



THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

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Spring/Summer 2022

2022 SPRING FLING & DOUBLE BARREL GUN SHOOT A SUCCESS!

The 2022 Spring Fling and Double Gun Shoot saw 48 Firebird Fans gather on Saturday, April 30 at Wings North near Pine City in east-central Minnesota. Despite a rather rainy day, the flock persevered in fellowship, learning, fundraising, and fun. Coffee and muffins, and a membership meeting at 9 am started the day. A summary of the meeting can be found on page 7.

Presentations were then shared by Greg Hoch of MN DNR on “The Prairie-Forest Border: A History and Continuation of Change”, Earl Johnson of the MN Prairie Chicken Society (MPCS) about “MPCS Habitat Protection Efforts”, Jillian Fejszes of Pheasants Forever regarding “Private Land Conservation Options for Landowners”, and Bob Hanson of WI DNR about “The Latest from Wisconsin”. These presentations generated excellent discussion, including added inspiration for a statewide sharp-tailed grouse management plan.

After a delectable burger bar lunch and safety message, the Double Gun Shoot began. Teams of 4 people competed at 10 shooting stations and had fun names such as the “Grouse Chicks”. For most of the participants it was their first time shooting sporting clays. Even though there was a light rain for the duration of the shoot, everyone was smiling.

The shooting stations were sponsored by 21 organizations, businesses and individuals. See the sponsor list to the right. THANK YOU, SPONSORS! Together you contributed \$5,250 toward sharptail habitat.

A Silent Auction and Raffle of items, ranging from maple syrup to wildlife art, and outdoors gear to two shotguns, were run throughout the day. Another highlight was Marshall Deters becoming a Life Member - Congrats, Marshall!

When all was said and done, over \$7,000 was netted from the day for habitat projects. These funds can be used for Conservation Partners Legacy grant match and thus be multiplied by 10. Well done, Team Firebird. Your generosity is a new Spring Fling record! Much gratitude also goes to the East-central Chapter of Pheasants Forever for partnering on the day.



Gun Shoot Sponsors – Thank You!

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Eder's Fox Run Kennels
Huntwise
Izaak Walton League of America
Jeff Powell Excavating
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MN Trappers Association
MN Prairie Chicken Society
Minnesota Native Landscapes
Native Resource Preservation
North American Grouse Partnership
PCI Roads
Pheasants Forever - East-Central Spurs
Ray Marshall
Red Rock Fire
Upland Gun Company

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A 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan - *Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird*



"...the grouse represents only a millionth
of either the mass or the energy of an acre.
Yet subtract the grouse and the whole thing is dead."
- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949

"We don't get the natural resources we deserve. We get the natural resources we fight for." I recently read this statement again under a colleague's email signature. So true. And having a plan for the "fight" greatly increases the chances of winning it. Having no defined goal and no strategies laid out on how to attain it wastes time, funds, people power, and ultimately our natural resources.

MSGs encouraged MN DNR repeatedly to develop a statewide management plan for sharp-tailed grouse, but due to other pressing issues and lack of capacity, they stated that it was a low priority. So MSGS stepped up to the plate, recently drafting "A 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan - *Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird*".

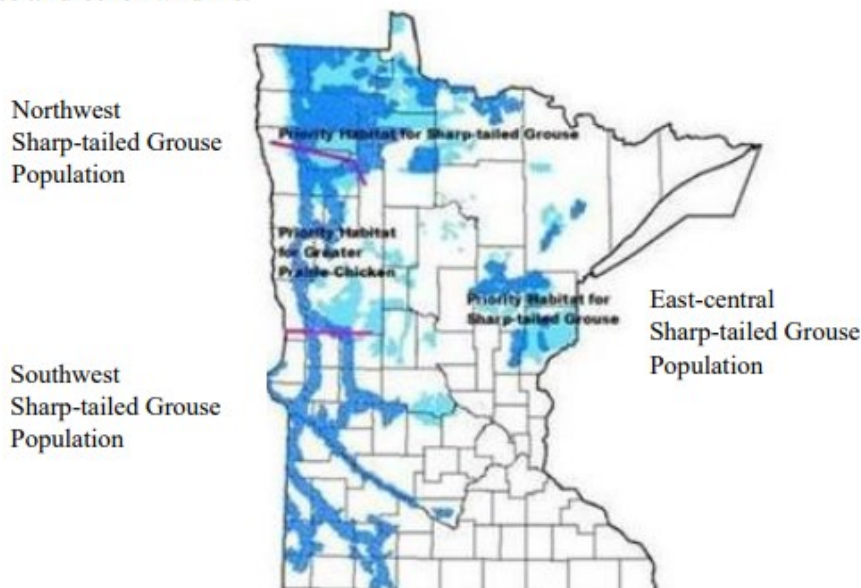
The Vision states "Wide open spaces of abundant, high-quality grassland and shrubland habitats support viable populations of sharp-tailed grouse, the "Firebird," in Minnesota. These populations provide opportunity for regulated harvest and viewing. Their habitats support a diversity of plants and wildlife, clean water, carbon sequestration, biomass, space to recreate, and other benefits to communities."

The Plan Purpose is "to serve as a communication tool with strategies for implementation over the next 10 years to assure viable sharp-tailed grouse populations in Minnesota into the future. The strategies will guide MSGS and all organizations and individuals that desire to positively influence sharp-tailed grouse habitats, populations, and outreach, especially within the identified core habitat areas and corridors. This plan will serve as a working document, use the best available science and management practices, and be adapted as needed."

Letters of support and input are currently being sought from partners with interests ranging from prairie grouse to pollinators, hunting to wildlife watching, clean water to carbon sequestration, and grass for grazing to native plants. All partners endorsing the plan will be listed and all input considered to further strengthen it.

If you would like to review the draft plan, email Jodie at jodie.provost@yahoo.com Input is encouraged by July 20.

Map 1. Core habitat areas and corridors of grassland and shrubland in Minnesota for prairie grouse and other wildlife.

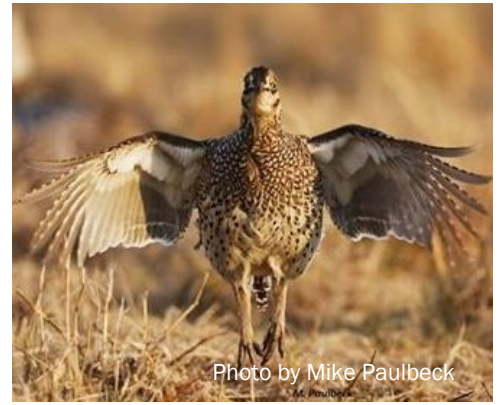


New MN DNR “Window on Wildlife” Features a Sharptail Lek, by Marshall Deters

On April 21, 2022, it happened. Minnesota sharp-tailed grouse were dancing live on YouTube.

After many years of discussing this possibility, and a year and a half of team work, the MN DNR Window on Wildlife Website went “live”. See <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/wildlife/window-wildlife.html>

An interdisciplinary team of MN DNR biologists, outreach, and computer specialists worked to research, acquire, and test equipment to video wildlife in a remote setting and stream it live to the internet. Content on the webpage gave information about sharp-tailed grouse biology and their habitat requirements, and provided links to supporting agencies.



Derek Frost of the DNR Aitkin Wildlife Office was instrumental in adapting the equipment to conditions on an east-central MN lek. He came up with the great idea to mount the solar panel and battery units to a large plastic sled for mobility and to prevent the need to drive posts into frozen ground. He used his trapping background to develop a method to anchor the sled into frozen ground to keep from it tipping in strong winds.

The camera worked great, but unfortunately the first microphone we tried did not work properly under these conditions. A different microphone was ordered, and but due to supply chain issues, it did not arrive until mid-May and was not installed at the lek.

The camouflaged camera can be mounted up to 200 feet from the solar power unit. It was mounted about 30 feet from the center of the lek. The birds did not seem to be concerned with the camera and often walked right underneath it.

Deer sometimes wandered though, other times they ran through, flushing some of the birds. A coyote walked within feet of the birds. Northern harriers and rough-legged hawks often flushed the grouse, but none were caught on camera catching a bird.

Two interesting observations on sharptail behavior occurred. After being flushed off the lek by a raptor, the birds often returned to dancing in just two to three minutes. The best viewing time was early morning, but the amount of activity on the lek in the evenings was surprising to many observers.

This year the camera view was fixed. Next spring we will seek one or two volunteers to remotely zoom the camera from their computer, to focus in or out to catch the best action. This would require a couple hours a morning, one or two days a week during April and early May. Contact Marshall Deters at muzzdog@ghotmail.com if interested.

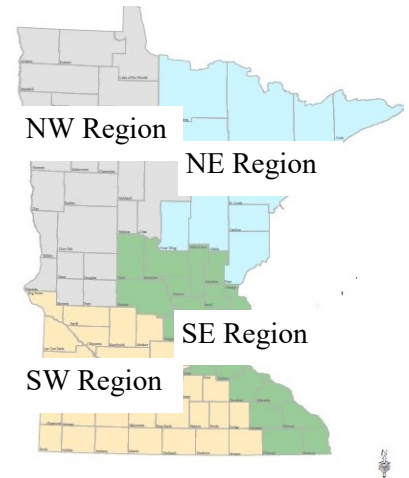
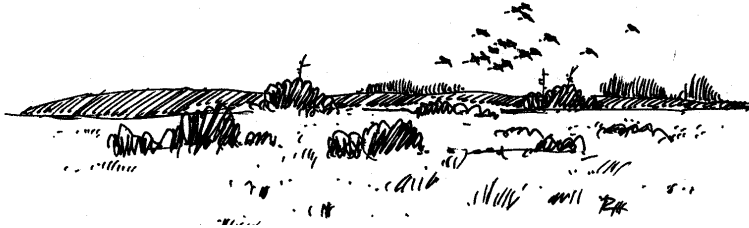
The camera is now installed in a wood duck nest box. Throughout the year the camera will showcase other wildlife.

The following camera data were gathered from April 21 to June 5: over 1,000 hours of total viewing time; live Grouse Cam total views = 1,777; live Wood Duck Cam total views = 4,760; 13,943 total views of the Window on Wildlife web page; peak daily view for the Grouse Cam was on April 22 with 934 views; and peak for the Wood Duck Cam was on May 26 with 1,335 views.



2022 MSGS Board Election Results for Vice President, Secretary, NW MN Rep & SE MN Rep

Congratulations and gratitude are in order to Kyle Arola, Martha Minchak, Gary Huschle, and Ray Marshall for their re-elections at Spring Fling to MSGS Vice President, Secretary, and Northwest and Southeast MN Representatives, respectively. Their dedication to our mission is greatly appreciated. Your Board is critical in steering our conservation ship straight and true toward a Minnesota with a sustainable sharp-tailed grouse population.



To Evan by Ray Marshall

To Evan:

If you attended the Spring Fling back in April, you probably saw Evan. He was helping his Grandparents, Gary and Kathy Huschle, sell raffle tickets in the big tent. Evan and I had met before.

I remember well the first time I met Evan. It was back in the Fall of 2020 when I had traveled to Gary's place north of Bemidji for our annual sharptail hunt. Evan was able to join us on one of those days. While this was Evan's first sharptail hunt, he was a member of his Bemidji High School trap shooting team, so he knew how to carry and shoot a shotgun safely. Evan is blessed with a personality that causes him to listen more than talk, at least when he is around adults. That sort of old-fashioned behavior in a young person is pleasing to me, but sometimes it makes one feel that you are talking a bit more than normal to fill in the quiet places.

Anyway, we decided to hunt one of our favorite areas by splitting up. Gary, Evan, and one of Gary's dogs covered one part of the area, while I took one of my dogs and hunted in the opposite direction. Probably a half an hour later, I glanced in the direction I thought Gary and Evan might be and I spotted Gary's dog cresting a rise half a mile away. Since I had hunted this area several times with Gary, I recognized that his dog was going to a spot where we often move sharptails, so I couldn't help but stop to watch. Sure enough, Gary's dog stopped suddenly, and then didn't move. I collared my dog so I could see this drama unfold. I then saw Evan moving up to and then ahead of the dog. A sharptail flushed, Evan mounted his shotgun, the bird dropped, and then I heard the report of his shotgun. Evan had shot his first sharptail! He didn't know it, but I did a little happy dance on the spot to celebrate. It isn't often that you get to witness a young person take a sharptail on their first sharptail hunt. Back at the truck later, Jackie took a photo of Evan with his first sharptail.

At the Spring Fling, I got to join Evan and Gary when we did the sporting clays course. Evan outshot me, of course, but he was smart enough to only tie with his Grandpa!

I wrote this note because I want readers to know that young people like Evan give me hope for the future. It won't be too many more years when many of us older members won't be around and I sometimes worry who will help look out for our sharptails. When I'm around Evan, I stop worrying. I think Evan and other young people like him will do just fine.

You might want to check with your local high school. If they have a trap shooting team, I'll bet there are some young girls or boys who would enjoy doing some bird hunting. More of us should do what we can to make that happen.

Thanks Evan. - Ray Marshall



Walt Gessler Reaches 300th Prescribed Burn Mark!

A Neat Note from Walt, SW MN Rep



Back in 1987 I started working with wildland fires. The first couple of years as a smoke chaser suppressing wildfires, and then primarily prescribed burning with some wildfires in the mix. A number of years ago a friend and colleague was recognized for completing their 300th prescribed burn. This person was farther on in their career at the time than I was, however I thought it was a goal to work towards. This week I finally reached that goal after 35 years. I have had the opportunity to work with and learn from many talented people over the years in the fire community and would never have reached this goal without their support and mentoring. The efforts and teamwork of a lot of talented wildland firefighters was also key and to all of them I say thank you!!

So after about 56,000 acres, might as well shoot for 60,000.



WAY TO GO, WALT!

MSGS Volunteer Brush Cut Habitat Days

“You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give.” - Winston Churchill

Volunteerism makes the world go ‘round. And once again, devoted souls made the sharptail world go ‘round by cutting woody vegetation on WMAs to learn about sharptail habitat, enhance it, enjoy fellowship, and generate in-kind match for Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) grants for even greater habitat work.

Though Saturday, March 26 was chilly and windy, Mille Lacs WMA near Onamia was graced with 17 volunteers that impacted 24 acres and created \$6,464 of CPL match. Vermillion Community College took home the highly coveted Golden Saw Traveling Trophy by bringing the largest crew of 9 people. A wild game “MeatEater” chili by Griz sustained the crew. Much thanks goes to the Pheasants Forever (PF) Rum River Chapter for joining the fun. An option to work self-guided on the sites was again offered for the second year. Six people used this option at Mille Lacs.

On the same day, 19 volunteers descended on Gun Lake WMA near Palisade to affect 40 acres and create \$4000 of CPL match. Itasca Community College attended a Brush Cut for the first time and kicked butt with 5 students, taking home the Golden Saw for that site. Snow goose polishes on the grill by Jodie provided a “MeatEater” lunch to power the flock. Gratitude goes to the PF North County Chapter for donating \$150 toward morning snacks and sides. Members of the local NWTF and RGS chapters were also amongst the crew increasing our biodiversity.

Brush Cuts were planned near Carp Swamp WMA south of Baudette and on Lac Qui Parle WMA near Appleton. However, deep snow then water caused cancellation at Carp Swamp. Lack of volunteers at Lac Qui Parle will be cause for a stronger recruitment effort in 2023.



Two productive Brush Cuts occurred on Saturday, March 26 including 17 participants at Mille Lacs WMA (left) and 19 at Gun Lake WMA (right). The Golden Saw recipients were Vermillion Community College and Itasca Community College students, respectfully. Way to give back, volunteers. You are sharptail conservation heroes!

A Visit with Bill Berg: A Founding Father of MSGS, by Jodie Provost



In early April, Bill Berg, one of the founding fathers of MSGS, graced me with an interview, along with friends Martha Minchak and Ann Giesen at his Knife River home. Bill is and has been many things to many people - MSGS supporter extra-ordinaire for decades, wildlife research biologist, outdoorsman, historian, retired DNR, colleague, friend, mentor, volunteer, veteran, father, grandpa, husband, and more. He is famous in wildlife management and research circles. In his very full life, he worked 31 years for MN DNR, retiring in 2001. His involvement in MSGS began at its very start in 1986 with first President and lead founder, Roche Lally. It includes roles as habitat project coordinator and newsletter editor. For a history lesson on MSGS, see the Fall 2016 Sharptailer, 30th Anniversary issue. Bill wrote several of the articles.

During our chat, Bill shared many stories and much wisdom. The “Dirty Dozen” or original DNR wildlife managers from the mid to late 1960s, as well as his professors in college, were instrumental in shaping him. His research spanned moose to sharptail. Living at Norris Camp for a few years was a dream fulfilled. His most interesting project was breaking up an illegal trapping ring. And his most frustrating was the wolf delisting process in the late 1990s. Bill mentions his Wildlife colleagues as “family” frequently and fondly recalls their shenanigans. One episode included calling into a radio show on which DNR’s Roger Holmes was fielding questions. Bill pretended to be an old Norwegian farmer with wolf and cattle issues. Working with many agencies and organizations, including Tribal Nations, was particularly rewarding to Bill.

To our current students and young professionals, Bill suggests: develop your people skills in communication and collaboration, don’t count every hour on the books, go into this field because you have a deep passion and want to know and help the natural resources, be self-motivated, learn to adapt to change, and get to know your peers and learn from them. Finally, he sees tremendous potential in encouraging and supporting a diversity of outdoor users beyond “people that look like us”.

This little blurb cannot do Bill justice. I highly recommend that folks enjoy his full interview by the MN Chapter of The Wildlife Society on [YouTube](#). It will be placed there soon. Thank you immensely for all you’ve done and still do, Bill!



Devils Dream (Mcgrath) 1996

Sharptailer Short Shots

- **MSGS recorded an [Amaazen Outdoors Podcast \(#45\)](#) in mid-March.** Brian Maze visited with Kyle Arola and Derek Frost about habitat management and conservation efforts for sharpies in MN, including how funds are raised to apply for grants to get even more important habitat work done, and the 2022 Spring Fling and Double Gun Shoot.
- **Southwest MN Sharptail Survey Results** - Sabin Adams kindly coordinated a survey by citizen-scientists this spring to get a better handle on the presence and number of birds there and learn where habitat projects could be targeted to grow the population. Despite poor April weather, one lek with 12 birds was verified in Yellow Medicine Co. and other sightings reported. The survey may continue in spring 2023. Watch Sabin’s video [on “The Bird Tales”](#).
- **MN Prairie Chicken Society, The Nature Conservancy, and prairie-chickens** were featured [on Inforum](#) and [KA-RE 11 TV](#) this spring.
- **[MN Chapter of The Wildlife Society](#)** is holding a summer workshop on Sept. 16 near Spicer - A Different R3: Review, Research, and Resiliency, For Mitigating Human Impacts on Grassland Habitats”.
- **A Stewardship in Action Field Workshop**, “[Fragmented Prairies and Grasslands: Reconnecting Habitats through Collaborative Partnerships](#)”, will be held July 19-21 at Redwood Falls for on-the-ground practitioners and statewide coordinators from across the Midwest.
- **[WI Sharp-tailed Grouse Society](#)** held their Annual Meeting on June 18 at the Bird Sanctuary, better known as Douglas County Wildlife Area. Bill Berg of MSGS shared his 50+ years of experience in a presentation.
- **[WI 2022-2032 Prairie Chicken Plan](#)** – WI DNR recently sought input on the Plan which is updated every 10 years. [It was passed on June 22](#) with a 4-3 vote by their Natural Resources Board. Four management options were weighed ranging from aggressive to passive. The public strongly supported the most aggressive and expensive proposal which would have cost \$4.26 million a year and set a goal of acquiring 25,000 more acres of grasslands in central Wisconsin. The prairie chicken committee offered a "hybrid" option to the board with a cost of \$1.34 million/year. The WI Sharp-tailed Grouse Plan is up for review next.
- **[Recovering America’s Wildlife Act](#) (RAWA)** - We celebrated a new milestone for wildlife when the U.S. House of Representatives recently passed RAWA on a bipartisan vote of 231-190. Now we need to encourage the Senate to pass it. RAWA will provide critical resources for states, territories, and Tribes to carry out conservation projects for at-risk fish, wildlife, and plants, as well as federal funding to help recover endangered and threatened species.

Conservation Reserve Program Update

Participation Declines, Despite Rising Acre Cap

The USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) provides critical grassland habitat for prairie grouse. The good news is that CRP presents much opportunity and landowners recently agreed to voluntarily enroll over 2 million acres in CRP through the General CRP Signup. Plus, more acres are expected through Grasslands CRP and Continuous CRP enrollment. Grasslands CRP enrollment closed May 13 and Continuous CRP is ongoing. USDA also accepted new and modified proposals for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative in June. SAFE, part of Continuous CRP, is focused on managing wildlife habitat.

However, about 3.4 million acres are expected to leave CRP at the end of September. Landowners plan to take 1.7 million acres out to put it back into crop production due to high commodity prices. Most of the acres enrolling this year -- more than 1.6 million acres -- involve land already under an existing CRP contract. Fewer than 400,000 acres being offered a contract this year involve new acreage enrolling in the program. This is the smallest amount of new acreage in General CRP since the program was created in 1985. USDA had aimed to expand the acres in CRP to this year's cap of 25.5 million acres from its current 22.1 million acres.

As of April 2022, Minnesota's total CRP enrollment for all signups was 54,183 contracts, 28,683 farms, 999,907 acres, \$146,136,000 in annual rental payments, and \$146.15/acre annual rent on average. Farm Bill 2023 is starting to take shape. CRP and other USDA conservation programs will likely continue to evolve. For more information, see the [CRP web page](#) and contact your [local Farm Service Agency office](#) which administers the program.

MSGS Spring Fling Membership Meeting Summary

by Martha Minchak

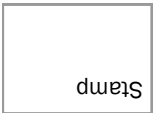
A membership meeting was held on April 30, 2022 in conjunction with the Spring Fling and Double Gun Shoot at Wings North near Pine City from approximately 9:15 to 10:45 am. President Dave Pauly, aka "Griz", welcomed all and thanked sponsors and partners in the day. Vice President, Secretary, Northwest Rep and Southeast Rep positions on the board were up for election. Kyle Arola, Martha Minchak, Gary Huschle, and Ray Marshall, incumbents for the positions respectively, agree to serve again and were unanimously approved by the membership. Nominations for the Service To Sharptails Award are due to Griz by May 15. Send items for the spring/summer newsletter to Martha and Jodie. The Treasurer report by Jillian Fejszes showed account balances of \$11,645.26 in checking, \$33,103.47 in SOS (Save Our Sharptail) and \$58,848.80 in CPL (Conservation Partner Legacy grants). Bailey Petersen reported that Give to the Max Day last Nov. had 45 donors give ~\$3,500.

Regional Rep and Coordinator reports followed. It is VERY wet in Northwest MN, shared Gary Huschle -- many leks are flooded. CRP is being lost. Most areas have decreasing lek counts. A view blind is available near Baudette. Charlotte Roy, DNR, is doing prairie-chicken and conservation grazing research, catching 3-4 hens/day when the weather cooperates. From Northeast MN, Marshall Deters reported that Tom Rusch and Jodie Provost retired from DNR last November and December, respectively. Lek counts show Aitkin Area up, the Cloquet Area with 4-5 birds observed at St Croix State Park, Tower Area with 9 at Sax and 20 at Palo. The DNR "Window on Wildlife" Cam went live on April 21 on a lek (see article on p. 3).

From the Southwest, Walt Gessler shared that Sabin Adams organized surveys in Yellow Medicine and Lincoln Counties based on local observations. 10-12 birds have been seen on Mounds Springs, and 8 and 2 birds at Lac qui Parle WMA. Grazing agreements are in place with 4 ranchers. Patch-burn-grazing is occurring on Chippewa Prairie. Woody removal projects are being funded with OHF \$. A holding crew is being hired to complete more burning. Prairie restorations and enhancements are occurring. Walt is planning for a better turn out for volunteer brush cut day in 2023 with local university students. In regard to Southeast MN, Bill Berg reminded folks that until 1965 or 1966, there were birds in the Owatonna area according to past Wildlife Manager John Idstrom.

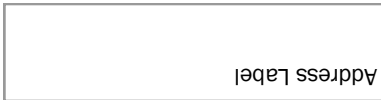
Accomplishments since last Spring Fling include several CPL habitat projects: hiring contractors to brush mow on state land; USFWS work on a WPA outside Agassiz NWR; \$1.3 Million in grants executed and \$400,000 on deck; 13 active and 10 completed projects since FY17; projects of 5 to 1,400 acres; aspen girdling in Pennington Co. on a site with sensitive plants that can't be mowed; and Mille Lacs Lake WMA with a 1400 ac aerial burn ignition. Grassland and shrubland habitat mgt. benefits both game and nongame species. A substantial amount of new habitat projects are in the queue for support via CPL, MSGS, and other funds. No new CPLs will be awarded MSGS until we close out some projects. Each project has 3 years to be completed. Brush Cuts are an important source of funding for the required 10% CPL match. Volunteer power is valued at \$28.54/hour. (See article on p. 5).

Jodie, Gary, and Ray are leading development of a statewide sharp-tailed grouse management plan by MSGS since it's development is low priority to DNR. It will be used as a communication's tool and mgt. guide for MSGS and all interested partners. Plan endorsers will be sought. (See article on p. 2).



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Address Service Requested



EMAIL ADDRESSES ENCOURAGED

MSG values its members, communications and funds. To reduce newsletter mailing costs, con-serve 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 those that desire a hard copy.

Minnesota Sharp-tailed
Grouse Society

