



MINNESOTA SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

SUMMMER 2016 NEWSLETTER

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“We will Endeavor to Preserve” - CPL Grant Proposal

By Dave Pauly, MSGS Vice President

The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) in collaboration with Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) will craft a traditional Conservation Partnership Legacy (CPL) grant proposal to submit to MN DNR in August 2016. The CPL Grant Program funds projects that restore, enhance, or protect forests, wetlands, prairies, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife in Minnesota. Funding for this program comes from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) created by the people of Minnesota. See www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/habitat/cpl for details.

The MSGS-RGS Collaborative Proposal will seek the maximum \$400,000 traditional grant allocation. 10% non-state match is required. These funds would assist DNR Wildlife staff and other public land managers in enhancing critical wildlife habitat in NW, NE and EC Minnesota for sharptails, ruffed grouse, woodcock, and a myriad of other game and non-game species. Habitat project and match ideas can be shared with Dave Pauly (Griz@scicable.net, 320-279-1777). MSGS looks forward to benefitting the targeted habitats, wildlife, its members, and Minnesota's hunters and non-hunters.

MSGS NEEDS YOU!

Officer, Regional Rep and Project Coordinator Positions

Last September, the MSGS Board gathered at Ward Julien's lake cabin for a day retreat to discuss how to keep MSGS strong and sustainable as an organization into the future. As a result, a brief draft, strategic plan with goals and strategies emerged.

One of the goals is to identify what leadership positions are needed on the Board, define their roles, fill them with capable and passionate volunteers, and function as an effective team. To that end, MSGS is considering implementing elections and appointments to new positions. Each position would serve two years, and people serving in the positions could be re-elected. Four of the eight elected positions would be up for election each year.

Positions up for election next year would include President, Secretary, and four new Regional Representatives (coinciding with DNR Regions). Volunteer, Merchandise, and Fundraising Coordinators are also needed. If interested in learning more about one of these positions, please contact Dave Pauly at Griz@scicable.net or 320-279-1777. All Board members are encouraged to actively represent and support MSGS in its mission, to recruit and engage members, and to provide material for newsletters/magazines.

MSGS Board

Roche Lally, President

Dave Pauly, Vice President,
Habitat Project Coordinator

Gregg Nelson, Secretary

Ward Julien, Treasurer,
Acquisition, Magazine

Matt Breuer, Website/Media

Dave Dickey, Membership

Bill Faber, Student Advisor

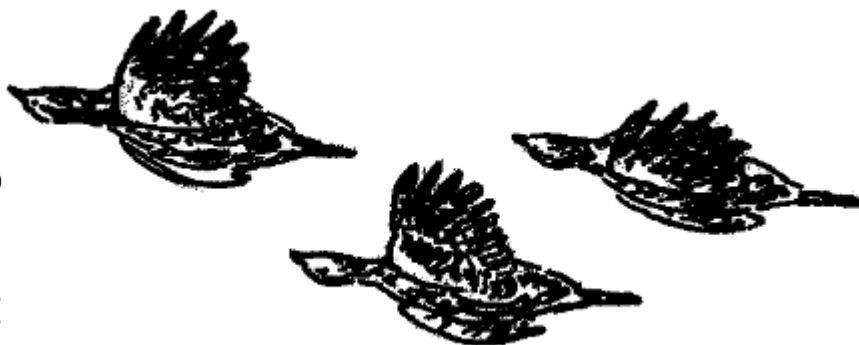
Melissa Koelsch, Newsletter

Bill Berg, Director at Large

Bill Goldberg, Accountant

Jodie Provost, MN DNR Rep.

Minnesota Sharp-tailed
Grouse Society
Celebrating 30 years of
Conservation!



MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
P.O. Box 3338
Duluth, MN 55803

Stamp

Address Label

SAVE THE DATES!

August 19th- Prairie Chicken Hunt Lottery Deadline

September 17th- Sharp-tailed, Ruffed and Spruce Grouse Season Opener

September 24th- Savanna & Brushland Landowner Workshop at St. Croix State Park
(contact jodie.provost@state.mn.us for more information)

September 24th- Prairie Chicken Season Opener

September 24-25th Take-a-Kid Hunting Weekend

October 15th- Pheasant Opener

Membership Update

By: Dave Dickey, Membership Coordinator

As of June 17th, our total membership is 237. Last October, we had 141 members and since then we have added 35 paying and 61 non-paying members.

Category	Members
Regular	120
Contributing	27
Sustaining	9
Life	20
Complimentary	29
Student	30
Landowners	2



MSGS Membership Form – for New and Renewing Members

Category	Gift for New Members	Donation
Regular	Newsletter and decal (received by all categories)	\$15
Contributing	MSGS hat	\$50
Sustaining	t-shirt and print	\$100
Sponsor	Framed print	\$200
Life (One-time Donation)	Framed print with engraved plaque	\$500

Category Selected:

Save our Sharptails (SOS)

Voluntary Donation for Habitat:

Total Enclosed:

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING MSGS!

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Phone

E-mail

(Allows newsletters/notices to be sent electronically, thus saving postage, making communication easy & allowing more funds for habitat.)

Please remove this application from the newsletter and mail to the following address:

Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

P.O. Box 3338

Duluth, MN 55803

2016 Brush Cuts– Successful Volunteer Days for Sharptail Habitat

By Jodie Provost, DNR Representative

For perhaps just the second time in many years, an MSGS Brush Cut was enjoyed in NW MN. On March 5, 36 hardy souls gathered at Palmville WMA, enhancing 16 acres of bog by hand cutting scattered spruce and tamarack. Kyle Arola, DNR Asst. Area Wildlife Manager from Thief Lake was key to organizing it. University of Minnesota - Crookston and Bemidji State University students were instrumental to its success. Dedication of the Crookston wildlife crew must be noted – this bunch had been up until the wee hours the night before cleaning the Ralph Engelstad arena as a club fundraiser. And they were returning to do it again after the Brush Cut, yet they still participated. Awe, to have that youthful energy and touch of craziness again!

The NE MN Brush Cut was held on March 19 at Sax WMA. Vermillion Community College and Central Lakes College students, and other robust MSGS members, totally 23, whacked 13 acres of scattered aspen from an old farm site and tamarack from ditch lines. Jessica Van Duyn and Jeremy Maslowski, DNR Asst. Area Wildlife Managers from Tower, did a yeoman job organizing and finding a contingency site when the originally planned site on Zim WMA became much too wet after a heavy snowfall. Of special note at this Cut, was an age range of 19 to 82! John Gislason, our wisest and oldest member, was in attendance as usual. He has never missed a NE Brush Cut. Amazing. He still has that touch of youthful craziness!

Both events began with breakfast buffets provided by MSGS, visiting and a briefing at local cafes - Paradise Cafe in Strathcona and Wilbert Café in Cotton. The usual tradition of bog burgers at noon, served in the great outdoors, occurred. 30th anniversary MSGS cakes, complete with MSGS and college logos, completed the foraging. See MSGS on Facebook for a video of the NW crew's birthday song rendition.

The 2017 NW Brush Cut is already set for Glacial Ridge NWR where a new acquisition needs former nursery trees cut. We hope our MPCS partners can join us, as the project will benefit both MN's prairie grouse species. The next NE MN site is to be determined. Wildlife Managers in that part of the state, please keep potential sites on one of your WMAs in mind. Hiring a contract mower can get more acres done, but it cannot match the mass appreciation and support for habitat and sharp-tailed grouse that is built, the inspiration instilled in students, the connections they make with professionals, the camaraderie shared, the tasty grub, fresh air and exercise of a Brush Cut Day.

Another new benefit of our Brush Cuts on public lands open to hunting, is that the hours put in by our volunteers (\$20/hour value), can be used as the required 10% match for a Conservation Partnership Legacy grant that MSGS will seek this August. If we strive for 40 members to attend each event, and work four hours each, that's \$6,400 match for \$64,000 of grant funds.



Photo Credit: John Loegering

Also, a new incentive for colleges next year will be the "Golden Saw" traveling trophy. The college with the most students participating will take it home. College participation and muscle power is currently recognized each year, and will continue to be, by a year plaque they are given to place on a Karen Smith sharp-tailed grouse print proudly displayed in their college hall.

A sincere thank you to all that make the Brush Cuts happen. They are truly a collaborative effort. See you in the brushland next year!

Summary of MSGS Board Meeting

May 24th, 2016

The meeting convened at 5:30 pm. Present were Roche Lally (President), Dave Pauly (Vice President, Habitat/CPL Project Coordinator), Ward Julien (Treasurer, Acquisition Coordinator, Magazine), Bill Berg (Director at Large), Bill Faber (Student Advisor), Melissa Koelsch (Newsletter), Jodie Provost (DNR Rep), and Josh Koelsch.

A membership update was shared and discussion on recruitment occurred. Membership Coordinator, Dave Dickey, has done an excellent job cleaning up the database, and sending renewal reminders and thank yous in the last several months ago. Membership currently stands at 237. The strategic plan, drafted based on the board retreat last Sept., aimed for 300 members by spring 2016 and 400 by spring 2017. Ideas to continue increasing and engaging the membership were discussed, such as distributing MSGS pamphlets this fall during hunting season at license vendors, sporting good businesses, on grouse hunter's vehicle windshields, DNR offices, and the Game Fair in August at Anoka. A photo contest on Facebook with winning photos published in the fall color magazine, and holding an event near the Twin Cities were discussed. One year memberships will be given to private landowners conducting brushland habitat, as done in the past.

Rob Naplin, DNR Wildlife Manager at Park Rapids, prairie grouse supporter, and avid conservationist, that passed away a couple years ago, will be honored June 4 with dedication of the Yaeger WMA addition. An MSGS Board member donated a sponsor level membership in his honor. Rob's wife, Linda, will receive the associated MSGS print.

In regard to MSGS's 30th anniversary, all special edition hats have been sold or distributed and a "field note" for the Sept./Oct. issue of the MN Conservation Volunteer is under development.

MSGS has \$14,000 in the north checking account, \$450 in the south account, and \$1,335 in the Save Our Sharptails (SOS) account. Potential sponsorships are being scoped out with corporations. FY15 Outdoor Heritage (OH) grant acquisition commitments will include \$3,500 each for administrative closing costs on three parcels under acquisition, as well other acquisitions that may still occur. The East Central Spurs Chapter of PF very kindly paid these costs for the parcel closed on in Pine County. A \$750 contribution was approved toward a pilot aerial infrared survey study of prairie grouse in NW MN.

Remaining FY15 MSGS-PF OH grant funds must be spent by June 30, 2017. After current acquisitions underway are completed, about \$1.2 million will remain and 120 acres be left to protect to meet our accomplishment commitment. Lands are being purchased for cheaper than expected. After all reasonable protection opportunities are exhausted, remaining funds can be used for enhancement in the NE MN partnership area. To help meet the need for enhancement funds on public brushlands, A Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) grant proposal is being developed for August when CPL funds become available again. The DNR budget is very tight for WMA projects. Possible projects and match are being determined. Insurance needs have been addressed and are not a problem.

A letter to the DNR Commissioner seeking greater support for brushlands management will be drafted and partners invited to sign on. DNR has not been seeking OH funds for brushland and forest management, only prairie management, and acquisition with OH funds, whether by DNR or partners that wish to donate land to DNR, is being limited to the prairie. In addition, the internal DNR budget for brushlands management is far below that needed for maintenance. A group will be convened this summer by Dave Olfelt, NE MN Regional Wildlife Manager, to discuss the sharp-tailed grouse hunting season in east-central MN. Concern exists over the continued loss of leks. Spring survey results were again bleak for Pine and Kanabec Counties. Bill Berg and Roche will represent MSGS on the group.

To begin implementing an election process, interest in nominations for the officer positions of President and Secretary (two year terms), as well as four new Regional Representatives (two would serve one year, and two for two years), will be sought. The following election would then include the Vice President and Treasurer (also two year terms). This election rotation would allow for experience on the board, yet build "depth on the bench".

The Fall Board Meeting will be held early fall. Consideration will be given to holding it in NW MN to draw on the interest, talents, support, and resources of MSGS members there. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm.

In late May during our big burns, flocks of up to 7 birds were flushed by staff and a number of singles and doubles were also flushed. Biological staff have observed two different hens coming in to males on the Moquah dancing ground, and at least three different males were observed with the Moquah males. Who by the way were quite rude to their Minnesota counterparts, likened to a playoff game between the Packers and the Vikings. However, within a few weeks the males were welcomed as long as they did not act like males. We have also flushed birds from historic dancing grounds so occupancy of maintained historic sites was encouraging. Remember, success in our eyes is anything better than two grouse by next spring.

The risk in a pilot effort is not getting sufficient numbers for the long term, but we likely thwarted off an extirpation event in a management area that Aldo Leopold surveyed in the late 1920's. The effort showed us that they all don't leave and that brushland birds from flat lands of northwestern MN on the short-term can adapt to rolling barrens. We also learned that late afternoon releases allow birds to settle in and cue into a new area since they have a short time prior to roosting after their release. They were also released on an active dancing ground and could hear the local birds dancing in the early morning hours. This epiphany was a product of logistics and not the plan. In scientific terms, this project is about how much wet paper can you throw at wall to see how much will stick. Well, we know some of it does stick, so the challenge will be about moving a sufficient number of hens over the next few years with the least amount of impact. I came away from the project with 27 recommendations on how to get there, and again like wet paper some will stick by the consensus of opinion.

As I move on as the project lead, the baton will be passed over to my friend and Forest Biologist Dan Eklund (another grousophile). Matt Bushman will act as my replacement, and Matt has a long term commitment to the management of Moquah Barrens and knows the resource intimately. I know under their watch that the discussion will be good, and that sharp-tails will persist in Moquah Barrens. The funding through the USDA Joint Chiefs Initiative and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative is in place for next year, so it's about garnering the support for a full scale trapping effort in 2017. I hope to volunteer on the project next year and in subsequent years in my travels to and from Alaska. My sincerest thanks to all. It's been a hoot!!

Save Our Sharptails (SOS) Please Consider a Donation

Several years ago, MSGS began a "Save Our Sharptails" or SOS account to raise funds to acquire and protect land critical to sustaining sharp-tailed grouse populations. In addition, these funds can also help MSGS enhance habitat. Now, more than ever, sharptail are challenged by multiple stressors, from habitat loss and degradation to a changing climate. The good news is MSGS can keep taking action to protect, improve and connect brushland habitats across the landscape, especially if a healthy SOS account exists. Funds in this account are greatly needed for acquisition closing costs on land to be protected with MSGS/PF's FY15 Outdoor Heritage grant, and as the required 10% match for a hopeful Conservation Partners Legacy grant that will be sought in August. Your donations are tax deductible and used to leverage additional dollars, going a long way to meet MSGS's conservation goals. Please consider a donation today. Thank you!

Check out MSGS on Facebook and the MSGS Website! Watch for our upcoming Photo Contest and Gift Card Giveaways

Check out the MSGS website at the following address:

www.sharptails.org

Like the **Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society** on **Facebook®** for announcements, giveaways & news!

DEDICATED TO THE MANAGEMENT AND RESTORATION OF SHARPTAILS IN MINNESOTA FOR HUNTERS AND NON-HUNTERS

Male Wisconsin Grouse Seeks Minnesota Female

Thomas C. J. Doolittle, District Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Forest Service

This past April U.S. Forest Service biological staff from the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, in cooperation with many partners captured 101 Sharp-tailed Grouse from Marshall, Roseau and Kittson counties in northwestern Minnesota. In total, 29 birds (13 hens and 16 males) were transported to Moquah Barrens in northwestern Wisconsin. The trapping crew deployed radios on five males and all were banded with white plastic leg bands with black numbers. This was our pilot year, and it was a learning experience for everyone.

The trapping only occurred on dancing grounds with 15 or more dancing males, and we could only capture 20% of the male count from a given dancing ground. We were also limited to areas that were not in conflict with Sharp-tailed Grouse research in northwestern Minnesota. We received permission to trap a location once it was surveyed by the local DNR wildlife manager and the location was reviewed as an area that would not be in conflict with ongoing grouse research. All of this meant that there were a lot of moving parts to affect the project. This process, at the advice of Charlotte Roy, was very salable to the private landowners and assured minimal impacts.

The effort between the agencies and private partners was a reminder of what great things we can do together. Our colleague's from Wisconsin and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Red Cliff and Bad River Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa, Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Minnesota and Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Societies, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Refuges and Private Lands) all worked together to initiate the recovery of Wisconsin's most northern population of Sharp-tailed Grouse. However, the real jewel in the process was the cooperation of the private landowners in northwestern Minnesota. We not only received permission from the landowners but they aided in determining trapping locations and calling their neighbors to help get permission to trap on adjacent properties. The Forest Service has written thank you letters to each of them reiterating our appreciation for their help and stewardship for the resource.

As a pilot year this was our chance to meet landowners and our management colleagues in Minnesota, as well as learn about the logistics to catch sharp-tails in their haunts within the northwestern counties. It is hard to express the gratitude that I have for the Minnesota Area and Assistant Managers who took time out of their precious spring schedules to provide dots on a map and answer a myriad of questions about sharp-tails in their management areas. In addition, the advice and support of Charlotte Roy, Jodie Provost, Bill Berg (MN DNR emeritus) and Paul Telander was instrumental in getting the project on the wing. And yes, Paul, Bill, Jodie and Charlotte were spot on - catching those hens is much tougher than it looks.

In the early spring of 2016, Moquah Barrens Management Area was down to one last active dancing ground with only two attending males so any addition of bio-mass to the population was critical. The results of this year's release I would express with guarded optimism since we only moved 13 hens. As said above, catching hens is tough! However, most of the transported birds have stayed in or near the management unit after their initial release. One male potentially flew 29 miles south of Moquah Barrens, joining 2 cocks and a hen on a dancing ground in Douglass County. Greg Kessler, WDNR, observed the white banded bird during one of his dancing ground surveys. Yellow bands and blue bands were placed on sharp-tails in that area six years ago so it could be a faded band on an exceptionally old bird or one of our released birds. Of the five radioed males, none are definitively on the air as of June 15. There were two known mortalities by raptors. One transmitter has been fading in and out and two have been off the air with unknown outcomes. If these were birds in their normal homeland habitats, we would expect 60 percent to perish within a year. Therefore mortalities are a given, with a higher risk to a newly relocated group of birds. Even with that being said, there are a number (>15) of released birds still alive in Moquah, and we are hoping for some reproduction. Further surveys in late season and next spring's dancing ground surveys will end the first chapter in this story.

Story Continues on Page 6

ABC Golden-Winged Warbler Habitat Effort

By Kevin Sheppard, American Bird Conservancy

Beginning in 2013, American Bird Conservancy (ABC) launched a collaborative, long-term initiative to foster partnerships and provide technical expertise to public agencies and private landowners throughout northern Minnesota. These habitat projects are implemented using research-based best management practices to create young forest (also known as 'early successional') habitat within a diverse forest landscape. Though this habitat benefits a wide range of game and non-game wildlife species, the main species of focus for ABC is the imperiled golden-winged warbler, one of Minnesota's premier conservation species.

Golden-winged warblers are a breathtaking songbird that only measures about five inches in length and displays vivid yellow wing bars and crown with a stark black throat patch and mask. Females exhibit similar physical features, but with more muted coloration.

A neotropical migrant dependent on a dynamic mix of young and old contiguous forest, these warblers nest on the ground in young forest openings and then, once the chicks have fledged, move into older adjacent deciduous forest to forage with their young until they migrate to Central and South America for the winter. Our summer migrants normally stay in Minnesota from May to August.

Unfortunately, golden-winged warblers have experienced one of the most precipitous declines of any songbird in the U.S. over the past 50 years and have completely disappeared from many areas of their historical summer nesting range, which once stretched from northwestern Minnesota to New Hampshire and as far south as Tennessee. Today, this range has contracted into just two isolated sub populations located in the Great Lakes and Appalachia. Today, northern Minnesota is a stronghold for golden-winged warblers, containing approximately 50% of the world's remaining nesting population.

Declines of both golden-winged warblers and the suite of species that share similar habitat are most attributable to habitat fragmentation, land use change, loss of breeding and wintering habitat and lack of age and cover type diversity in our forested landscape. In the past couple of decades, full life cycle observations have started to indicate that there may be a bit more overlap of habitat use between those species originally thought only to use young forest and those species presumed to use only forest habitat than initially believed. It has therefore become all the more important to maintain a healthy and diversified balance of forest age classes and cover types throughout the landscape.

To this end, American Bird Conservancy has secured funding for habitat projects on both public and private lands in northern Minnesota. On public lands, habitat projects are completed through partnerships with county, tribal, state, and federal agencies through a grant provided by the State of Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Fund. On private lands, funding is available to landowners through Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant secured by ABC and provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Since 2013, ABC and its partners have completed over 5000 acres of habitat restoration and plan to add an additional 2000 acres per year in Minnesota. In addition, ABC has concurrent conservation projects throughout the Great Lakes and Appalachia as well as in the golden-winged warbler's wintering habitat in central and South America.

If you think your property or public land in your area has the potential for young forest habitat projects please contact the following:

Kevin Sheppard
Minnesota Private Lands Coordinator
American Bird Conservancy
Phone: (218) 244-3788
Email: ksheppard@abcbirds.org

Peter Dieser
Minnesota Private Lands Coordinator
American Bird Conservancy
Phone: (218) 567-1967
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Photo Credit: Laura Erickson