

THE MINNESOTA SHARPTAILER

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Spring/Summer 2024



Photo provided by the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

The Joint MSGS and MPCS Spring Fling was a Success!

This year the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) and the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society (MPCS) hosted a joint annual meeting (“Spring Fling” for MSGS) in Crookston, MN. The meeting was a resounding success as we had 74 prairie grouse enthusiasts from all across the state.

The meeting started with a field tour of sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chicken leks on Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge and focused on the management their staff and partners do to maintain them. Despite the mid-April flurries, it was a fun day for all who attended as we learned about the history of prairie grouse management in the area, and the great work being done on the refuge. Attendees saw a wide variety of wildlife, such as prairie chickens, sandhill cranes, turkeys, and some even saw a moose!! Thank you to all the members and field staff who helped organize this event! It was an awesome day!

The second day was packed with informative presentations and fundraising. We had multiple speakers from North Dakota, Minnesota, and even one from Manitoba, Canada. Their talks focused on current sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chicken research projects, management strategies for both prairie grouse species, and the history of sharp-tailed grouse on the landscape. Thank you to all of the presenters who took the time to attend the event and share the amazing work they are doing. You all did an amazing job, and we look forward to what’s next for you. A link to pdf versions of presentations can be found on the North American Grouse Partnership's website.

This two-day meeting was a great success where we learned a lot and helped fund the conservation of these two prairie grouse species. Thank you to everyone who attended, helped organize it, donated items to the silent auction/raffle, or sponsored the event. Lastly, thank you as well to the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society for being great co-hosts!



Group of prairie grouse enthusiasts from across the state braved a mid-April flurry in Crookston, MN during the field tour of Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge at the Joint Spring Fling this year. Photo taken and edited by Jodie Provost.

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Mike's Message to the Members

Mike Chalich, MSGS President

Hello all! MSGS "Team Firebird" has been busy! We staffed a booth at the MN Wildlife Society event in Bemidji, co-sponsored the joint Spring Fling with MPCS in Crookston, hosted two volunteer Brush Cut days in the NW and EC zones, and our annual Double Gun Shoot in Pine City!

If you've never attended a Spring Fling, Brush Cut day or the Double Gun Shoot, you are missing out on a chance of meeting fellow prairie grouse enthusiasts! The Double Gun Shoot continues to grow and I truly enjoyed the day! Mark your calendar for next year's event!

Gary Huschle and Ray Marshall are both running for re-election this year as your NW Regional Director and SE Regional Director, respectively. We are seeking folks interested in serving as VP and Secretary. Please contact me if you are interested. Rest assured, if elected you will have plenty of support, I promise you that!

May 14th we put together an EC Zone tour with Kelly Straka, Nate Huck, Russ Reisz and Derek Frost from the DNR, myself, James Meadows, Dave Dickey and wearing two hats, PF Farm Bill Biologist and our new Newsletter editor, Joe Quehl! We discussed issues such as tree encroachment, declining nesting and brood rearing sites, and loss of connectivity. We also discussed working towards a lottery season in the EC. We toured some of the best habitat, and next tour we'll look at the not so good! This is a huge undertaking, but we need to continue to focus on it. As Charlotte Roy mentioned in a conversation at the Spring Fling, "It's easier to keep the birds you have than to get them back!" Bird counts are looking good this year though! Let's hope for good brood rearing weather! Stay tuned, the EC zone is near and dear to my heart and needs our attention.

MSGS has a booth reserved for the Aitkin County Fair this July. We'll have a County Map and hopefully have local land owners put a stick pin on properties they've seen birds. We currently have only 5 members from the Aitkin area, hopefully we can add to that number! Aitkin is in the Core of the EC range. If you'd like to help staff the booth, please contact James Meadows, Dave Dickey, or myself.

We are currently discussing the best methods to continue discussing and acting on our MN STG Management Plan. There is a lot of support from the DNR! More details in the next newsletter.

You'll read in the general membership meeting minutes at the Spring Fling, a motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously to look into the feasibility/interest of creating a MN Prairie Grouse Society. It's simply to determine if there is interest. I can tell you, we struggle to fill positions, so it is worth the time to consider. I personally believe we'd have a bigger voice! More to come on this.

Last, I will again say, we need to increase our membership! We're hovering now around 270. As stated by me from day one, my goal is 500 during my two year term! If you need brochures or posters to distribute, contact me!

Previously I asked for volunteers to add eyes in the field to watch leks no longer surveyed by DNR due to staff and time. I did get a response from a couple of interested folks. Nate Huck has agreed to provide a list of leks prior to next Spring that we, MSGS, could monitor. Excellent opportunity for us! Contact me if you are interested. Getting involved in any organization is never easy, and none of us have enough time, I know first hand, but do it for the birds please!

Thank you!

Mike Chalich

MSGS President
michael_chalich@hotmail.com

Board of Directors:

Executive Board

President - Mike Chalich
Vice President - Kyle Arola
Secretary - Martha Minchak
Treasurer - Gretchen Mehmel

Regional Representatives

NW MN - Gary Huschle
NE MN - James Meadows
SW MN - Sabin Adams
SE MN - Ray Marshall

Coordinators

Habitat - Dave Pauly
NW Assistant Habitat - Brian Hanson
EC Assistant Habitat - Nate Basinger
Outreach/Newsletters - Joe Quehl
Website/Facebook - James Meadow
Membership - Dylan Mortenson
Fundraising/Merchandise - Bailey Petersen
Give to the Max Day - Bailey Petersen
Student Advisor - Bill Faber

Honorary Directors

Roche Lally, Bill Berg, Jamie Slade



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



Welcome Aboard Team Firebird!



Dylan Mortenson Membership Coordinator

I live in central MN and have been chasing birds since about the age of 10. I got my first bird dog in 2019, and have followed her across the Midwest/West in search of grouse. In 2021, I made my first attempt at finding sharp-tailed grouse back here in Minnesota, and that's when I realized how special these birds and their habitat are. It's a pleasure to be a part of an organization that is dedicated to the prosperity of these birds.

Brian Hanson NW Assistant Habitat Coordinator

Born and raised in Crookston MN. I spent my early days hunting deer and ruffed grouse in the Beltrami Island State Forest. I have an Aunt and Uncle who helped introduce me into the wonderful world of hunting and conservation. Without their guidance I would probably not have gone down this path. I am currently a firefighter for the City of Crookston where at times we are right in the middle of the firebird's habitat. I'm married with three kids and have a 10-year old field bred English Springer Spaniel. If I'm not protecting the city I'm probably at the family cabin in Clearwater county. During the Covid-19 pandemic I was looking for things to do just like a lot of the country. I got certified through the MN DNR to teach Firearms Safety. I've been helping with the Fisher MN program and hope to help here in Crookston soon. I also reached out to the Ruffed Grouse Society about starting a local chapter. It was slow moving at first because of the restrictions the State had in place, but we were finally able to hold our first banquet this past December. I have a passion for birds, bird hunting, and volunteering. I want to thank everyone for this opportunity to give back to the birds we love to chase and work our dogs on every fall.

We need leaders!

We are still looking for someone to serve as our Secretary. Contact President Mike Chalich at michael_chalich@hotmail.com with nominees or to nominate yourself to serve in this important role.



Board Elections - Choose your Leaders!

Election for MSGS VP & Secretary

Nominees for open Board positions were sought at the spring meeting. Each position serves a two-year term. Your vote is important! You can vote by emailing outgoing Secretary, Martha Minchak at mminchak27@gmail.com or call and leave a message with your vote at (218) 628-3462, **by July 1st**

Your candidates are:

Nate Basinger - Vice President

I am what has been termed an "adult-onset hunter". I jumped head-long into the world of upland hunting and training my own, and first, bird dog - Scout - a GSP/collie cross. This newfound passion is something I am now sharing and passing along to each of my three sons in the hopes that they pass it along to their kids someday. We love chasing ruffed grouse and woodcock in the forests near our family cabin in northern Minnesota. I got to spend two weeks working/hunting in western North Dakota a couple of years ago and fell in love with the habitat and terrain of sharp-tailed grouse. I want to help maintain and restore that natural habitat here in my home state and that is why I am serving as the EC Assistant Habitat Coordinator and running for Vice President of MSGS.

What I enjoy most about upland hunting and conservation are the bonds built between father and sons, between friends present and friends yet to come, and that indescribable bond between man and his dog.



Volunteer Brush Cut Days

Palmville WMA (NW Region)

4/6/2024

- Gary Huschle

We had a great turn out for the Brush Cut day at Palmville WMA. We had 27 people plus DNR manager Kyle Arola. There was also one individual volunteer earlier in the week. We donated 221.5 volunteer hours, which equated to \$6,321.61 as in-kind match. MSGS has applied for a \$50,000 grant for brush control on the WMA for which these volunteer hours will be the matching funds.

This was the third time MSGS brush cutting crews have visited this site. The objective is to take out encroaching tamarack and willow to keep the area available as a winter roosting site for sharp-tailed grouse.

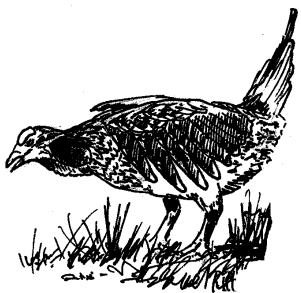
The coveted Golden Saw award went to U of M Crookston. They had 10 students and needed Dr. Loegering's presence to break a tie with Bemidji State University. BSU students will be giving their advisor some grief for not coming with them.

We worked 4 hours straight and then went to the Thief Lake WMA headquarters for lunch and disbanded after that. Kyle Arola made a great batch of venison chili and delicious baked goods were provided by Kathy Huschle. The Crookston students were also treated to scones made by Mrs. Loegering for their ride up to the site. Brad Dokken, outdoor writer for the Grand Forks Herald was one of our volunteers. He wrote a good article for the Herald. The article can be found [here](#)!

Thank you to all the volunteers who donated their time and helped manage our public land for the firebird!



All 27 volunteers after a hard days work enhancing habitat for the firebird on Palmville WMA in the NW Region. Photo taken by volunteer, Brad Dokken.



Post-work day feast after the volunteers put in some long hours cutting willow, tag alder, and other woody species near a known lek on Red Clover WMA in Carlton County, MN. Well earned meal to say the least.

Red Clover WMA (EC Region)

4/13/2024

- James Meadow

We had a better than expected turnout for our volunteer Brush Cut day in the EC region! We had 22 volunteers who were from Central Lakes College (thanks to Bill Faber), MN DNR, ICWC (Institution/Community Work Crew Program through MDOC), and MSGS members. Thanks to everyone who came out to the volunteer day and created habitat for sharp-tailed grouse.

These 22 volunteers worked a total of 198 hours which equated to \$5,650.92 of in-kind match! These match hours will also be used to secure an additional \$50,000 CPL grant that will be used on public lands in the area. The area was focused near a former and hopefully future lek! This is part of a larger brush management plan for the entire 281-acre Wildlife Management Area.

The ICWC crew took home the Golden Saw award this year! Griz found a way to enlist the crew, who were really enthusiastic and great to work with! We hope to have them back to other work days in the future.

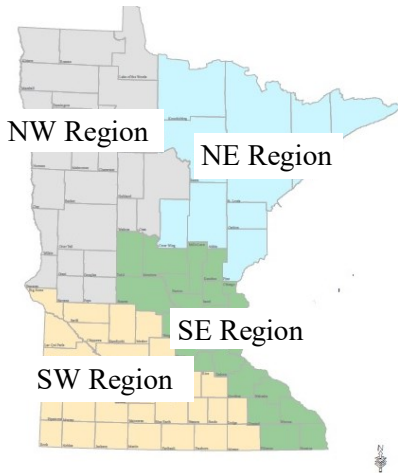


The crew of volunteers at Red Clover WMA for the volunteer Brush Cut day!



Updates from Around the State

Provided by Each Regional Representative



Northeast Region:

There's reason to be optimistic in the Northeast Region this year, as the EC Zone has seen quite a bit of focus this year from MSGS, Pheasants Forever, and the DNR. In May, we spent a great day out with members of the MSGS Board and the DNR to review some of our biggest habitat improvements, as well as some of the most reliable lek and nesting areas in the region. It was a great opportunity to highlight success, identify opportunities, and address some of the biggest challenges we've faced in the EC zone. Second, early sampling results indicate another slight increase in lek counts for 2024. It seems likely this is a combination of sampling effort along with favorable conditions for a few years in a row - both are reasons to be hopeful about the future. During our EC zone visit, we reviewed the most recent data, especially for the core lek sites that have been observed for years, and compared that to data going back through 1975 to get a better understanding of the long term trends in the region. By holding and maintaining existing strongholds, opening and enhancing fringe areas, and gaining more public awareness, we're hopeful the hard work of the past few years is beginning to pay off in the region.

- James Meadows

Southwest Region:

Sharp-tailed grouse (STG) are now mostly absent in the southern half of Minnesota. Sporadic sightings have occurred along the South Dakota border, although these don't indicate a stable local population due to the STG's tendency to roam in search of better habitats. Recent efforts have identified a significant STG lek near Mound Springs, close to the South Dakota border. Discovered in 2022, this lek of 9-12 birds has grown to 17 by May 2024. This lek is likely longstanding, unnoticed due to the absence of human observers. Conservation groups including the MSGS, USFWS, MN DNR, and Pheasants Forever are now working to improve this area's habitat to support and hopefully expand this population. Other potential sites in southwest Minnesota like Goodman WPA (six displaying birds observed here this spring) and Robinhood WPA have also recorded multiple STG sightings over the last five years, though no lekking behavior has been observed. These sites are visible from South Dakota's prairie coteau, which hosts a robust STG population. Continued habitat enhancements in these areas aim to attract more birds from South Dakota, hoping to establish a sustainable breeding population in the region.

- Sabin Adams



Early morning sunrise over a sharp-tailed grouse lek in SW MN. Photo taken by Dave Pauly "Griz"

East-Central Sharp-tailed Grouse Zone Tour

Joe Quehl, Farm Bill Biologist - Aitkin and Carlton County, Pheasants Forever

In partnership with the MN DNR, MSGS took part in a tour of sharp-tailed grouse habitat in the EC region to highlight some of the challenges managers and the grouse face. The goal of the tour was to highlight the obstacles that sharp-tailed grouse populations face in the EC region; such as invasive species, lack of disturbance, and subsequent loss of habitat connectivity. DNR officials from retired wildlife area manager to Wildlife Section Manager were present for the tour as well as the MSGS President and NE Regional Representative. There was a wealth of sharp-tailed grouse knowledge present.

During the tour, we visited three WMAs: Deer Run, Gun Lake, and Aitkin, each actively being managed for sharp-tailed grouse and each facing their own challenges. We discussed potential ways for collaboration between MSGS and the DNR to overcome these challenges through Brush Cut days, surveying old leks, and potential changes to the hunting season. This tour is a first step in getting people talking about sharp-tailed grouse and finding a way that we can best conserve sharp-tailed grouse in the EC region. Thank you to the Aitkin DNR staff for hosting the tour and to everyone else who attended! It was a great tour!



Group photo at Deer Run WMA in Aitkin County as the group looked at a nearby lek on the WMA.

Shooting Clays and Conserving Birds!

The 3rd Annual Double Gun Shoot in Pine City, MN

The third annual Double Gun Shoot was a great success for the third year in a row at Wings North Hunting Club in Pine City, MN. We had 23 members participate in the event and 17 sponsors who donated \$3800! Congrats to Mike Chalich who was the top shooter for the day with a 42 on the day. Thanks to everyone who attended and helped organize this event! We raised \$5,459 that day which is enough for another \$50,000 CPL grant to fund habitat management projects! Shooting clays and conserving birds, what a day. Thank you to all of our sponsors: Minnesota Native Landscapes, Sim's Gunsmithing LLC, North American Grouse Partnership, MN Trappers Association, Custom Art Concepts, Wings North Hunting Club, MN Chapter of the Wildlife Society, Moose Willow Sportsman Club, Eden's Fox Run Kennels, Pheasants Forever, MPCS, Titan Forestry, Backcountry hunters and Anglers, PCi Roads, Ray Marshall, and Dave Pauly. Overall a great day for sharp-tailed grouse conservation as we funded habitat management work, got more people involved with MSGS, and had fun doing it. The fourth annual Double Gun Shoot is already in the books for the last Sunday of April 2025, so mark your calendars!



Dave Pauly shooting and James Meadow scoring at the Double Gun Shoot this year.

MSGS Membership Meeting Notes

April 20, 2024 at the Spring Fling, Crookston Convention Center

We have been working towards new partnerships and increasing our outreach in the community. We have about 250 members now so look for MSGS at your local county fairs. More involved members equals more volunteers and more focus on these amazing birds. Please send in your Prairie Grouse hunting photos to the Outdoor News to increase the visibility of these birds and promote their management.

The membership made a motion to create a committee to begin exploring the idea of combining MSGS and MPCS to form one Minnesota Prairie Grouse Society. The vote passed unanimously to help both organizations meet their missions, and sustain and grow the prairie grouse populations in Minnesota.

Some members expressed concern that the closed hunting season in the EC range is causing a lack of conversation about sharp-tailed grouse by landowners, and hunters in the area. Changing the hunting season to a lottery system for the sharp-tailed grouse in the EC region was proposed as a way to balance the needs of the birds and promote sharp-tailed grouse conservation in these areas. It would also help us gather data on bird sightings, and hunter effort/metrics. No motion was made on this topic but only discussed as a goal for sharp-tailed grouse management in the state.

During the meeting, we also discussed the current totals in our bank accounts. We will be setting up a STRIPE account (or other system) that will better track our memberships, purchases, and online donations. We will also be hiring a CPA to review our accounts to make sure that we are being as efficient as possible and following all tax regulations consistent with a non-profit.

May 7, 2024 Board Meeting – Zoom Meeting 4 – 5 pm

We discussed how the website needs an upgrade. A motion was made to move the website to a format, that is designed for non-profit organizations. This change will help the website function better and will occur over the next year. The motion was approved unanimously.

Another motion was made to move all file storage systems to one central system and it passed unanimously. If any board members or previous board members have files pertinent to MSGS, please send them to James Meadow so that he can make sure they are properly stored and available to current board members.

A committee was formed to explore the potential of merging MSGS and MPCS as required by the motion passed at the Joint Spring Fling. If you are interested in serving on this committee, please reach out to Mike Chalich or any other board member.

Table showing the financial breakdown from the 2024 Joint MSGS and MPCS Society Annual Meeting in Crookston, MN.

Joint Income

Sponsorships (5)	\$1,400.00
Registration Fees (74)	\$4,860.00
Joint Fundraisers	\$2,753.00

MSGS Only Income

MSGS Gun Raffle	\$880.00
MSGS Hats	\$150.00
MSGS Memberships	\$50.00

Total Income	\$10,093.00
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Meeting Expenses	\$4,329.77
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Total Net Income for each Society	\$3,421.62
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MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Signage Project

Promoting Sharp-tailed Grouse Management on Private Lands throughout the EC Range

Sharp-tailed grouse require large complexes of grasslands and brushlands that likely exceed the average size of one landowner's property. But a group of landowners can make landscape scale changes for sharp-tailed grouse habitat. To help build these complexes, Pheasants Forever and MSGS have partnered together to create sharp-tailed grouse management signs for landowners to post on their property. The goal of these signs are to promote sharp-tailed grouse management and potentially encourage other landowners to manage their property for the firebird. The board of MSGS approved funding this project in tandem with Pheasants Forever. After the approval, MSGS Honorary Director and founder, Bill Berg, generously donated the necessary funds to create the signs and help spread the word about sharp-tailed grouse conservation in the EC region. Thank you very much for your donation and continued efforts to conserve sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota.



Bill Berg, shown above, helped produce the sharp-tailed grouse signs, shown to the right, in partnership with Pheasants Forever.



North American Grouse

Partnership –Midwest Update

Jodie Provost, NAGP Communications Director

In the Midwest, NAGP sought and organized speakers and sponsors for the Joint Meeting of the MSGS and MPCS on April 19-20. Over seventy people attended and five sponsors, including NAGP, backed the event, providing an additional \$1300 for their conservation efforts. NAGP also sponsored MSGS's Annual Double Gun Shoot, adding to their \$5,000 raised for on-the-ground work. Additionally, NAGP has shared resources from our Council of Scientists with partners in Wisconsin concerned about the proposed Vista Sands solar project in southwestern Portage County near the state's last greater prairie-chicken population, provided input to the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin regarding the application, and will provide input also on the draft Environmental Impact Statement. In North Dakota, Wildlife Federation habitat funds and the need for woody vegetation management on the Sheyenne National Grasslands where greater prairie-chicken remain, were connected.

Great reads about sharp-tailed grouse!

Dance of the "Fire Grouse", by Cheryl Lyn Dybas in the April 2024 issue of the Northern Wilds Magazine.

- Great article highlighting current sharp-tailed grouse management and some of the struggles associated with it in NW MN. Link to article can be found [here](#).

Meet the Editor

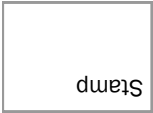
Joe Quehl, MSGS Newsletter Editor

My name is Joe Quehl and I am the new newsletter editor for MSGS! I am excited to become more involved with MSGS, but wanted to take a minute to thank Jodie Provost for all of the time and effort she put into the newsletter for the last eight years! It does not go unnoticed or unappreciated. I have some big shoes to fill that's for sure.

I am originally from St. Paul, Minnesota, and grew up hunting and fishing near Park Rapids, MN. This is where my passion for hunting and fishing began. I am an avid bird hunter, whether it be upland, waterfowl, or turkeys. I am relatively new to the sharp-tailed grouse world as I saw my first one ever this spring in Aitkin County. But I truly enjoy seeing them and want to become more involved in the conservation of the population that we have left in MN. I also plan to execute this mission through my job as a Farm Bill Biologist with Pheasants Forever where I help private landowners manage their property for sharp-tailed grouse in Aitkin and Carlton Counties.



Joe Quehl, pictured here with his crazy one-year old black labrador, Rye, after a successful ruffed grouse hunt in Northern MN.



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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, Dylan Mortenson, at dylan.mortenson@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

