



THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

Visit Us at Sharptails.org & Facebook

Spring/Summer 2023

BEMIDJI STATE UNIVERSITY & RUSH CITY H.S. TRAP LEAGUE EARN GOLDEN SAWS!



Carp Swamp Crew

Never underestimate the power of inspired and well-fed students and other volunteers. The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs) again hosted "Volunteer Brush Cut Habitat Days" this spring to enhance sharp-tailed grouse habitat on public lands, engage the next generation of conservationists, and raise grant match.

A crew of 24 volunteers gathered at Firebird WMA on Earth Day, April 22. It included Vermilion Community College students, members of the Rush City High School (RCHS) Trap League, parents, instructors, Pheasants Forever members, MN DNR staff, and retired MSGS board members. They enhanced habitat, garnered 162 hours of volunteer time, and generated \$4,623 of in-kind match to Conservation Partnership Legacy (CPL) grants. These grants will then be used for additional habitat work. RCHS Trap League was awarded the highly coveted Golden Saw. Traveling Trophy for NE MN. Read an article about the day, "Trying to Save Sharptails with Saws, Shears", in the [Duluth News Tribune](#) by John Myers.

The Brush Cut near Carp Swamp WMA had 23 people on April 29, including Bemidji State University students who proudly took home the Golden Saw for NW MN. 219 hours of volunteer service was logged, generating \$6,242 for CPL match, in addition to habitat enhancement. Way to go, Team Firebird!



Firebird WMA Crew

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Greetings from Griz	2
Griz is ODN Person of the Year!	3
2023 Election Candidates	5
MSGs's 2nd Double Gun Shoot	6
MPCS Celebrates 50 Years!	6
Upper Midwest Prairie Grouse Summit	7
"Grouse Trail" at Pheasant Fest	7
Dan's "Sharpie" Shack	7

Greetings from Griz
Dave Pauly, MSGS President

Regards from Grizzly's Den,

It is time for this grey-bearded, long-in-the-tooth, combat biologist soul to disengage from the position of President. It has truly been a most rewarding experience to serve as **your** president of **your** MSGS! The passionate members (150 strong) and dedicated Executive Board [re]ignited the **FIRE** of my "inner beast"!

I liken this position to a Rx Fire Burn Manager – whose Vision can only reach fruition thru a perfect execution of the 'Controlled Burn'. Subtitles to this job include, but are not limited to, Prescribed Fire Burn Boss – Ignition Specialist – Logistics Specialist – Helitack Manger (when called for) – Supply Manager – Crew Boss – Squad Boss – Mop Up Crew Leader.

Drop fire from the drip torch on the downwind side – proceed with fire along both flanks – close the perimeter and allow the fire to feed on the energy it has created, all commencing in the excitement of a beautifully executed FIRE for the perpetuation of the FIREBIRDS!

Allow me to express my gratitude to ALL of you, each-and-every one of you for your absolute willingness to advocate for a sustainable sharptail population for future generations! Including our outgoing Treasurer Jillian and Regional Reps, Marshall Deters and Walt Gessler. Your service has made a difference and is immensely appreciated.

It has been a great ride. Now I will mount my horse and ride into the sunset horizon and be one with my 'cowboy' spirit on the Holy Cow Ranch WMA!

Please carry on and into the future with the legacy we've created together.

I must close now as I was just notified my younger brother has passed on this morning. I will be offering up SMOKE for him and allowing my prayer feathers to carry my prayers to heaven on the breeze. Please think of him because he was a true conservationist in his own rite!

We were also recently notified that Bill Mahoney, Charter Member of MSGS and active supporter and brush cutter, passed away at the age of 88. Bill made every Brush Cut along with his friend, John Gislason, until covid hit. He was a true Firebird Fan through and through.

On another sad note, Samuel H. Sylvester, a firefighter who works for NRP, tragically died while working on a prescribed burn this spring on the Fish Creek Natural Area after being pinned under an ATV. This is the first fatality on a prescribed burn in Minnesota of which we are aware.

MSGS sends its sincere condolences to Bill's and Samuel's families and friends.

David C Pauly

President | Habitat Projects Coordinator
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
Griz@scicable.net / 320-279-1777



Board of Directors:

Executive Board

President - Dave Pauly
Vice President - Kyle Arola
Secretary - Martha Minchak
Treasurer - Jillian Fejszes

Regional Representatives

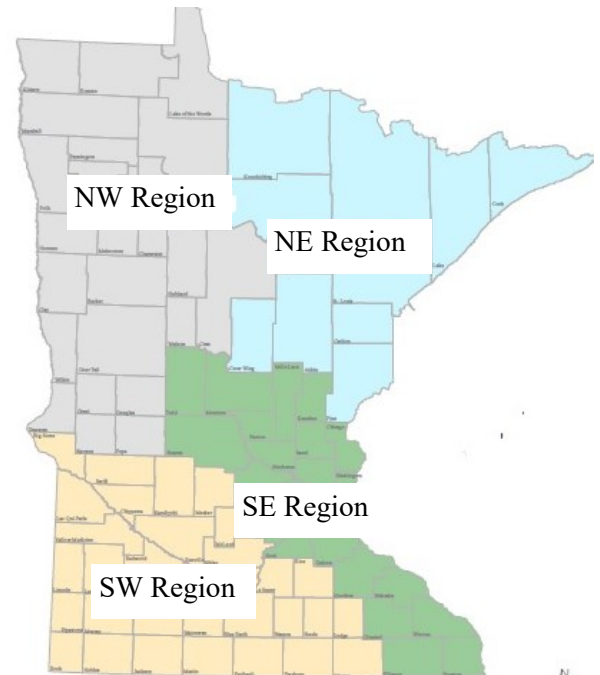
NW MN - Gary Huschle
NE MN - Marshall Deters
SW MN - Walt Gessler
SE MN - Ray Marshall

Coordinators

Habitat - Dave Pauly
Outreach/Newsletters - Jodie Provost
Website/Facebook - James Meadow
Membership - Dave Dickey
Fundraising/Merchandise - Bailey Petersen
Student Advisor - Bill Faber

Honorary Directors

Roche Lally, Bill Berg, Jamie Slade



Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society is dedicated to the management and restoration of sharptails in Minnesota for hunters and non-hunters.



Catching up at Freddie's: Outdoor News Editor Tim Spielman (l) presented the Person of the Year award to Pauly when they met recently for a chat and a meal at Freddie's Family Restaurant in Mora.

By Tim Spielman
Editor

More than 50 years ago, a young Minnesota DNR deer habitat specialist in the Hinckley area fell in love with a charismatic feathered creature, the sharp-tailed grouse.

Go figure.

Dave Pauly's dedication to sharp-tailed grouse – "firebirds," he affectionately calls them – hasn't diminished in the nine years since his DNR retirement. In fact, he's more devoted particularly to the birds these days, expending time and energy and using his accumulated knowledge in leading the charge to create habitat for a wildlife species – a "species of greatest conservation need" in Minnesota – that continues to inspire and fascinate him.

For nearly a decade, Pauly, now 70 and living in Hinckley with his wife, Lorraine, and his wirehair, has been president of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, an organization of which he's been a part since its inception in 1986. He's helped the group obtain grants, coordinated habitat projects, and used the array of networks he's established – with wildlife agencies and conservation group partners alike – to preserve a bird that's suffered through habitat loss on a scale as great as most any other of Minnesota's wildlife.

Sharp-tails are special, Pauly says, and if you give him an hour or two, he'll gladly tell you just exactly why that's the case.

For his leadership in endeavors to ensure sharp-tails remain a fixture on Minnesota's shrublands landscape, continuing to bring pleasure to those who hunt them or simply desire to witness the majesty that is the sharp-tail courtship dance, Pauly has been named this year's Outdoor News Person of the Year.

Pauly, born in Rhode Island and raised in Sauk Centre, is humble, heaping credit where it's due. For the soft-spoken but driven man, the list of those who've influenced his life and career is extensive and impressive. It includes Bill Berg, a co-worker and a mentor who, along with Roche Lally, founded the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. Berg worked with the DNR's Forest Wildlife Research Group in Grand Rapids more than five decades ago when Pauly landed a part-time gig at that office while attending Itasca Community College. That work-study employment became the foundation upon which Pauly would build his career.

Pauly later reunited with Berg after a few within-the-department position moves that had taken him from far northern to far southern Minnesota. Pauly had become a deer habitat specialist, later transitioning to assistant area wildlife manager, in Hinckley. His boss and another mentor, Lee Hemness, recognizing Pauly's interest in sharp-tails, suggested he work with Berg to maintain a statewide sharp-tail survey system, which included the sharp-tails of east-central Minnesota.

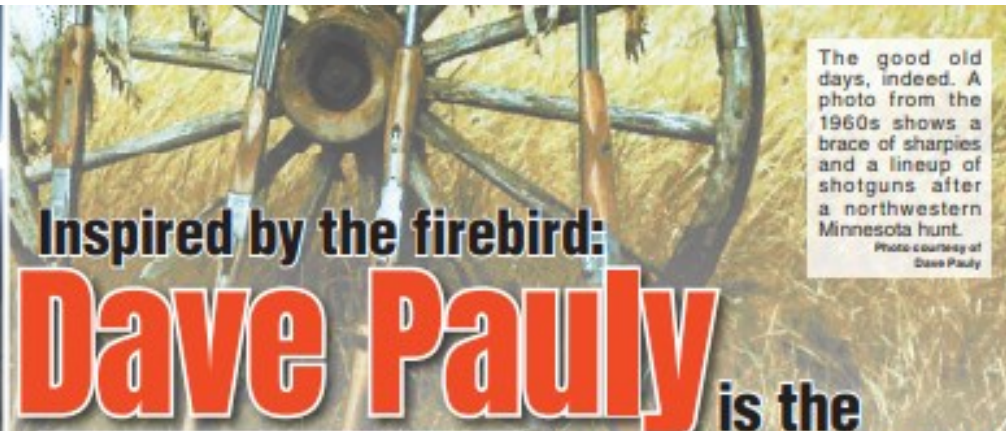
Pauly didn't need to be asked twice.

"While I was at Hinckley, I'd see sharp-tails nearly every time I was in the field," Pauly said. "I started to think, this is a pretty cool species we have right here in this part of the state. That's when my love of the species really started."

After a two-year stint in a DNR wildlife position in New Ulm, Pauly returned in 1989 to where sharp-tails

Springtime at a lek. It's what folks such as Pauly await all year – a chance to see male sharp-tails fighting for the affection of female sharp-tailed grouse.

Photo by Chuck Kartak



The good old days, indeed. A photo from the 1960s shows a brace of sharpies and a lineup of shotguns after a northwestern Minnesota hunt. Photo courtesy of Dave Pauly

Inspired by the firebird: **Dave Pauly** is the **2023 Outdoor News Person of the Year**



Pauly's fascination with the "firebird" began about half a century ago. He and the Minnesota Sharp-Tailed Grouse Society are dedicated to sharp-tail preservation.

Photo by Chuck Kartak



dance, this time as the DNR's area wildlife manager in Cambridge. He'd spend nearly the rest of his career there, caretaker of all wildlife in a multi-county section of east-central Minnesota, but keeping sharp-tails, specifically, front of mind.

While sharp-tail numbers in the 1980s and '90s weren't anywhere near their historical highs, the species was surviving, if not thriving, there. During that period, Pauly describes a "really nice mosaic of small dairy farms, small cattle operations," with pastured and hayed ground that sharp-tails found to their liking. What prescribed burning needed to be done for habitat maintenance was met with landowner approval in most cases – all creating a landscape of "openness."

"That was simply dynamite sharp-tail habitat," he said.

But as farmers retired during the early 2000s, farmland was divided and sold, in many cases as smallish parcels for deer hunting. Trees and other vegetation grew up, and sharp-tail needs weren't as often met.

"What was left of sharp-tail habitat decreased even more," Pauly said. "And burns became almost impossible."

In 2021, sharp-tail hunting was closed in the east-central portion of Minnesota – "due to concerns about the population decline in this region and challenges to implementing a hunting season ...," according to the DNR.

"None of us ever dreamed we'd be closing a season," Pauly said.

In recent years, sharp-tail harvest in the state

As has been the case with other wildlife species, the range of the sharp-tail has diminished over the years due to habitat loss. Currently there are populations in northwestern and east-central Minnesota.

Map courtesy of Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

has been estimated to range from 5,000 to 15,000 birds – a far cry from several decades ago when sharp-tails were the third-most bagged game bird, behind just ruffed grouse and pheasants. According to the MSGS, around 1950, about 150,000 sharp-tails were taken by hunters.

The focus for Pauly and the nearly 300 members of the Minnesota Sharp-Tailed Grouse Society is to make certain sharp-tails continue to have favorable living conditions – both in east-central and northwestern Minnesota, where habitat, too, has declined but bird numbers have remained more stable. And to an extent as well in southwestern Minnesota, where sharp-tail leks have been discovered and male sharp-tails have been seen dancing in springtime.

The MSGS approach to its mission has taken a variety of forms. It includes securing grants for habitat work, almost all of which is done on state wildlife management areas in consultation with area wildlife managers. In the past five years, Pauly said, the society has secured about \$1.3 million in Conservation Partners Legacy grants through the state's Outdoor Heritage Fund. Presently, there are about 10 sharp-tail-focused projects in the works, all aimed at habitat improvement.

And a year ago, the MSGS submitted to the DNR a 10-year plan (2022-2032) for sharp-tails: "Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird."

The plan was submitted to the DNR earlier this year for modifications, approval, and implementation.

"The society board decided we needed to search for avenues to highlight the plight

(See Dave Pauly Page 17)



Dave Pauly

(From Page 16)

of sharptails, especially in east-central Minnesota, but even statewide," Pauly said of why member hours were poured into plan development.

He said the MSGS is prepared to support and offer expertise to the DNR regarding all aspects of the plan.

"The groundwork has been laid," he said. "So now it's time to start building on what we already have ... so we can begin to assist (the department)."

MSGS members share Pauly's enthusiasm, donating labor and dollars to the organization, whose board is 100% volunteer, Pauly said. "We have a strong society," he said. "Those on the executive board and the members all share the same desire and passion and dedication. We all want to see the return of sharptails to those places in Minnesota where they were indigenous and existed all those years – their ancestral homeland."

The MSGS also partners with local groups – from FFA chapters to Boy Scouts to university students and conservation organizations – for its own habitat-improvement projects, among them its Volunteer Brush Cut Habitat Days. Not only do those field days enhance sharptail habitat, they also provide an in-kind (labor) match for CPL grant dollars, Pauly said. MSGS also encourages individuals or groups to perform "self-guided" hand-cut brush work on select WMAs.

While the first such opportunity for volunteers to join in a "brush cut" at a WMA was canceled due to weather conditions this year – it was scheduled for April 1 at the Lac qui Parle WMA near Appleton – two others remain: April 29 at Garp Swamp, south of Baudette (rescheduled from April 15), and Firebird WMA, near Kettle River, on April 22.

Pauly is just the second president in the history of the MSGS, following Lally, who served as the group's leader for about 30 years. Currently the MSGS board also includes vice president Kyle Arola, a DNR Wildlife area supervisor at Thief Lake WMA; secretary March Minchak (a retired wildlife manager), and treasurer Jillian Fejszes, a soil conservation technician with the Kittson County Natural Resources Conservation Service). Regional representatives include Gary Huschle, Marshall Deters, Walt Gessler, and Ray Marshall. Honorary directors are Berg, Lally, and Jamie



The best friend of the prescribed burner: a drip torch, and the start of a sharptail habitat-management fire.

Photo courtesy of Dave Pauly



Pauly played a key role in introducing wild turkeys to east-central Minnesota as DNR area wildlife manager in Cambridge during the late 1980s and early '90s. Photo courtesy of Dave Pauly

Slade.

Arola said the MSGS has been successful largely because of the work of Pauly. "What makes Dave an exceptional leader is his passion – for habitat conservation and for wildlife. And, of course, sharptails are second to none for him. It's amazing how much he gets done."

Berg offered similar praise.

"What a deserving guy," Berg said of Pauly's award. "After retirement, some of us never really retire, and Dave is the epitome of one of those who kept on going. He knows so many people and has so many relationships," he said. "I feel honored to have been a part of his entire career. He's so dedicated to the 'firebird.' I just can't say enough about the kid."

Pauly's words speak to why his love of sharptails began, and why undoubtedly those funky birds will always be a part of him:

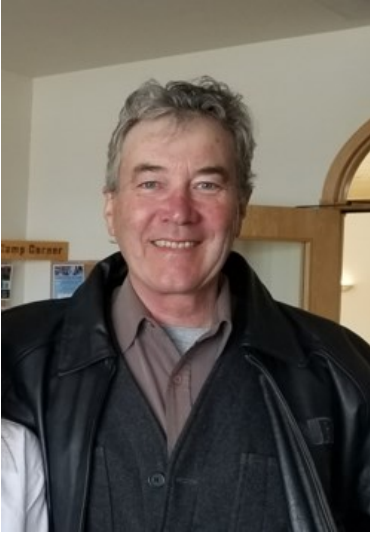
"The first time you pull up to a location in the predawn light, where you're going to observe dancers on the lek ... when you put the binoculars or scope on those dancers out there and you observe the intensity, and the noise – hooting and hollering, and the fights – you know, feathers flyin', jumping up like banty roosters, kickin' at each other and all that tail feather rattling and foot stomping, it's addicting," he says. "And it's like, this is the greatest thing in the world. To think that a species has evolved to be in this habitat and to be able to display and expect to attract females. When you think about that you're in Minnesota and you can be involved in that, it's a very special thing."

Editor's note: For more about the MSGS, visit www.sharptails.org. To view sharptails at leks, visit the DNR's "Window On Wildlife page" – www.dnr.state.mn.us/wildlife/window-wildlife.html

Board Election - Choose Your Leaders!

Election for MSGS President, Treasurer, NE MN & SW MN Representatives

MSGS's candidates for our Governing Board are below. Nominees were sought in the winter newsletter and by a nomination committee. Each position serves a two-year term. Your vote is valued. **Please vote by e-mail or phone call to Martha Minchak, MSGS Secretary, by July 1** (lobstahgurl@gmail.com, 218-451-0931).



President - Mike Chalich - I grew up in Remer and am now 64 years old. My high school sweetheart married me 45 years ago. We have 4 children and 13 grandchildren! I started trapping muskrats and weasel when I was 8. My father grew up near Boy River and was an avid Sharptail hunter. I remember his stories vividly! In my younger life, I remember our favorite grouse spot near Remer. In 1977, I started my railroad career in Swatara. We'd see birds from just east of there to McGregor. Lots of birds! I've served on the Board of Directors of the National Trappers Association and as District Director, Education Director, and President of the Minnesota Trappers Association. In my railroad career, I started as a laborer, worked many different positions, and retired as General Manager. I was the only manager who held positions in Engineering, Mechanical, and Operations. It saddens me to witness the continued decline of our native Sharptail grouse. I know how to manage and I'm not afraid of hard work. We need a full court press to increase our membership, and educate folks on the importance of increasing our birds' habitat and population. If elected, I will use my leadership skills to further build our Society.

Treasurer - Gretchen Mehmel - I recently retired from the DNR where I was the manager of Red Lake WMA since 1991. I live with my husband (and daughter home from the summer from college) near Baudette, and enjoy reading, hunting, music, cross-country skiing, and gardening. I'd like to serve as the MSGS as Treasurer to give back to this great organization. I've been a member off and on for a long time, but never served as an officer or been very active. It's time to change that!



NE MN Representative - James Meadow - I'm excited to bring together a background in ecology, restoration, technology, and leadership to continue the great work the MSGS has done in NE MN to conserve and grow our dwindling Sharptail populations. I hold a BS in Resource Conservation and a PhD in Ecology & Environmental Sciences, which led me to devote 5 years early in my career focused on ecological restoration of some of the most disturbed sites across the Western US. Following a few years as an academic researcher in Montana and Oregon, I transitioned to Data & Analytics, where I now run an analytics consulting practice, helping private and public sector clients, as well as academic and non-profit organizations learn and adopt modern cloud technologies. I currently live just outside of Duluth with my wife, 2 great kids, and an excitable bird dog. I look forward to learning from some of the folks who have built MSGS over the years, and working to conserve prairie grouse and the habitats we all love.

SW MN Representative - Sabin Adams - My name is Sabin Adams and I am a grouse nut. From Sharpies, Chickens, Ruffies and everything in between. I spend many days in the fall chasing grouse behind my dogs and many days in the spring looking for chicken and sharpie leks in Western MN. In my professional life I am the MN Public Lands Manager at Pheasants Forever. I have dedicated a great deal of my life to the protection, restoration, and enhancement of habitat for prairie species. Please consider me for the SW Rep. position.



MSGS HOLDS 2ND DOUBLE GUN SHOOT AT WINGS NORTH

MSGS along with Wings North held their 2nd Double Gun Shoot on April 30, 2023. Participants used over and under or side by side shotguns on a 50 target, sporting clay shoot. The \$60 fee included a taco bar lunch and 1:45 pm shotgun start. \$20 from each registration fee was donated to MSGS. A Silent Auction was held with 12 items provided by MSGS and 20 items provided by Wings North. Five shooters, all MSGS members, participated— James for Duluth, Carl from Bemidji, Dave from Appleton, Greg from Woodbury, and Griz from Hinckley. Griz was the official High Scorer. Concurrent events of a Concealed Carry Class (25 attendees) and RCHS Trap Team Shoot (13 members) occurred. Some of these individuals joined in the Silent Auction. The event resulted in \$452 in MSGS's Save Our Sharptails (SOS) fund for cash match for habitat project grants. **Another MSGS Double Gun Shoot is planned for April 28, 2024. Mark your calendars!**



MN PRAIRIE CHICKEN SOCIETY "WOO-OPPPS" IT UP AT 50TH ANNUAL MEETING!

Congratulations on 50 Years, MPCS! It was a stupendous gathering on Earth Day, April 22, in Rothsay. **Everyone be sure to mark your calendars for a Joint MPCS/MSGS Meeting in Crookston on April 20, 2024.**

"Prairie chickens and the grasslands they need to survive were kind of overlooked, one might say, back in 1973, when two young biologists working in Crookston decided to see if they could draw some attention to the birds and the prairies.

Dan Svedarsky had moved to northwest Minnesota in 1969 from his home state of Missouri to join the faculty at the University of Minnesota Crookston, and Terry Wolfe was just a few months into his job as area wildlife manager for the Department of Natural Resources in Crookston.

There were prairie chickens in Missouri, Svedarsky says, but he had never seen one until he ventured out on the prairie in Polk County with Jerry Maertens, who preceded Wolfe as manager of the DNR's Crookston area wildlife office before transferring to Thief Lake Wildlife Management Area near Middle River, Minnesota, in 1972..."

For the full read about this small and mighty organization, go to the article by Brad Dokken [in Inforum](#)



HAPPY 50TH ANNUAL MEETING,
MN PRAIRIE CHICKEN SOCIETY!

Congrats on decades of success in raising awareness and conserving grasslands and prairie-chickens. It was an inspirational gathering in Rothsay on Earth Day. To the next 50 years!



Photo by Roy Heilman

UPPER MIDWEST PRAIRIE GROUSE SUMMIT, AUGUST 1-2

An Upper Midwest Prairie Grouse Summit will occur on August 1-2, 2023 at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area near Grantsburg, WI. The purpose is to gather key leaders to address the issue of fragmented sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chicken populations across our ecoregion. It will be co-hosted by Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) and North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP). Because space is limited, spots will initially be filled by invite, with more spots possibly available as registration numbers are known. If interested in attending, contact jodie@grousepartners.org. The registration fee of \$60 includes meals, snacks, bus, and decal. Pre-order swag may be an option. The full agenda with speakers and habitat project tour will be ready soon. Up to 10 continuing education credits can be earned through TWS. Presentations will be recorded and available on the [NAGP website](https://www.nagp.org).



MSGS HELPS MAKE “GROUSE TRAIL” AT PHEASANT FEST A SUCCESS

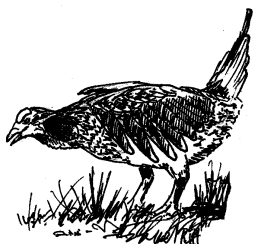


Thank you to all that sauntered the “Grouse Trail” at Pheasant Fast last mid-February in Minneapolis and worked their tail feathers off at the booths, including MSGS. Immense gratitude goes out to MSGS as well as Pheasants Forever (PF), OnX Hunt, Ruffed Grouse Society, WI Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, MN Prairie Chicken Society, Project Upland (PU), and all grouse enthusiasts that visited the “Grouse Trail”! It proved to be a fruitful first endeavor as folks flocked to the row of grouse organizations to share in their passion for habitat and the birds, raising awareness and inspiration for greater conservation action.

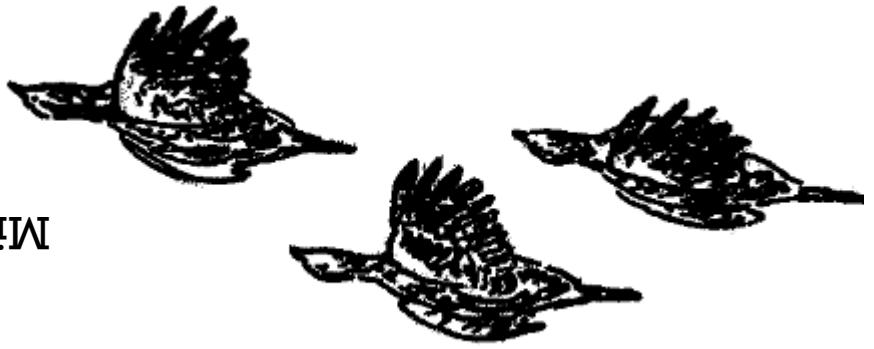
Highlights included a viewing blind (courtesy of WSGS) with a video of all 12 North American grouse species’ displaying (compiled by PU), a drawing for door prizes (contributed by all 5 grouse orgs) for Fest go-ers visiting all 5 grouse booths, a social hour sponsored by OnX, and a presentation regarding sharp-tailed grouse on the nearby public lands stage. The entire 40th Anniversary of the National Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic was a success with 33,154 attendees rallying around quality upland habitat and public lands access. Read more on PF’s blog [here](https://www.pheasantsforever.org/blog).

“SHARPIE SHACK” CONTINUES TO BE AN ATTRACTION

The “Sharpie Shack”, created and managed by Dan Svedarsky and situated just 250 yards north of Pankratz Prairie in northwest MN, was a hit again this year. It sat on a very accessible lek with 20 males. As of June 4, the lek still had 15 birds on it at 5:30 pm when Dan went to take it home for the season! MSGS funded this blind a few years ago. Much thanks to Dan for giving prairie grouse enthusiasts this opportunity.



**Minnesota Sharp-tailed
Grouse Society**



MSGGS 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. MSGGS 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.

EMAIL ADDRESSES ENCOURAGED

Address Service Requested

Address Label

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

Stamp