



# THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

Fall 2017 NEWSLETTER: Membership Appreciation Edition

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Roche Lally  
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## Thank You for Your Membership Support

Dave Pauly, MSGS President

As we (collectively) enter our 4<sup>th</sup> decade of Sharp-tailed Grouse population and habitat conservation, I wish to commend you all for your staunch dedication to our Mission.

You have demonstrated your unwavering support through annually renewing your membership, routinely upgrading your membership status and often donating a few extra bucks to the SOS (Save Our Sharptails) land acquisition account. Not to mention purchasing raffle tickets at the Spring Fling. Pat yourselves on the back – by your willingness to do the above we were able to pay ½ of the \$14,000 LSOHC Acquisition debt we had accrued in our Partnership with Pheasants Forever, to acquire 4 highly desirable parcels which are additions to several Wildlife Management Areas.

Many of you (and I hope more will join in the future) in conjunction with other volunteers have been involved in annual “Brush Cuts”, sharing your physical labor and camaraderie in return for improved sharptail habitats. Watch for a notice of upcoming Brush Cuts in the Winter newsletter.

I look forward to improving our continued efforts and sharing our thoughts and ideas regarding our Fire Birds!

Regards, Dave (Griz), MSGS President | Habitat Projects Coordinator | Life Member, Email : [Griz@scicable.net](mailto:Griz@scicable.net) , Phone : 320.279.1777

## Give to the Max Day is November 16

The power of our members and funds drive MSGS’s ability to meet its mission - the management and restoration of sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota for hunters and non-hunters. Funds are primarily secured from membership fees, donations, and Spring Fling fundraisers. They go a long way toward printing and distribution of newsletters, sponsoring events and trainings that support brushland and habitat conservation, supporting research, matching CPL grants for habitat enhancement, and paying for closing costs on acquisitions that protect brushlands with Outdoor Heritage grants.

Now we are exploring a new avenue to raise funds – **Give to the Max Day on Thursday, Nov. 16, 2017!** GiveMN was launched in 2009 to help non-profits and schools raise money to improve the quality of life in Minnesota. To give to MSGS, so our good work for sharp-tailed grouse, brushland habitats and their wildlife, clean water and air, biodiversity, and outdoor recreation can continue and grow stronger, go to the GiveMN website and MSGS’s page at [givemn.org/organization/Minnesota-Sharp-Tailed-Grouse-Society](http://givemn.org/organization/Minnesota-Sharp-Tailed-Grouse-Society). Look for more promotion of Give to the Max Day on [MSGS’s website](#) and [Facebook](#). Your dollars will be put to work. Thank you to the max!

## 2017 Spring Grouse Survey Report & Fall Outlook (from 7-10-17 DNR News & Report Release)

Charlotte Roy, MN DNR Grouse Project Leader & Ted Dick, MN DNR Forest Game Bird Coordinator

Based on spring grouse surveys in Minnesota this spring, ruffed grouse drumming counts were up 57 % statewide and the average number of sharp-tailed grouse per lek was similar, compared to 2016.

The ruffed grouse population is nearing its 10-year peak. The 2017 survey results for ruffed grouse were 2.1 drums per stop statewide. The averages during 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 were 0.9 and 1.1 and 1.1 and 1.3, respectively. In the northeast survey region, which is the core of Minnesota's grouse range, counts were 2.5 drums per stop; in the northwest there were 1.6 drums per stop; in the central hardwoods, 0.9 drums per stop; and in the southeast, 0.8 drums per stop. Statewide, drums per stop were as high as during the last peak in drumming in 2009, but have not yet reached previous peak levels in all regions. For grouse hunters, the large increase in drumming counts this year is sure to be a signal of good times ahead during the fall season.

Data on sharp-tailed grouse take some interpretation. Observed lek size can vary as a function of population changes, lek numbers, and the timing, effort and conditions of surveys. Comparisons of the same leks counted in both years indicate that counts per lek were similar to last year in both the east-central and northwest survey regions and statewide. 286 grouse were counted on 40 leks in the east central region and 1,470 on 141 leks in the northwest. Leks with  $\geq 2$  grouse were observed an average of two times. The average per lek was 7.2 in the east-central region and 10.4 in the northwest. This year's statewide average of 9.7 sharp-tailed grouse per lek was similar to the long-term average since 1980. Importantly, the multi-year declining population pattern observed in the southern portion of the east-central region, appears not to be an artifact of survey effort. In the northwest, the number of leks counted has been stable or increasing in the same period. In 2016 and 2017, DNR allowed capture and translocation of sharp-tailed grouse from the northwest to supplement the Moquah Barrens population in Wisconsin.

The DNR's 2017 grouse survey report and grouse hunting information can be found at [mndnr.gov/hunting/grouse](http://mndnr.gov/hunting/grouse).

### SW MN & NE MN MSGS Regional Representative Notes

Walt Gessler & Jeremy Maslowski

**Walt Gessler** - Greetings from the Southwest. Sharp-tail grouse are a rarity down this way however, we continue to get regular reports of them in the region. They consistently show up along the Minnesota/South Dakota border from Browns Valley down towards Pipestone. Near Pipestone there has been a lone male Prairie Chicken observed for the last couple of years and we also had an observation of a lone male Sharp-tail displaying just west of the Lac qui Parle WMA on TNC's Plover Prairie Sanctuary this spring.

Brushland habitat is not nearly as abundant in southwest Minnesota as in the rest of the state due to extensive agriculture and wetland drainage. Brushland type habitat in southwest Minnesota is primarily associated with forest transitions, savannas, wild plum thickets, sandbar willow thickets and sumac thickets on areas of remnant or restored habitat. To maintain these habitat types, the following activities are the primary drivers carried out in the southwest that provide the most benefits to prairie and open landscape species-prescribed burning, woody removal from prairies and grasslands, prescribed grazing, prairie and grassland establishment, invasive species management, and land acquisition. The following agencies and groups in the southwest conduct the most habitat management that benefits prairie and openland species: DNR-Wildlife, The US Fish & Wildlife Service and The Nature Conservancy. DNR Parks & Trails, DNR Ecological Services and Habitat Forever also manage or establish habitat that benefits prairie and openland species. There is also a fair amount of private land management that occurs by prescribed burning by private landowners and contractors.

**Jeremy Maslowski** - Greetings from the Northeast! The Tower DNR work area will be initiating a two phase project in coordination with MSGS using a \$55,000 CPL grant over the next couple of years to mow and grind a total of 400 acres (200 for each phase) on the Sax, Fermoy and Zim WMAs beginning late this fall. With challenging weather the last couple of years to get fire on these units, we will continue to use mowing as a method to treat and set back brush. Staff are very appreciative for MSGS involvement with CPL grants and have been able to accomplish a lot of work that otherwise wouldn't get completed. Staff have not heard any reports from hunters in the field planning to target sharpies this fall.

## John Gislason & Bill Mahoney– the Power of Friendship & Membership

By Jodie Provost

Long as I can remember involvement in MSGS, I can also remember John Gislason and Bill Mahoney's unwavering, pleasant and gentlemanly presence at Brush Cuts and Spring Flings. These two fellows have been members from nearly the fledging of our organization. Recently, I visited a bit more in depth with them about how they came to join MSGS, their involvement, and thoughts on our organization, its future and that of sharptail.

John joined MSGS in the mid-1980s. It began when he and Bill Berg crossed paths ice fishing at Ford Dam between Minneapolis and St. Paul. They were both young bucks, about 25 years old. Bill was going to college. John was a promising engineer (and still works as a forensics engineer). They had grown up just a mile from each other. Both were avid bird watchers, uncommon back then. John really liked Bill, bird watching and learning to hunt grouse with him. He was already active in several organizations, but when Bill invited him to join the budding MSGS, he jumped on board for the chance to get out of the Cities and spend time with Bill. Over the years, John and Bill Berg raised their families simultaneously, worked their careers, and embraced adventure together. John recalls a sharptail hunt as bumbling novices up at Lake of the Woods one weekend when they stayed in the Norris Camp garage and harvested just three birds.

John is fond of history and is a wealth of knowledge and facts. One relevant story is the collection of prairie chicken and sharptail eggs by his grandparents as kids on the prairie. As immigrants from Iceland to Lyon and Yellow Medicine counties of Minnesota, they were accustomed to a lack of mammals and hardy, subsistence living. John also recalls shooting a prairie chicken in Lyon County, northwest of Marshall in about 1963.

Every single MSGS Brush Cut held in northeast Minnesota has been graced with John's company! Even with walking stick and saw in hand, he treks through the bog, leaving a path of woody destruction. Younger folks should take heed and feel deep respect. Over the decades, John has sold raffle tickets (and won a shotgun), attended nearly all the Spring Flings, and a least three board meetings, and recruited about a half dozen members. In the late 1980s/early 1990s, he remembers helping with an unsuccessful effort to get a local Twin Cities chapter established.

According to John, MSGS has done a great job securing and using grants, and keeping interest in sharptail alive through media such as TV and articles like those in the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer. He notes that most older folks interested in sharptail have died, and that young people don't know what sharptail are or have the interest unless they hunt birds and have dogs. To keep interest alive and MSGS's future bright, he thinks hunters, birders and young people, should be engaged. As a 30+ year member of the Minnesota Ornithological Union, his interest stems strongly from birding. John also noted the opportunity to engage and encourage farmers with hay and pasture land, especially if they see sharptail and appreciate them.

John finished with "MSGS has been a fun organization, there are few of us, but it is a great reward, you meet interesting people, and hear about interesting programs."

Bill Mahoney joined MSGS in the mid to late 1980s, not long after John joined and encouraged him to do the same. The two fellows worked for the same company that was owned in part by John's Dad. They hunted together at first, then were partners in conservation crime together in MSGS. Bill was inspired by the organization's desire to save sharptail and their habitat. He'd seen the birds in flocks of 15-20 in northern Minnesota, but knew little about them.

Over the decades, Bill worked as a technician in construction, materials testing, site inspection, and quality assurance at nuclear plants and electrical facilities such as Northern States Power. In later years he served in management, retiring in 1999. During his busy career and beyond, Bill has helped at nearly all of the northeast Minnesota Brush Cuts, only missing a couple due to a conflict and a knee surgery. He's attended most Spring Flings, noting they are quite enjoyable, and briefly served as secretary on the board. He recalls attending an event north of Minneapolis at a DNR facility where there was a feed to encourage membership from the Cities. In the 1990s, he and John helped survey leks in Pine County, camping on 80 acres John had there.

Bill thinks MSGS does the Brush Cuts well – he really believes in them, feeling they are important to maintaining activity and bringing in new members. He underscored the significance of keeping a stream of communication to members, recruiting members, reaching young people with information about sharptail and their habitat, and finding ways to compete with people's busy lives, jobs and multiple interests. He thinks outreach skills are needed, schools/colleges should continue to be invited to Brush Cuts and Spring Flings, and new ideas on running the organization from younger members are needed and important.

Bill ended by sharing "MSGS's future depends on whether sharptail can be saved and if people think we can win the battle. People, the public and DNR, like to see success. Experts need to share information, and what needs to be done for success. We are fighting changing weather and greater interest in forest."

## MSGS Member Profile: Ross Hier

### By Kyle Arola, MSGS Vice President

Ross grew up as a farm kid in pheasant country near Jackson, MN, which lies along the Iowa border. Growing up in that setting instilled a passion for wildlife and he knew at a young age that he ultimately wanted to work in the wildlife field. He would go on to be a proponent of wildlife and habitat conservation in the wildlife management field. Ross retired last December from the Crookston DNR wildlife office where he was the Area Wildlife Manager; he had worked in that office since 1988 when he was hired as the Assistant Manager. Ross cherished his great coworkers and members from the public that he had the opportunity to work with while he was there.



His first encounters with sharp-tailed grouse occurred while working at Roseau River WMA where he was working on a ring-necked duck project. It was during this time that he was introduced to the Juneberry country; this is a vast area of peatlands, sedge communities, grasslands, and scattered aspen thickets. In his downtime from work he would get out and spend time hunting for them. He quickly fell in love with the vast, open tallgrass aspen landscape of northwest Minnesota. One thing that stood out to him was the habitat that sharptails require, which is the right mix of grass and brushlands. Ross thoroughly enjoyed the land management aspect of his job and his favorite management tool for sharptails and greater prairie chickens was prescribed fire.

Life after retirement? Ross has been enjoying life at his cabin on a quiet, peaceful lake north of Bemidji. He has been busy fishing, fly-tying, water-coloring (one piece was recently featured at the Red River Watercolor Society National

Watermedia Exhibit), wood burning and carving, working on art for donations, catching up with old friends, finishing up a shop that will be used for carving waterfowl decoys, wild ricing, and most importantly, spending quality time with his beautiful bride, Leela. He continues to be active in conservation. He also noted that the most beautiful part about retirement is the mornings and not having to be in a rush to get anywhere.

And how about those adventures with Tympie nuchus? The original idea came from Ross and Terry Wolfe referring to Tympanuchus WMA, which is in the Crookston office's work area, as Tympie WMA. Ross likes to add humor to a lot of situations and I think all of us appreciate that aspect.



## Required Minimum Distribution from Your IRA to MSGS

By Bill Berg, Director at Large

So if you are 70-1/2 years or older, or approaching that milestone, please read this. If you have savings in an IRA or Deferred Comp, you already know about the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) that the financial firms are required by law to pay you at the end of each year. The amount is calculated by insurance companies. And you already know the Federal tax withheld is substantial, and can put you in a higher tax bracket.

But did you know that you can withdraw part or all of your annual RMD tax-free if you donate it to any 501-C-3 (tax exempt) organization? All RMDs qualify, except funds held in a Deferred Comp account (for some reason, the IRS didn't allow that). Examples of 501-C-3 organizations include most charities, churches, and conservation groups, including MSGS. If you think that a tax-free RMD withdrawal is right for you, please consider designating part or all of your RMD to MSGS. Your financial agent who handles your IRA can set it up for you.

## Summer 2017 MSGS Board Meeting Summary

The MSGS Board held its summer meeting at the farm of Jodie Provost near Aitkin on August 25, 2017. The meeting convened at 4:00 pm.

Present: Dave Pauly (President, Habitat Project Coordinator), Kyle Arola (Vice President,), Derek Frost (Treasurer), Scott Laudenslager (NW Regional Rep), Jeremy Maslowski (NE Regional Rep), Walt Gessler (SW Regional Rep), Dave Dickey (Membership Coordinator), Jamie Slade (Honorary Director), Ted Dick (DNR/RGS Forest Game Bird Coordinator), Breanna Wagner (member) & Jodie Provost (DNR Rep, note taker)

With several new board members in place, operations, duties and ideas were discussed to clarify board member responsibilities and expectations. The MSGS charter will be secured and bylaws/operations updated by a committee. Board meetings will occur at least two times per year in person and rotate around the state, with on-line Skype or conference call meetings between, so meetings occur at least quarterly or more if needed. E-mail communications in between will keep activities moving forward.

Progress continues with FY15 Outdoor Heritage (OH) and 2016 Expedited Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) Grants. Two recent acquisitions in Aitkin County were closed in late January by Pheasants Forever (PF). Sax/Zim WMAs mows were completed last winter. When burns are done on Pomroy Pastures WMA and Holy Cow Ranch Addition to Kroschel WMA in Kanabec County, the entire OH grant will be utilized. Five mechanical projects are ready to go this coming winter with CPL funds. The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) may be interested in collaborating on an OH grant proposal for brushland mowing and burning on public lands, as well as a Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant proposal for private lands work.

DNR currently manages sharptail as a forest grouse under the forest habitat and research teams because where it remains is primarily in the forest and transition regions, despite the fact it is technically a prairie grouse. Discussion ensued whether more support and funds (e.g., OH prairie grants) could be secured if it were managed by DNR as a prairie grouse by the prairie/farmland habitat and research teams. Consensus was they should remain managed by DNR as a forest grouse - forest and bushland management, coordination and collaboration cannot be untangled and must occur for success.

An update on the Interstate Work Group (IWG) for Sharp-tailed Grouse and Greater Prairie Chicken was shared. Jodie and Greg Hoch of DNR serve on the IWG which will develop range wide plans for these grouse to be proactive and apply lessons learned from sage grouse and lesser prairie chicken. The IWG meets next Oct. 16-17 prior to the Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting in Dickinson, ND Oct. 17-19. DNR Wildlife's Forest Game Bird Team recommended development of a strategic open landscape (brushland) conservation plan about two years ago. It would be timely to complete alongside the IWG effort, resulting in a vision and tool agreed upon by partners to secure support/funds and target habitat management.

The MSGS treasury was reported as: checking account balance of \$7,665.57, SOS savings of \$4,286.12, and CPL of \$500, for a total of \$12,451.69. The Spring Fling/30th fundraiser cleared \$2,882.44! Corporate sponsorships of MSGS continue to be sought. Give to the Max Day (Thurs., Nov. 16, 2017) will be capitalized upon to raise funds, especially for the \$14,000 in acquisition closing costs owed PF, but also for CPL match. It will be promoted via the newsletter, website and Facebook. A motion passed to pay PF \$7,000 from the SOS and checking accounts. RGS offered to kick in \$500 (similar to Woodcock MN and Aitkin NWTF each giving \$250.) Current membership stands at 261. Life members total 23. Membership dues provide about \$4,400 per year.

The fall newsletter will be the usual newsletter format, not a glossy magazine as developed the last several years, to save funds and ensure timeliness. It will be e-mailed to as many members as possible to save postage and for ease, but mailed when needed or desired by members. Four newsletters per year is the goal – winter before Brush Cuts, spring before elections and if a Spring Fling year, summer, and fall before hunting season. Articles for the fall newsletter were discussed.



Outreach discussed included prep for NW and NE MN March 2018 Brush Cuts, and collaboration with grazing and farming organizations such as MN Grazing Lands Conservation Association (GLCA), Sustainable Farming Association, Land Stewardship Project, and Audubon's Birds and Beef Program. MSGS has sponsored the Sept. 15-16 NW MN Stockmen's Assoc. Alternative Grazing Tour at Baudette and Sept. 29 NE MN Forage and Grassland Council Field Day at Aitkin. Jim Ravis (master naturalist, photographer) and Jake Granfors of PF recently had a booth at the Aitkin Rivers and Lakes Fair featuring a blind and video of sharptail that was a big hit. Dave Pauly will tend a MSGS table at an Aug. 26 Pine Ridge Grouse Camp event. A lek cam and spots on Prairie Sportsmen and Project Upland episodes were also ideas.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm and was followed by a bonfire. The next board meeting will occur in early December.

## Recipes and Photos from the Field

By Matt Bauer, Kyle Arola & Jodie Provost

### Lobster Mushroom Camp Potatoes

- 3 wild foraged lobster mushrooms
- Potatoes
- 1 onion
- 3 tbsp butter or margarine
- Salt & Pepper
- Seasoning



Slice potatoes and lobster mushrooms into equal sized pieces. Dice onion. Put in foil or foil tin. Cover with butter and add salt, pepper, and seasoning. Wrap the foil tightly or cover tin with foil. Grill at 350 degrees for 20 minutes or until potatoes are done. Serves 6.

### Sharpie Fajitas

- 2 sharp-tailed grouse breasts
- 1 each sweet bell pepper, green, red, orange
- 1 onion
- 1 tbsp. honey
- 8 tortillas, small
- Sour cream
- Hot sauce



Start by cutting breasts into strips, continuing with onions and peppers. Begin to sauté until rare, drizzle with honey and cook to medium rare. Add veggies and continue to sauté until veggies are done. Serve with tortillas with a side of sour cream and hot sauce. Serves 4.



Kyle Arola's Dog Isla and a 2017 NW MN Sharpie Caribou Wildlife Management Area

### Friendship and Membership

John Gislason and Bill Mahoney



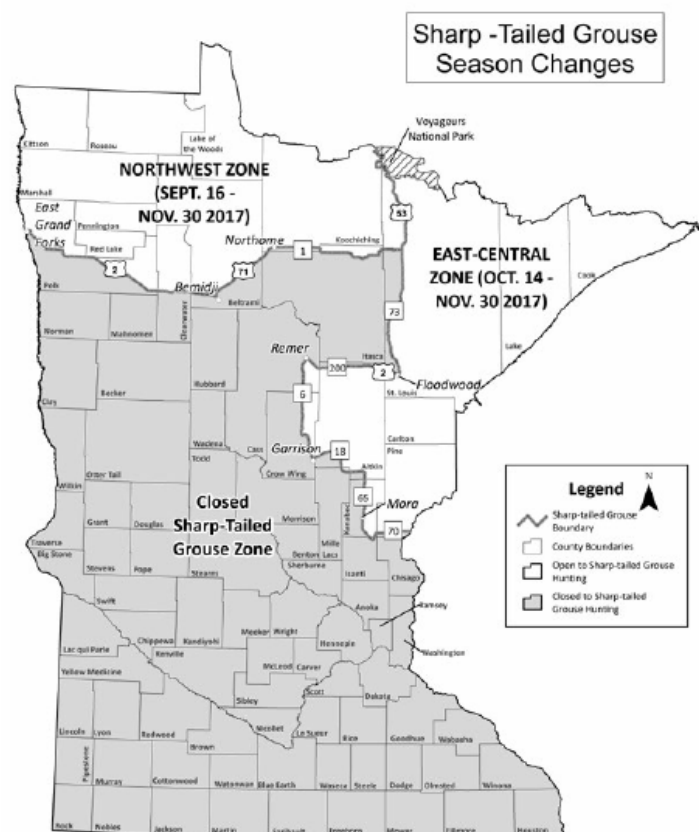
## Northeast/East-central MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Season Change - Opens October 14

A reduced sharp-tailed grouse hunting season is in effect in northeast Minnesota beginning this fall to address concern over decline of this population and potentially benefit it. **The northeast Minnesota season will now run October 14 to November 30.** The season in northwest Minnesota remains unchanged, still opening in mid-September on small game opener, running September 16 to November 30. See page 42 of the 2017 MN Hunting and Trapping Regulations. MSGS provided input to MN DNR regarding this change at two stakeholder meetings in fall 2016 and at the April 29, 2017 MSGS Spring Fling/30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.

### Treasurer Summary - Derek Frost, Treasurer

Funds in the SOS and checking accounts were recently used to pay \$7,000 to Pheasants Forever towards closing costs for recent land acquisitions.

MSGS Accounts as of Sept. 25, 2017	Dollars
Regular Business Checking	\$4,690.84
Heritage/CPL Checking	\$500.00
SOS Savings	\$560.00



## Hunters Can Contribute to Conservation Research for Prairie Grouse—Neonicotinoid Study

Charlotte Roy, MN DNR Grouse Project Leader

This fall, we are asking licensed sharp-tailed grouse and prairie-chicken hunters for their help. We are conducting a study to examine recent exposure of prairie grouse to neonicotinoid pesticides through treated seeds or other means. We hope to determine whether residues are detectable in liver and tissues of harvested birds.

To contribute to the study, we are asking prairie grouse hunters to consider submitting samples from the birds they harvest, along with the GPS location where the bird was harvested. If GPS coordinates are not available, township, range, section, and quarter-section information is also useful, but GPS coordinates are preferred if possible, and will be kept confidential. If you would like to help, **please submit whole frozen liver or whole birds to your local Area Wildlife Office by appointment** during regular business hours. The DNR Office Locator Application can be found at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/contact/locator.html>. Harvest location information will be kept confidential. Please fill out the following information for each bird or liver submitted.



### Minnesota Dept. of Natural Resources Prairie Grouse Sample Collection

Species: Prairie-chicken / Sharp-tailed grouse (circle one)

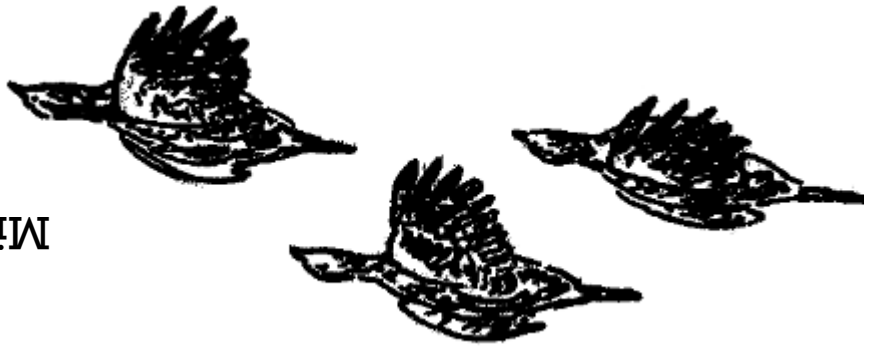
Sex of bird (if known): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of harvest: \_\_\_\_\_ Collector: \_\_\_\_\_

Township/Range/Section: \_\_\_\_\_ Example: T152N R38W S21

GPS Location if Possible: \_\_\_\_\_

# Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society



**PAPERLESS NOTICE - EMAIL ADDRESSES ENCOURAGED**

MSG values its members, communications and funds. To reduce newsletter mailing costs, conserve funds for other important outreach and habitat opportunities, and allow special communications via email, members are encouraged to provide their email addresses to membership coordinator, Dave Dickey, at 99whitetail@gmail.com. MSGS will not share members' email addresses. Hard copies of newsletters will continue to be mailed to members with no e-mail address and/or that desire a hard copy.

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

Stamp

Address Label

Address Service Requested