed with MSGS volunteers.

By autumn 1987 we mailed MSGS window decals to members, and printed a Private Lands Sharptail Management brochure for landowners. Winter saw our second raffle, this time for a Remington 870 20 gauge, and 3,812 tickets were sold. In April 1988, the Backus Community Center was the site of the second MSGS and MPCS joint meeting. MSGS had eleven State Regions, all with Directors, but sadly, the Regional concept gradually faded away. We donated $500 to DNR Forestry for Bombardier repairs for prescribed burning. In summer, Wayne Hoshal replaced John Toffoli as newsletter mailer. DNR's Bob Farmes, the father of sharptail management in Minnesota, died April 21, 1988. In winter 1988-89, our third raffle, this time for a Remington 1100 20 gauge, grossed $3,208. Minnesota's Environmental Trust Fund passed the legislature, and MSGS donated $1,00 to Minnesota FWLA. In spring 1989, we had the first Spring Fling in NW Minnesota, at Lake Bronson State Park. In autumn we raised $3,470 with another gun raffle, and sponsored another booth at Game Fair.

Our first Metro meeting held January 13, 1990 at Carlos Avery Game Farm was a resounding success. Long Lake Conservation Center (LLCC) hosted the first of many Spring Flings to be held there. MSGS donated $500 to FWLA, and MSGS helped to form the fledgling Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Association. In autumn we grossed $3,462 in another shotgun raffle. MSGS lead the effort to stop the proposed introduction of the imported Sichuan pheasant in both Minnesota and North Dakota. In April 1991 a combined Spring Fling and Metro meeting was held, this time at North Woods Audubon Center at Sandstone. By winter, 104,000 Consolidated Conservation Lands (Con-Con) acres were been designated as potentialWildlife Management acres. MSGS hatched another great group, the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed grouse Society!

In autumn 1991 MSGS sponsored its fifth Game Fair Booth, and sold 3,507 tickets for another 870. And we finally became an official 501-C-3 tax exempt organization, thanks to donated services of Attorney Dennis O'Toole and CPA John Roessler! In March 1992 Carlos Avery Game Farm again hosted a super-successful Metro meeting. Dan Hinton became the new Vice President, replacing Mark Chandler. Greg Nelson signed on as Treasurer, and he still is the MSGS Secretary. Barry and Ann Sampson were typing many newsletter issues. Volunteers Norm and Delores Ebert were staffing the MSGS travelling display booth at various county fairs. On May 27, 1992, a third Metro meeting was held at Burger Brothers, but attendance was sparse. The autumn fundraiser grossed $3,027.

The very first MSGS winter brush cut was on February 20, 1992 on a private parcel north of Hinckley, with 60 acres being cleared. DNR's Tom Dickson published a sharptail article in the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer. In April 1993 a "combined" MSGS and MPCS Metro Spring Fling was held at LLCC. The East Central zone open to sharptail hunting was changed to protect most of Itasca and the northern edge of Aitkin County; this change remains to this day. The winter 1993-1994 brush cut was at Devils Dream WMA on Hwy 65 north of McGrath.

The last Metro Spring Fling (to this day) held in April 1994 at Carlos Avery Game Farm featured Ron Schara as the guest speaker was well attended. In autumn, MSGS was again at the Armstrong Game Fair. In 1995 the brush cut returned to Devil's Dream and another Spring Fling was held at LLCC. MSGS donated $1,500

towards acquisition of a parcel at Fermoy WMA, near the Zim-Sax WMA. There was no fundraiser in 1994, but in autumn 1995 $2,394 was raised for a Remington 870 20 gauge. Sadly, Wisconsin closed its sharp-tailed grouse hunting season (a permit season eventually opened in later years). In autumn 1995 a Game Fair booth was shared with Ruffed Grouse Society.

The third winter brush cut at Devil's Dream was held in April 1996; the habitat was now very open! MSGS and Natural Resources Research Institute of Duluth applied for and received a $200,000 Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR) grant to study the feasibility of harvesting brush biomass for electrical generation. MSGS asked for volunteers to help staff the fifteenth Armstrong Game Fair in autumn 1996. This was MSGS's last Game Fair. Ever since its beginnings, MSGS had an "annual business meeting" in Grand Rapids, and what appears to be the last one was in September 1996. MSGS was first "on line" courtesy of Vice President Dan Hinton and Up-North Outdoors. But MSGS often had on-line access problems.

In April 1997 there was a Spring Fling at LLCC, where the idea was put forth by Jamie Slade and Kent Solberg to apply to LCMR to study savanna landscapes for sharptails. This project was proposed to LCMR in 1998 and approved for $30,000. DNR hosted a well-attended community meeting at Blackberry to evaluate support for the Blackberry brush project, and the people were strongly in favor. Sadly, the birds were gone a few years later. The 1997 fundraiser was not a raffle, but MSGS asked for donations. This was the last actual fund raiser. DNR published Technical Report No. 10, *The Sharp-tailed Grouse in Minnesota*, authored by Bill Berg. MSGS paid for the full color cover, with photography donated by Craig Borck of St. Paul Pioneer Press. The first and only MSGS sanctioned sharptail hunt was at Caribou WMA in Kittson County, hosted by DNR's Jodie Provost. The twelve hunters saw birds, but none were harvested. The 1998 brush cut was at Cross Lake WMA, north of Cromwell.

The brush biomass NRRI project was completed and a report to LCMR submitted in1999. MSGS cut brush at Cromwell, and Kent Solberg presented preliminary findings of the LCMR savanna project at the Spring Fling in April at LLCC. The Prairie Grouse Technical Council held its biannual conference at Gimli, Manitoba, where Bill Berg was presented with the esteemed PGTC Hamerstrom Award, The North American Grouse Partnership was formed as well. During winter 1999-2000 MSGS held two brush cuts; one at the Dalbo WMA, and the other at Kettle Lake WMA. Due to the extra work, this was the only time two projects were held, until winter 2015-2016. At the January 2000 Minnesota Chapter of The Wildlife Society (MNTWS) meeting in Brainerd, MSGS was presented with the prestigious MNTWS Conservation Award.

Thanks to the hard work of Pat Feretti, MSGS sold its first t-shirts in spring 2000. The controversial Con-Con land transfer as WMAs was helped by a resolution by MSGS, and lo and behold, these lands were finally transferred, creating several new WMAs, most for sharptails! Kettle Lake WMA was the site of the brush cut, and at the Spring Fling in April 2001, Raleigh Nelson (Greg Nelson's dad) presented MSGS with a gift of appreciated stock worth$1,976. Also in 2000, long-time Hinckley DNR Wildlife Manager Lee Hemness retired. In summer 2001 Bill Berg also retired and became an "official" MSGS Board member. MSGS donated $50 for the DNR's 50th WMA Anniversary dedication. MSGS hired Mike Luusa in yet another unsuccessful attempt to have its own web page. Cotton was the site of the 2002 brush cut.

The historic Heritage Enhancement Grants from LCMR were initiated in 2002, and MSGS received the first of nine consecutive annual grants for habitat improvement, this first being for $67,600. Brush cutters returned to Cotton in March, and LLCC hosted the Fling in April. In autumn 2003 the PGTC met in Siren Wisconsin, where Bill Berg presented the tear jerker keynote address on "The Ghosts of Prairie Grouse Past." The March 2004 brush cut was at Palisade. DNR authorized its first prairie chicken hunting season for autumn 2004. In spring 2004, MSGS received its first of several annual anonymous $5,000 gifts. History was made in spring 2005, when MSGS and MPCS jointly held its first "large-scale" workshop format Spring Fling, this one in Thief River Falls. This was actually the third MSGS-MPCS joint meeting, with the first at St. Croix State Park in 1986, and second at the Backus Community Center in 1988.

The winter 2005 brush cut was on the Grayling WMA near McGregor, and the 2006 cut was at Cherry. Both were well attended. The autumn 1986 issue of *The Minnesota Sharptailer* made its debut in magazine format on MSGS's 20th Anniversary, with several more magazine issues to follow. MSGS joined as a partner in Bird Conservation Minnesota, through the Audubon Society. The 2007 brush cut was on the Woodbury Brushland Unit near Cromwell. The Spring Fling was again at LLCC in 2007, with the emphasis on private

lands sharptail management. Our second magazine issue was published as the Winter 2007-2008 *Minnesota Sharptailer.* Willowsippi WMA was the site of the 2008 brush cut. A milestone was reached, with the creation of the Save Our Sharptail (SOS) fund, designated for habitat acquisition. With the help of several partners contributing, this fund quickly reached $69,340. Our sights were on purchasing an 80 acre parcel at Gun Lake WMA, and MSGS kicked in the remaining $8,000 to make our first acquisition a reality! WOW!

In autumn 2008 MSGS became affiliated with Minnesota Conservation Federation (MCF), which enabled MSGS to assist with the MCF 21 Gun Salute raffle, and earn some funds at the same time. Delores Ebert died, following her husband Norm's death in 2004. Together, Norm and Delores were MSGS's dynamic volunteer duo, always helping at county fairs and brush cuts. Their dedicated accomplishments are truly missed. Year 2008 was a milestone, with the passing of the "VOTE YES" Constitutional Amendment that with citizen support, increased the State Sales Tax by 3/8 of one percent. MSGS supported this action. The fund, dedicated to natural resources and the arts, has had an incredible positive impact on sharptails and brushlands. The 2009 brush cut was at the Cross Lake Burn WMA. A couple weeks later, the Spring Fling was held at LLCC, This Fling was historic, as it was the first one approved for DNR training, with a full Friday of DNR workshop presentations. Also in spring 2009, MSGS and DNR held a joint working meeting at Lake Bronson State Park with Manitoba DNR and Sharptails Plus of Manitoba. And thanks to Matt Breuer, MSGS finally got its permanent web page: www.sharptails.org!

In 2010 MSGS donated $500 towards a north central range sharptail genetics study, and $1,000 to DNR for sharptail research. The winter brush cut was March 13, 2010, on the Kroschel WMA. Long-time Aitkin County Wildlife Manager Dave Dickey retired. The Gun Lake WMA acquisition was finalized, and dedicated on May 8, followed by a celebration at LLCC. MSGS co-sponsored an Early Successional Workshop at Cloquet. The LCCMR Heritage Enhancement Grants saw their successful end in 2010, MSGS had received $687,682 in grants that funded 55 projects that enhanced a total of 11,990 acres! The HE Grants were replaced by the Conservation Partners Small Grants program, funded by the Lessard-Sams Outdoors Heritage Council (L-SOHC) (from the sales tax increase). From the newly established Conservation Partners L-OHC funds, MSGS applied for and received $48,000 for one 667 acre brush shearing project at Roseau WMA before dropping from the CP Program due to insufficient matching funds.

2010 was also the year that MSGS partnered with Pheasants Forever (PF) to acquire acquisition funds from Lessard-Sams. This work was mainly carried out thanks to Ward Julien of MSGS and Joe Duggan of PF. MSGS's ability to utilize PF's acquisition expertise for additional lands is truly appreciated! Also in 2010, MSGS continued its 21 Gun Salute affiliation with MCF. In spring 2011 MSGS and MPCS held its second very successful joint Spring Fling "DNR approved" workshop at Thief River Falls.

Mainly funded by L-SOHC, an additional 1,285 acres were added to the Kroschel WMA. The winter 2011-2012 brush cut, originally scheduled for the Soo Line site, was moved to Wagner WMA in Aitkin County. MSGS and Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society met jointly (for the first time) April 26-27, 2013, at Crex Meadows WMA near Grantsburg, Wisconsin. No brush cut was held in winter 2012-13. Rich Staffon retired from Cloquet, and Dave Pauly left his Hinckley Wildlife Manager position to work on northeastern Minnesota moose. So in just a couple years, several "old time" sharptail managers, some dating to the late 1950s, left DNR.

Long time DNR and MSGS volunteer Wayne Hoshal died in early 2014. Wayne was the backbone of "getting the job done" for MSGS for about 20 years. The winter brush cut returned to the Wagner WMA in March 2014. Thanks to the passage of the USDA Farm Bill, and funding from PF, Jake Granfors was hired to work with private landowners in northeastern Minnesota. Thanks to continued MSGS-PF partnership, the Gun Lake WMA was expanded by another 760 acres, aided by a $33,000 acquisition grant from Enbridge Energy. The 2015 brush cut was held on the Kimberly WMA southeast of McGregor. In April, MSGS and MPCS again met together, this time at Deep Portage Conservation Reserve. Part of this event was to express sadness of the recent extinction of the entire north central prairie chicken population, which numbered into the thousands in the late 1970s.

In spring 2016, MSGS sponsored two brush cuts. The first was on the Palmville WMA in northwestern Minnesota (the very first brush cut in the northwest), and the second, on the Sax-Zim WMA near Cotton. Plans were being made for a 30th Anniversary *Minnesota Sharptailer* issue in autumn, 1987. In August 2016, MSGS sponsored a historic northwestern Minnesota sharptail planning meeting at Bemidji.

MSGS HISTORY: THIRTY YEARS OF NEWSLETTERS

By Bill Berg

Although we are celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of MSGS in Autumn 2016, MSGS really began about sixteen months earlier, The idea first started with a phone call and letter from a dedicated sharptail hunter, Roche Lally. Roche spelled out that history in the first MSGS Newsletter article entitled *"HOW DID WE START?"* reprinted on the following two pages. But what transpired in the first sixteen months is absolutely amazing. Roche and I teamed up with another concerned sharptail hunter, Mark Chandler. Mark worked for Boise Cascade in International Falls and his frustrations were similar to Roche's. Mark served as the MSGS Vice President (Roche was automatically **the** President, but he did not know then that 30 years later he would **still** be the President). This early history is detailed in another article in this issue, *"THE VERY BEGINNING."*

So the first MSGS Newsletter was printed and mailed to about 100 prospective members in Autumn, 1986. After the first issue, it was given a name: *THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER*. Prospective members receiving the first issue were hunting, birding, and nature enthusiasts that we knew back then. The newsletter was typed on a small portable electric typewriter that had a memory of two pages, maximum. So it was a cut and paste job, as were most of the next 20 years of MSGS newsletters. In the interim, Barry and Ann Sampson typed up the newsletters for a few years, using something called MS WORD. In 1996 Bill Berg bought a home computer with WIN 95 (which he still has, of course, but it is "modernized" to WIN 98).

The front page of that 1986 newsletter used the same format for about 28 years. Except for the time Barry and Ann did them, Bill Berg did them all, except for the magazine format once a year starting in 2006 edited by Ward Julien, and the present newsletter, edited by Melissa Kolesch. Originally, and for many years, four issues were printed a year. But gradually, the number fell to "about" three. The small sharptail figures scattered throughout the first 28 years of newsletters were drawn by Bill's artist son Bob. They also appeared on the membership applications and brochures. Other artwork was kindly provided by Tim Brastrup, retired DNR Fisheries Biologist, and Karen Smith, retired U. S. Fish and Wldlife Biologist. Karen also did the special sharptail and prairie chicken charcoal drawings for MSGS and the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society, respectively. Brent Gurtek drew the first MSGS logo, which went on all early caps, including those given to RIM and CRP landowner enrollees.

As MSGS membership increased, the job of maintaining the member and mailing lists also increased. Just in time, another sharptail enthusiast came on board, and Dan Hinton became the second Vice President and data keeper. Dan left MSGS in about 1995, and the data base was maintained by Bill Berg. But with a membership mailing list around 350, more help was needed and a local U. S. Diplomatic Corps retiree by the name of Wayne Hoshal stepped up. Raised in Calumet, Minnesota, Wayne was full of stories of "olden day" remembrances of prairie chickens and sharptails on the Mesaba Iron Range. Wayne ran the "membership department" until his death in 2013. Dave Dickey ably assumed this responsibility in 2014.

Both the magazine and paper formats are now sent in digital or printed formats. Sadly, few of the earlier issues were ever digitized. The issue you are reading now is the 95th. Enjoy.

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

PUBLICATION OF THE MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 3338
DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55803

AUTUMN 1986

HOW DID WE START?

BY ROCHE LALLY

I'd heard it so often before. I'd heard it from my dad, from my friend's dads, and from land owners where we hunted. It started to sound like a broken record - "You should have been here twenty or thirty years ago. There were flocks of birds in every field."

To a lesser degree, I'd seen it myself. In the dozen or so short years that I've hunted sharptails, it sure seemed that birds were becoming less abundant. Every year we had to go farther to locate birds, even as far as Manitoba and Saskatchewan. What was happening?

I figured it was time to find out. I recalled a biologist who had checked us in the Warroad area years ago. I found him, still working on sharptails, at the DNR's Forest Wildlife Populations and Research Group in Grand Rapids. I asked Bill Berg ("Mr. Sharptail") what was happening with the bird.

Bill told me that the long term decline in the sharptail population was primarily due to three factors:

1. Natural succession. The grass-brushland habitat that sharptails require is aging rapidly.
2. Intensive clearing of marginal agricultural lands was destroying vast acreages of sharptail habitat.
3. Conifers were being planted in sharptail habitat, primarily by DNR Forestry.

"What if the habitat destruction isn't stopped?" I asked. Bill's answer was the last thing I wanted to hear. "If the current trend isn't reversed, the population will continue to decline, and sharptail hunting could end within 5 years."

"What can we do?" I asked. Bill's answer seemed obvious. "Form a group of concerned sharptail enthusiasts to focus some attention on the bird's plight, and to put pressure on DNR to better manage the sharptail resource. Currently in Minnesota there are groups representing the interests of deer, waterfowl, ruffed grouse, pheasants, turkeys, and furbearers. There are even groups dedicated to protected species like quail, prairie chickens, and wolves. BUT THERE IS NOBODY TO SPEAK FOR THE SHARPTAIL, a bird that was once our third-ranked resident upland

continued on next page---

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

Page 2.

HOW? (continued)

game bird that now ranks fifth (even behind spruce grouse)."

Bill then gave me the name of another person whose concerns paralleled mine, Mark Chandler from Littlefork. I called Mark and suggested that the three of us meet in Grand Rapids. Bill would take us on one of his now famous early morning sharptail excursions, and then we would discuss the feasibility of forming a sharp-tailed grouse organization.

We met at 5:00 on a cold March morning in Aitkin County. We weren't very successful at seeing many birds that morning (rotten weather), but we had a dandy tour. And back in Grand Rapids, we hatched the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. We worked up an initial mailing, and the ball was finally rolling.

The media picked up on us; we had a DNR news release. Favorable responses AND contributions came from the initial mailing. The response was incredible -- people really DO care!

It seems like the timing for the Society couldn't have been better. Everything seems to be in our favor; enthusiastic people, R.I.M. legislation, the Federal Farm Bill, a change in attitudes about burning, etc., etc.

We're not "out of the willows" yet, by any stretch of the imagination (this spring's census was down again). But if we can't bring the birds back now - with all this opportunity - the odds are that we never will! Let's just hope that we're not too late!

IN JUST SIX MONTHS:

The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society has:

- -conducted several business and informational meetings.
- -printed and distributed an informational brochure.
- -communicated the sharptail"crisis" to legislators and Governor Perpich.
- -built a display for the Anoka County Game Fair.
- -assisted with the Minnesota State Fair sharptail exhibit.
- -published its first newsletter.
- -planned fund raising activities.
- -been instrumental in promoting and planning R.I.M. projects.
- -received publicity in local, state, and national media.
- -planned for growth in the NEXT six months.

MSGS HISTORY: SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

By Bill Berg

In its early years, MSGS was fortunate to have a group of energetic volunteers who got right to work. After the foundations of MSGS were laid, and there was a small treasury, MSGS found several ways to "give back" to the resource. These ranged from donating a few bucks to DNR for prescribed burning to applying for grant funds toward purchasing huge parcels of land. On the ground habitat enhancement and protection projects, whether by hands on Brush Cuts or large mowing projects, have occurred in eight counties of NW, NE and EC Minnesota. Following is a summary of some accomplishments.

Printed a sharp-tailed grouse private lands management brochure.

Cost-shared with DNR the printing of a glossy private lands habitat management pamphlet.

Purchased several hundred "farmer" caps to give to RIM and CRP private lands cooperators.

Helped fund DNR's purchase of a helitorch for prescribed burning state-wide.

Donated funds to DNR for renovation and maintenance of a J-7 Bombardier for burning.

Donated $1,000 to DNR towards the acquisition of the Fermoy WMA in St. Louis County.

Donated $1,000 to prairie grass seeding on the Caribou WMA in Kittson County.

Donated $1,000 to DNR towards prescribed burning in northeastern Minnesota.

Paid for printing the covers of DNR's Sharp-tailed Grouse in Minnesota bulletin.

Sponsored 23 winter Brush Cutting projects on State WMAs and Brushland Management Units (BMU).

Staffed information booths at county fairs, gun shows, and Anoka Game Fair.

Provided sharp-tailed grouse viewing blinds.

Helped form sharp-tailed grouse advocate groups in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Manitoba.

Received a $200,000 Grant from LCCMR to fund a brush biomass feasibility study done by University of Minnesota's Natural Resources Research Institute.

Received a $30,000 Grant from LCCMR for a savanna landscape study in EC Minnesota. Purchased (along with other organizations) its first parcel of property and donated it to DNR to begin the Gun Lake WMA in Aitkin County.

Received $687,652 from DNR Heritage Enhancement Grant Program that enabled MSGS to manage to manage habitat on 14,045 acres on 55 WMAs and BMUs.

Donated $1,000 to DNR for sharptail research.

Donated $500 to University of Wisconsin for sharptail genetics research.

Received $48,000 from Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund to manage 667 acres on the Roseau River WMA.

Supported biobaler demonstrations monetarily.

Formed a relationship with Pheasants Forever that enabled MSGS to procure five grants from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund for an amazing $8,217,000, to acquire over 5,000 acres to donate to DNR for WMA, and enhance over 2,000 brushland acres on WMAs in EC Minnesota.

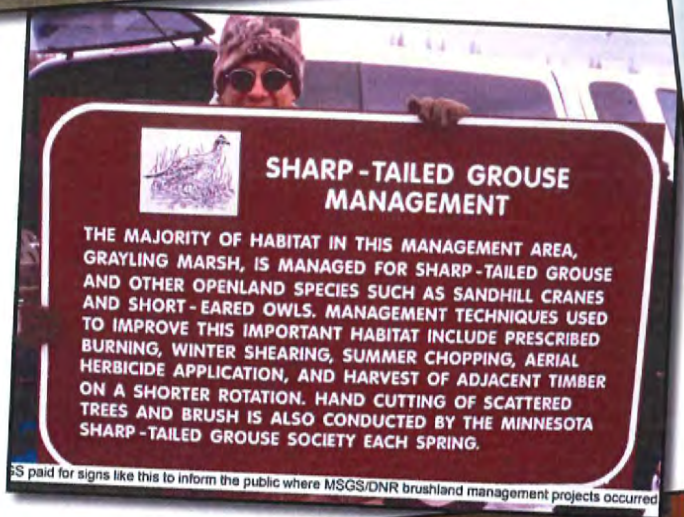
Donated $750 to a pilot aerial survey of prairie grouse using an infrared camera by the USFWS in collaboration with DNR and MPCS.

Sponsored several private landowner habitat workshops focusing on brushlands and sharptail.

Secured, just recently, $252,400 in six Expedited Conservation Partner Legacy grants for brushland enhancement of 2,270 acres in the Bemidji, Baudette, International Falls, Tower, Cloquet, and Cambridge DNR Wildlife Areas.

30 Years

Sheared brushland on an MSGS Heritage Enhancement Project on the ZIM WMA.



S paid for signs like this to inform the public where MSGS/DNR brushland management projects occurred

MSGS held its first Spring Fling in spring 1987 jointly with the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society and the Society of *Typanuchus Cupido Pinnatus* at St. Croix Park. Roche Lally is conducting the meeting.

For the first few years, MSGS co

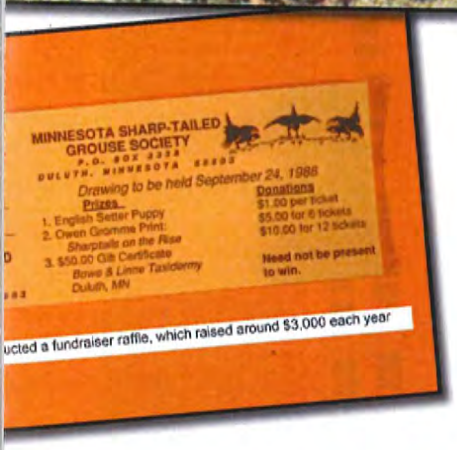
Sharptail dancing ground observation blind in Aitkin County, being supported by Bill Berg. Or is it the other way around?

The first MSGS booth in 1987 at the Armstrong Game Fair near Anoka. MSGS had its own or a shared booth until the early 1990s.

in Pictures

P-TV "On the Road" photo-journalist Jason Davis doing a program on sharptails in Aitkin County in 1987

Speaker presenting at the 1997 Spring Fling at Long Lake Conservation Center near Palisade. Most Spring Flings were at Long Lake.



MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 4338
DULUTH, MINNESOTA 55805

Drawing to be held September 24, 1988

Prizes
1. English Setter Puppy
2. Owen Gromme Print: *Sharptails on the Rise*
3. $50.00 Gift Certificate *Bowe & Linne Taxidermy Duluth, MN*

Donations
$1.00 per ticket
$5.00 for 6 tickets
$10.00 for 12 tickets

Need not be present to win.

ucted a fundraiser raffle, which raised around $3,000 each year

Front cover of the DNR Private Lands Sharptail Management brochure, which MSGS cost shared.

MSGS contributed twice to DNR to equip helicopters with prescribed burn heirloom and ping pong ball ignition devices. This Hughes 500 is at Thief Lake WMA.

University of Minnesota's Dr. Don Christian taking habitat measurements on an Aitkin County dancing ground in 1996 as part of a MSGS-UMD Natural Resources Institute biomass suitability project funded by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources.

MSGS HISTORY: TWENTY-FOUR YEARS OF WINTER BRUSH CUTS

By Bill Berg

1993: The first brush cut, on private land north of Hinckley. Sponsored by Hinckley DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Cassidy's.

1994, 1995 and 1996: Devils Dream Brushland Management Unit north of McGrath. Sponsored by Aitkin DNR Wildlife. Breakfasts at McGrath.

1997: No project.

1998 and 1999: Cross Lake WMA north of Cromwell. Sponsored by Cloquet DNR Wildlife. Breakfasts at Cromwell Country Inn.

2000: Dalbo WMA near Dalbo, sponsored by Cambridge DNR Wildlife. Breakfast in Dalbo. 2000. (Second project of 2000). Kettle Lake WMA, southeast of Cromwell. Sponsored by Cloquet DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Cromwell Country Inn.

2001: Kettle Lake WMA, southeast of Cromwell. Sponsored by Cloquet DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Cromwell Country Inn.

2002 and 2003: State land west of Cotton. Sponsored by Cloquet DNR Wildlife. Breakfasts at Wilbert Café in Cotton.

2004: Private land near Gun Lake WMA. Sponsored by Aitkin DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Palisade Cafe. 2005. Grayling WMA east of McGregor. Sponsored by Aitkin DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at The Fireside in McGregor.

2006: Cherry Brushland Management Unit, near Cherry. Sponsored by Eveleth DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Wilbert Café in Cotton.

2007: Woodbury Burn private tract west of Cromwell.. Sponsored by Cloquet DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Cromwell Country Inn.

2008: Willowsippi WMA, north of Palisade. Sponsored by Aitkin DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Palisade Cafe.

2009: Cross Lake Burn WMA, north of Cromwell. Sponsored by Cloquet DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Cromwell Country Inn.

2010: Kroschel WMA west of Hinckley. Sponsored by Hinckley DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Cassidy's in Hinckley.

2011: No project.

2012: Soo Line Brushland Management Unit NW of McGregor. Moved due to access difficulties to Wagner BMU north of Palisade. Sponsored by Aitkin DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Palisdae.

2013: No project.

2014: Wagner Brushland Management Unit. Sponsored by Aitkin DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Palisade Cafe.

2015: Kimberly WMA, west of McGregor. Sponsored by Aitkin DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Fireside in McGregor.

2016: Palmville WMA in northwestern Minnesota. Sponsored by Thief River Falls DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Paradise Café in Strathcona..

2016 (second project of 2016): Sax WMA. Sponsored by Tower DNR Wildlife. Breakfast at Wilbert Café in Cotton.

MSGS note: If only 20 acres were cut per project (some were 40 acres) roughly 500 acres, managed at no cost to DNR!

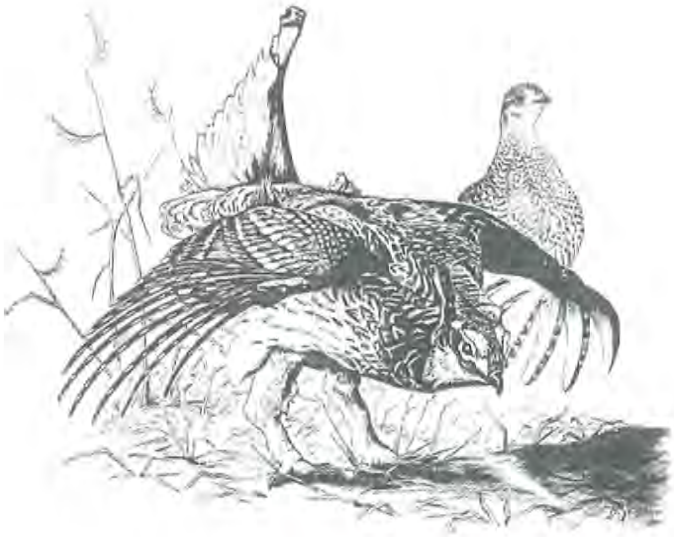
THE USE OF AN AERIAL PLATFORM TO LOCATE AND MONITOR GROUSE LEKS ON GLACIAL RIDGE NWR

By Benjamin Walker, Wildlife Biologist at Glacial Ridge and Rydell NWRs

It's 4:00 AM, another early morning for lek surveys but instead of quietly listening for distant booming, I park the truck on the tarmac of Crookston Municipal Airport and shine its headlights toward a small white plane. I groggily walk over to the pilot to help with the pre-flight inspection so we are able to take off in a timely manner. Everything looks good and we remove the ropes that attached the wings to the tie-down anchors on the tarmac. As I climb into the rear seat of the twin-engined Partenavia Observer (Italian brand of airplane), I instantly realize that the amount of space that the cameras and computer occupy is vastly greater then what is left for my 6'4" frame. The pilot fires up the engines and I test the computer system and cameras, everything is functioning. The pilot informs me that our flight time to cover the leks will be about two hours; I smile as that same distance took me about 5 mornings to cover on foot.

Current grouse survey methodologies rely on ground observers to record the number of individuals in each lek. Using this traditional method to monitor multiple leks across a large landscape can be extremely time-consuming due to the high number of required personnel, training of volunteers, and logistics required for lek access. The high amount of suitable habitat on Glacial Ridge NWR and the inaccessibility of some areas of the Refuge make traditional survey methods inefficient and time consuming during a period when staff-time is in high demand. In situations like this, researchers will typically utilize aircraft to cover these large areas but have had limited success monitoring small species that are often extremely difficult to detect and accurately count from the air. The recent advancement of infrared cameras (thermal) has been a potential game changer to monitor these species as some systems are able to detect a 0.035 degree difference in temperature! The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was fortunate enough to have one of these cameras on loan from the United States Geological Survey's Geomorphology and Sediment Transport Lab in Golden, Colorado.

On April 29, 2016, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Regional Pilot and I successfully tested this system to assess whether individual grouse could be identified. Flying at a height of 1,500 feet, we made multiple passes over known leks and searched a large portion of the Refuge which has not been surveyed from the ground. To date, only a handful of images from the known lek locations have been processed but we have successfully identified grouse at each lek. This proof of concept application demonstrated that grouse can be detected using the thermal imaging camera from an aerial platform and the potential capability of this system. In addition, we have also identified a number of improvements that could be made to the system such as a higher powered lens that would give us greater detail and a movable camera mount that will improve image capture as the plane tilts. We are very excited about utilizing this efficient survey technique in the future and would like to thank the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society for making this initial survey possible!



SPRING GROUSE SURVEYS IN MINNESOTA: A COLLECTIVE EFFORT

By Charlotte Roy, MNDNR Grouse Research Scientist

Minnesota is home to 4 grouse species, all of which can be harvested somewhere in the state. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources coordinates annual spring surveys to monitor population status for 3 of these species and is developing survey methods for the fourth. Survey data can be used to inform management decisions, but depends on the collective efforts of hundreds of volunteers and cooperators. Thanks to you if you've contributed to one or more of these surveys!

Ruffed Grouse

The largest of the grouse surveys is the ruffed grouse drumming survey. In 2016, volunteers from 14 cooperating organizations including the Chippewa and Superior National Forests; Fond du Lac, Grand Portage, Leech Lake, Red Lake, and White Earth Reservations; 1854 Treaty Authority; Blandin Paper; Agassiz and Tamarac National Wildlife Refuges; Vermilion Community College; Beltrami and Cass County Land Departments, and DNR staff from 26 work areas helped count drums on 123 survey routes. The results show that ruffed grouse are in the rising phase of their 10-year population cycle, which usually peaks in years ending in 9 or 0 statewide. Populations are doing well in the northeast, northwest, and central hardwood survey regions, based on long term data going back to the early 1980's. In the southeast survey region, where forest changes have resulted in habitat losses for ruffed grouse, they are faring less well. This long term context is possible because of the consistent support of volunteer biologists every year.

Sharp-tailed Grouse

Survey efforts for sharp-tailed grouse also rely on the efforts of many. In 2016, biologists from Agassiz National Wildlife Refuge and DNR staff from 13 work areas counted 1,737 male sharp-tailed grouse and birds of unknown sex at 182 dancing grounds. The survey approach varies depending on sharp-tailed grouse density; where grouse are dense, observers survey along routes and where grouse are less dense, all known dancing grounds are surveyed. Sharp-tailed grouse also have a 10-year population cycle (with peaks near years ending in 9), so it is important to compare sets of years in the same part of the population cycle (i.e., peaks to peaks, and lows to lows) when interpreting trends. The population is faring better in the northwestern part of the state than the east-central region, with larger leks (10.2 vs 6.0 males/lek, respectively) and more leks in the northwest. In the east-central region, the number of leks counted now is about half that counted 10 years ago. Although counts can vary with survey effort (how many leks are visited, and how often), an intensive survey effort in 2016 helped clarify that these downturns in the east-central region cannot be explained by changes in effort alone. Several studies are underway to understand these changes. Lindsey Shartell, MNDNR Forest Habitat Biologist, and I are studying how sharp-tailed grouse respond to prescribed fires and mowing in the fall. I am also conducting a study with Eric Nelson (MNDNR) and Andy Gregory (Bowling Green State University) to examine landscape connectivity for prairie grouse using genetics. A third study with Juli Ponder (UM-Twin Cities), Mark Jankowski (EPA), and Da Chen (Southern Illinois University Carbondale) is examining prairie grouse exposure to neonicotinoids. If you hunt prairie grouse, please consider submitting samples for these studies this fall. More information can be found at the DNR website: http://dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/grouse/index.html

Prairie-chickens

The prairie-chicken booming ground survey was first initiated in 1974 by the Minnesota Prairie-Chicken Society (MPCS). In 2004, the DNR assumed coordination after a modest hunting season was reopened following years of closure. Yet, MPCS still plays an extremely important role in these surveys, with MPCS members from various agencies and the public accounting for nearly all the volunteer effort. These volunteers include biologists from The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Minnesota Crookston, as well as the Wildlife Society Chapter at Bemidji State University and DNR staff from Crookston, Detroit Lakes, and Fergus Falls. In 2016, all 17 survey blocks were surveyed with 634 males and birds of unknown sex counted at 60 booming grounds. However, many more were counted outside the survey blocks, totaling 1,422 males and birds of unknown sex on 130 booming grounds. Numbers of birds counted this year were the lowest since the standardized survey began in 2004, but it appears that the population has stabilized after declines beginning in 2008. These declines were likely due, at least in part, to losses in Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollments over the same time

period. Graduate student Kaly Adkins is working with David Andersen (Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Unit, UM-Twin Cities), Bob Wright (MNDNR), and myself to analyze relationships between CRP and prairie-chicken population indices for her thesis.

Spruce Grouse

Last, but not least, is the spruce grouse survey. This survey is in its infancy. Improving information on spruce grouse population trends is important because spruce grouse are harvested (more Minnesota hunters report hunting spruce grouse than sharp-tailed grouse and prairie-chickens combined), and severe habitat loss is predicted as a result of climate change. Chris Scharenbroich (MN Information Technology), John Giudice (MNDNR), and I have been working for the last 3 years to design a spruce grouse survey throughout the current range in Minnesota. We have learned that response to the cantus call is insufficient to track population changes reliably, but a survey based on spruce grouse droppings has promise for detecting population trends over time. In 2016, we surveyed 65 routes in northern Minnesota for droppings with the help of 2 seasonal technicians. We are currently working on refining routes and hope to identify volunteers that are willing to take on a route or two. The goal is to have an operational survey by 2018. Cross your fingers and if you have spruce grouse in your area, please consider volunteering! We need information on spruce grouse, just like all our grouse, but that is only possible with the help of volunteers like you!

AN AERIAL DISCOVERY!

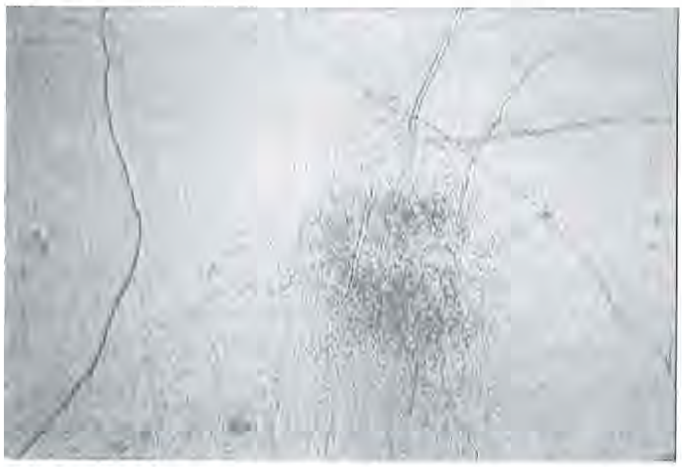
By Dave Dickey
Aitkin DNR Wildlife Mgr Ret.

It was May 18, 2000. We were conducting a prescribed burn on the Kimberly Marsh Wildlife Management Area SW of McGregor. I don't recall the exact acreage involved but was probably around 2,000 acres of lowland grass, lowland brush, and upland brush islands. Aerial ignition was involved that consisted of dropping what look like ping pong balls from a helicopter.

These balls have a chemical in them and when run through the ignition machine, they are injected with a liquid and then dropped to the ground. There is a chemical reaction and they then burst into flames. A lot of line can be ignited in a short period of time.

I was in the helicopter as the burn boss and directing the ignition pattern. As we flew over one area of the burn area, I notice a spot that looked different from the surrounding area. I then realized that I was looking at the sharp-tailed grouse lek that is present in this area. Since the birds spend a lot of time at the lek, vegetation gets trampled down. I snapped a couple of pictures for future use and to show others that in certain situations, leks can be spotted from the air.

It occurred to be that perhaps we could use helicopters to seek out leks in remote areas that we did not have time to seek out. It is also known that the birds are on the leks very early in the spring when there is still snow on the ground. But, at the time I did not follow up on the idea primarily due to the lack of funds to pay for airtime.



This spring, another idea is being pursued, that of using helicopters and infrared imagining to spot leks and count birds present at the time of the flight. They say the equipment is so good that they can tell the males from the females! If this works it will be a big boost to getting better census data on sharp tails. On the ground census takes a lot of time and can be weather dependent.

The Minnesota Prairie Chicken and Sharp-tailed Grouse Societies and helping in this effort by providing funds for some of the flights and data analysis.

I'd still like to spend some time in a helicopter early in the spring to seek out leks in remote areas, those areas that are hard to access by foot or ATV. Most times leks are found by listening for the birds to vocalize on the lek and for that you need a very calm morning.

PAYING HOMAGE TO THE MINNESOTA SHARPIE

By Bob St.Pierre

If you burn it, graze it, or hay it, they will come.

In my version of "Field of Dreams," heaven isn't located in an Iowa cornfield. Nope, heaven is just north of the Twin Cities in east-central Minnesota. Off a dirt road with a few turns exists a tract of land surrounded by yellow Wildlife Management Area signs with one big wood sign featuring the engraved names of the Minnesota Sharp-Tailed Grouse Society, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Pheasants Forever and a host of other partners. I'm referencing, of course, a parcel which was put into the public's hands a few years back through the state's Outdoor Heritage Fund with the Partnership of MSGS & PF as well as other organizations with a conservation vision.

On any given autumn day, a walk through the short grass with a savvy bird dog will produce the flush and chuckle of Minnesota's fire bird. If you wander into the young aspens and alders bordering the prairie grasses, you're liable to kick up a ruff or timberdoodle, too. When the stresses of the daily grind beat me down, it's the place I retreat to inside my mind. That image so crisp – on one knee with a pair of German shorthairs nuzzled by my side, I drink in the crimson maples, yellow poplars, and golden grasses.

Consider for a moment, the words of author John Voelker:

"I fish because I love to. Because I love the environs where trout are found, which are invariably beautiful, and hate the environs where crowds of people are found, which are invariably ugly. Because of all the television commercials, cocktail parties, and assorted social posturing I thus escape. Because in a world where most men seem to spend their lives doing what they hate, my fishing is at once an endless source of delight and an act of small rebellion. Because trout do not lie or cheat and cannot be bought or bribed, or impressed by power, but respond only to quietude and humility, and endless patience. Because I suspect that men are going this way for the last time and I for one don't want to waste the trip. Because mercifully there are no telephones on trout waters. Because in the woods I can find solitude without loneliness.

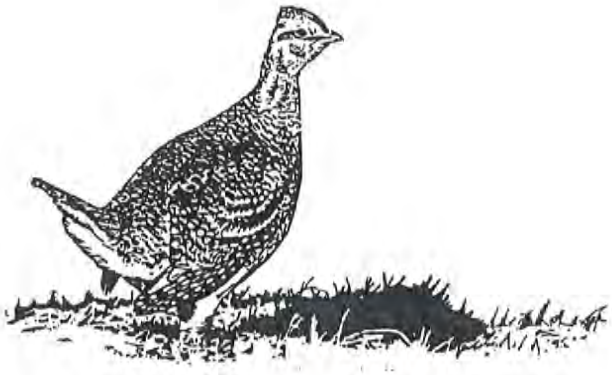
... And finally, not because I regard fishing as being so terribly important, but because I suspect that so many of the other concerns of men are equally unimportant and not nearly so much fun."

As I read Mr. Voelker's famous text, I replace trout with grouse. As a member of the Minnesota Sharp-Tailed Grouse Society, I'm confident you probably did the same. Sharptails and their environs are indeed worthy of poetry and passion.

My admiration for Minnesota's sharp-tailed grouse is inextricably intertwined with my sense of place. I love sharptails for where they live and I love the northern rangelands of Minnesota because sharpies call them home. And as we all know far too well, these places are disappearing. It's that link between a bird, the land, and ourselves that makes conservation our passion and our mission. Thank you for being a member of the Minnesota Sharp-Tailed Grouse Society.

Should I die tomorrow, there is an apple tree on the top of a hill north of my home in the Twin Cities. That hill overlooks a small sharptail lek, a wetland, and a crimson ruffed grouse woods beyond. Heaven.

Bob St.Pierre is Pheasants Forever & Quail Forever's Vice President of Marketing. Follow Bob on Twitter **@BobStPierre** and listen to Bob and Billy Hildebrand every Saturday morning on FAN Outdoors radio on **KFAN FM100.3**.



MSGS LOSES TWO CLOSE FRIENDS

By Jodie Provost and Bill Berg

Recently, the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society lost two beloved friends and colleagues, Wes Bailey, biologist, and Joe Nowak, a well-known MSGS charter member. Following are two summaries on these fellow's love for our natural resources and MSGS, as fondly written by Jodie Provost (for Wes) and Bill Berg (for Joe).

Wes Bailey died peacefully at his home in Grand Rapids of a malignant brain tumor on October 8. Wes received his BS Degree from Concordia College in Austin, Texas and a MS Degree from the University of Missouri in Columbia. He was a wonderfully warm, gentle, and caring fellow, and our DNR Forest Assessment Biologist based out of Grand Rapids for a few years.

A dedicated scientist, he initiated the DNR sharptail habitat selection research in Aitkin and St. Louis Counties that fellow biologist Lindsey Shartell recently completed. Wes constructed a preliminary habitat model and analyzed habitat connectivity. MSGS supported his study by paying for vehicle operation costs so radioed sharptails could be followed after DNR funds were expended.

I had the pleasure of trapping sharptails with Wes a handful of mornings and being one of his sounding boards. He was present at our first ever MSGS land dedication at Gun Lake WMA and a frequent speaker at MSGS meetings. He left DNR to pursue private consulting and help his wife Courtney (a DNR Plant Ecologist).

Bill Berg tells me he saw Wes and Courtney in Duluth a year ago, and that he looked good and openly talked about his condition. Wes was an accomplished photographer. He and Courtney vacationed in northern Michigan just three weeks prior to his passing. MSGS has contributed a memorial in memory of Wes.

Joe Nowak died October 27, after a couple years of declining health. I was shocked at the headlines on the Local News page of the Duluth Tribune that read *"Ski jumper, teacher, coach Joe Nowak dead at 88"*. That's how well Joe was known! And most MSGS members have seen Joe, too, as he was on the front cover of the Fall-Winter issue of *The Minnesota Sharptailer* Magazine.

I first met Joe and his sharptail hunting buddies in autumn, 1972 on DNR hunter checks northwest of Baudette, and that's where I took his picture. The ultimate sportsman, I checked his crew often the next three sharptail seasons, and if I didn't find him, he found me. These guys had one of those sharptail "honey holes" and always shot a few birds while leaving lots for seed.

Besides being an avid sporstman, Joe was a champion ski jumper, ranked in the US Top Ten from 1951 to 1959, and was inducted in the American Ski Jumping Hall of Fame in 2008. Joe had a BS Degree from University of Minnesota Duluth and a MS Degree from University of Wisconsin Superior. He was a well known coach and teacher in the Cloquet, Minnesota School district from 1958 to 1983, when he retired.

A couple years ago, Joe sent a hand-written letter to MSGS on sharptail management, which is printed elsewhere in this issue.

SUMMARY OF FALL 2016 MSGS BOARD MEETING

The MSGS Board held its fall meeting near Bemidji at Matt Breuer's home on August 25, 2016. The meeting convened at 3:30 pm. Purpose of a NW Minnesota board meeting was to hear from and build relationships with membership there.

Present were Dave Pauly (Vice President, Habitat Project Coordinator), Matt Breuer (Web Coordinator), Bill Berg (Director at Large), Bill Faber (Student Advisor), Dave Dickey (Membership), Jodie Provost (DNR Rep), Jerry (DNR retired) and Shirlee Maertens, Gretchen Mehmel (DNR Red Lake Area Wildlife Mgr.), Scott Laudenslager (DNR Baudette Area Wildlife Mgr.), Phil Doll (DNR Prairie Plan Local Technical Teams), Gregg Knutsen (USFWS, Glacial Ridge/Rydell NWR Mgr.), Brian Hiller (BSU professor), Kyle Arola (DNR Thief Lake Asst. Area Wildlife Mgr.), Jake Anderson (TNC Land Steward), Charlotte Roy (DNR Grouse Project Leader), Steve Caron (DNR retired), Dave Rave (DNR Bemidji Area Wildlife Mgr.) and Jay Huseby (Red Lake Tribal Biologist).

Time was allowed for NW Minnesota members to share observations, perspectives, needs, challenges, and opportunities. Reports were shared for brushland and sharptail activities at Thief Lake, Red Lake, Baudette and Bemidji Wildlife Areas, on Red Lake Tribal lands, on TNC lands, and at Rydell and Glacial Ridge NWR. Research updates were given regarding fall treatment, burn season, landscape genetics (analysis for habitat connectivity) and neonics studies, as well as pilot use of an infrared camera to aerially survey prairie grouse leks last spring (MSGS and MPCS supported this latter effort with funds).

Concerns included invasive species, brush and aspen encroachment, loss of habitat, loss of leks, lack of brushland management funds in DNR Wildlife's FY17 budget, and lack of USFWS funding for prescribed burn staff. Assistance was sought in getting attention and funding to the Aspen Parklands, raising awareness about habitat loss east of the "prairie line", the need for DNR to appreciate sharptail leks as unique resources and provide support and funding to protect and enhance brushlands, and on securing sharptail samples for the neonic study.

The predominant presence of leks on private land (86% of 201 known leks), protection and management of open, upland habitat, and engaging the public and private landowners were discussed. Acquisition and easements for protection were emphasized. The next Farm Bill needs a higher cap on Conservation Reserve Program acres, and more improved changes to the crop insurance that reduces the risk of farming marginal land. Land is at risk from conversion and tiling. Grazers and cattle producers should be supported.

Habitat managers need MSGS to be a voice to DNR, to state legislators, and to U.S. Senators and Representatives for adequate USFWS funding, and to secure OH and CPL grants. A meeting of MSGS, partners and private landowners with the DNR Commissioners Office was suggested (versus a letter as discussed at the May board meeting) to bring forward these and other talking points to encourage support for brushland ecosystems.

Interest was expressed in coordinating with Universities and students on Brush Cuts, a sharptail hunt, surveys, research, a photo contest, and wood routed signs for MSGS projects.

Regular business included an update on the NE MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat Partnership and its FY15 OH grant. $1.2 million remains. The LSOHC has extended it until 2019. Two parcels in Aitkin County and one in Carlton County are of particular interest. Save Our Sharp-tail (SOS) funds are needed for parcel closing costs. $450K of the remaining grant will go to brushland enhancement projects, with potentially more depending on acquisition costs.

CPL proposal plans were shared. A joint proposal by MSGS and RGS was planned for $400K for ruffed grouse/woodcock and sharp-tail projects on public lands across NW, NW and E-c MN. (Subsequent application details led to successful submission of six Expedited CPL proposals by MSGS, not in conjunction with RGS.)

Plight of the EC Minnesota sharptail population was noted by Bill Berg. The population is faring very poorly. Habitat and connectivity is being lost. He cautioned NW managers regarding habitat loss on the east edge of the NW range. Dave Olfelt, DNR NE Region Wildlife Manager, plans to organize a discussion soon with Charlotte, local wildlife managers and MSGS representatives regarding the EC Minnesota sharptail season.

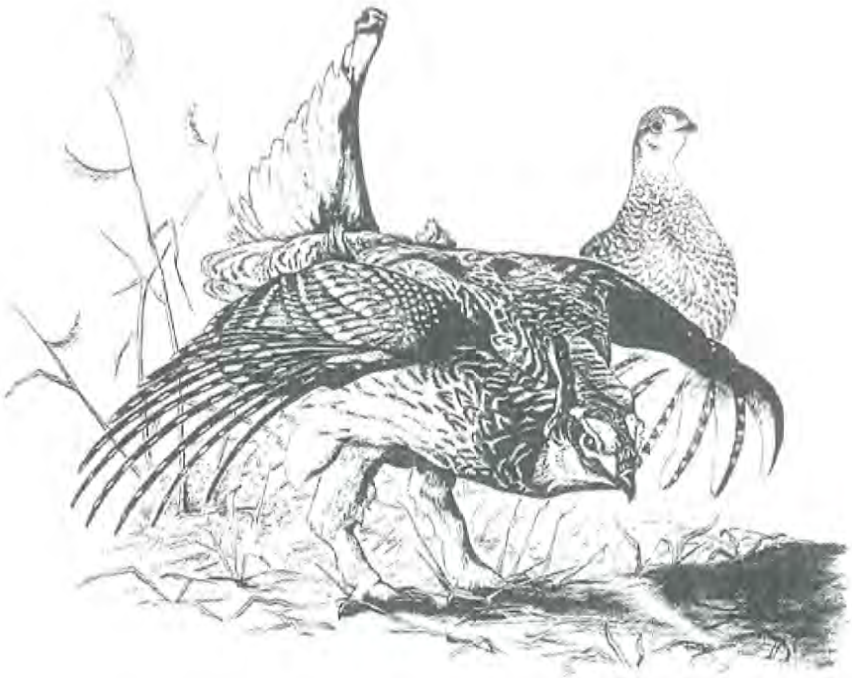
The sharptail translocation from NW Minnesota to Moquah Barrens, WI, that occurred next spring and will occur potentially the next two springs, was discussed. Concern exists whether enough sharptail can be moved to make a sustained difference, unless its 100 birds/year for five years as other states have done. Even then

translocation may need to be repeated in the future. Some states with isolated prairie grouse populations have resigned to this approach to maintain prairie grouse as part of their state's wildlife heritage and natural resources (and be prepared if land use/habitat becomes favorable again). DNR has directed that if removing birds from the NW Minnesota population will not harm it, we will help WI. NW Minnesota wildlife managers are understandably protective of local birds. However, stewardship for the greater good of sustaining sharptail in our two states and being a team player was reflected.

A special 30th Anniversary MSGS fall magazine is being planned. An interesting array of articles and photos reflecting on MSGS's history and accomplishments will be included.

MSGS sincerely thanked all NW Minnesota members for participating, their expertise, input, ideas, passion and dedication.

The next Board meeting will likely be held in January at Hinckley. The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.



DONATIONS NEEDED

MSGS was granted 3.7 million dollars a few years back from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) grant program to help us acquire critical sharp-tailed habitat in Minnesota. Each land acquisition costs MSGS $3500/parcel which covers the cost of appraisals and legal fees. NONE OF THE ALLOCATED GRANT MONEY CAN BE USED TO COVER THESE COSTS. MSGS must cover this cost out of our general treasury. We foresee 4-5 of these land transactions completed this year which will bring our total expense to around $15,000. Some of this can be covered with the help of other conservation groups but at the end of the day it is our responsibility. This will consume a major portion of our treasury.

MSGS does not have an annual fundraising event but rather we rely on personal donations from our members to fund our treasury.

Please consider donating generously. Donors giving in excess of $100 will be sent an MSGS 30 year anniversary cap. This is one time only offer for this cap as it is on special order. To be eligible for the cap, donations must be made by Jan 1, 2017. Donations should be made by check with a note "SOS habitat fund"

Thanks in advance for your generosity.

Roche

MSGS Application (for New & Renewing Members)

Membership Categories: (All include newsletter and decal)

- ☐ Regular $15
- ☐ Contributing (new members receive a cap) $50
- ☐ Sustaining (new members receive t-shirt & print) $100
- ☐ Sponsor (new members receive framed print) $200
- ☐ Life (one-time payment, receive framed print with engraved plaque) $500

Save Our Sharptails (SOS)
donation for habitat: _____

Total Enclosed _____

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Mail to:
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
P. O. Box 3338
Duluth, MN 55803

MSGS is a 501-c3 organization and donations are tax deductable

P.O. Box 3338
Duluth, MN 55803