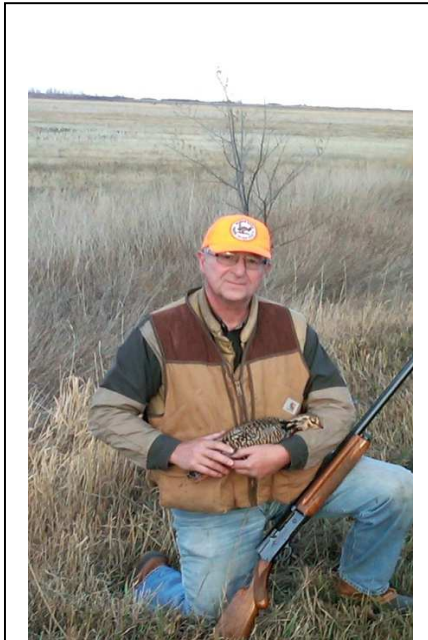




PGTC FALL NEWSLETTER 2012



Outdoor recreation at the
Glacial Ridge NWR. Oct. 2013

Greetings prairie grouse and I trust that you've wintered well. Hopefully all of you receiving this "official" newsletter will have received the earlier announcement of the 30th meeting of the PGTC, scheduled for the University of Minnesota, Crookston from 10 to 13 of October. If you've never heard of Crookston, it's in the northwest corner of the state; 25 miles from Grand Forks, ND and 80 miles from Canada. The campus is located near the transition of the tallgrass prairie, southern tip of the aspen parkland, and the northern tip of the deciduous forest. It's a pretty cool area and in spite of some folks claiming that we are in "the middle of nowhere," I'm convinced that we are in the "Middle of everywhere!" There are even some management areas in the neighborhood that have ruffed grouse, greater prairie chickens, and sharp-tailed grouse on the same tract. As for prairie grouse, we commonly have leks of each within a half mile of each other and even mixed grounds. I dug out the logo which I used in '87 in which I "merged" some wonderful artwork of Charlie Schwartz to show both species sharing space.

As for you "older timers" who attended the 1987 meeting, the place where we got the tour bus stuck is now part of the largest prairie and wetland restoration project in the country – the Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge. Imagine that just a few years ago, a 1 mile by 2 mile corn field in the background of the photo to the left. Yes, we now hunt prairie chickens in Minnesota

if you're willing to walk far enough. I now know more about the expression, "Tenderfoot." We sure look forward to sharing some of our great countryside with you all in October. Towards the end of the newsletter, I've included a first call for paper and poster abstracts to get you planning. **Let's shoot for 1 August as a deadline.** I borrowed the format from Dave Dahlgren and Jim Pitman from Kansas so I can't claim any originality there. ("I.M. Smart," "Slapout University.") Find also, the nomination information for the prestigious **Hamerstrom Award**, the premier recognition occasion of our outfit.

The Executive Committee of the PGTC, made up of the immediate Past-Chair, current Chair, and the Chair-Elect, has been in discussion with Steve Riley, President of the North American Grouse Partnership, about joining forces a bit. The Partnership represents an umbrella organization for all grouse species in North America and we feel it makes sense to synergize. They already include prairie grouse in their scope of coverage and with this connection more people could find out about both organizations by googling

each. What this means in the short term is that that the Partnership would host our web site and serve as our banker. See a copy of the working MOA, also towards the end of the newsletter. The Executive Committee has approved the MOA for now, pending final action at our annual meeting in October.

I've assembled many of the state and province reports on the status of prairie grouse in their respective areas. Others which are en route can be added to this electronic newsletter later. It would be nice to include as many of the status reports as possible. In reviewing the status reports and observing trends in land use over the years, it is clear that our focus species require landscape scale management and the influence of many factors beyond our immediate control is pervasive. We are not managing for robins! Those of us engaged in prairie grouse management in 1973 and 1974 saw an unprecedented increase in grain prices with a concomitant increase in land prices and pressure on what we thought was "marginal" land. Well here we are again, high corn and soybean prices, and redefining marginal land once again. The benefits of erosion prone land enrolled in CRP are rapidly going by the ditch-side with upside-down sod, destruction of windbreaks, and increase in drainage via new ditches and tiling. Along with upland wildlife, downstream flooding and diminished water quality will follow. I've included an NRCS press release and some thoughts from recent research by Dalzell and Polasky at the U of MN that add a little fodder for thought as we strive to maximize our individual and collective effectiveness to aid these magnificent flagship birds.

After looking things over, let me know of any suggestions, comments, additions, corrections, etc,

Thanks much,

Dan Svedarsky, Chair

30th meeting of the North American Prairie Grouse Technical Council

Second announcement!

**"Whooping it up on the
Minnesota prairie!"**

**30TH PGTC conference and meeting
Crookston, MN.**

10-13 October 2013

"Good works need not be done in a sepulchral atmosphere!"
— Fred Hamerstrom



**BIENNIAL
~~ANNUAL~~ GATHERING OF THE FLOCK**

Welcome, prairie grouse! With a shameless alteration of the annual meeting announcement of the Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, I would like to invite you to journey to Crookston, Minnesota for the second coming of the PGTC meeting - first held in Crookston in 1987. Those of you "long in the feather" remember Fred Hamerstrom and his above quote, admonishing those

**of us who labor in the grass and the brush, to have fun while we're at it.
Mark your calendar now.**

Hosts: Northwest Research and Outreach Center, U of MN; University of Minnesota, Crookston; Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society; and Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. (with others to be added)

Thursday, 10 October:

Informal grazing and browsing social and registration. **Prairie Lounge, U of MN, Crookston (UMC)**. Food and drink in Nature Nook, weather permitting, otherwise in Prairie Lounge of Sargeant Student Center. Commencing at 5:30 p.m. and lasting until 9:00

Friday, 11 October:

7:30 – (Registration desk open at 7:00) **Breakfast in Bede Ballroom, UMC**

8:00 - Sessions commence.

12:00 - **Lunch**

1:00 - 5:00 – Sessions

6:00. Program and **banquet. Bede Ballroom, UMC**

Saturday, 12 October.

7:30 - **Breakfast in Bede Ballroom, UMC**

8:00 – 9:00 Business meeting

9:00 Sessions commence.

12:00 - **Lunch**

1:00 Field trip to Glacial Ridge NWR and environs. Bus provided

5:30 Evening B-B-Q in the prairie. Catered.

Sunday, 13 October

Dispersal.

**WHEN CRP IS CONVERTED TO CROPLAND ON HIGHLY ERODIBLE LANDS,
THERE ARE OBLIGATIONS**

“Expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Contracts - Conservation Systems are required on Highly Erodible Land”

MN NRCS press release No. 2012 30. December 14, 2012

FSA Contact: Wanda Garry 651-602-7712. Wanda.garry@mn.usda.gov

NRCS Contact: Julie MacSwain. 651-602-7859. Julie.macswain@mn.usda.gov

ST. PAUL, MN, December 14, 2012 - The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has been one of the most successful conservation programs in the state of Minnesota. Established in 1985, land enrolled in CRP continues to make major contributions to national efforts to improve water and air quality, prevent soil erosion, protect environmentally sensitive land, and enhance wildlife.

Linda Hennen, State Executive Director for the USDA Minnesota Farm Service Agency (FSA), reminds USDA program participants with expired CRP of the requirement to obtain an approved conservation plan for land classified as Highly Erodible Land (HEL), prior to planting in order to meet USDA program payment eligibility.

To maintain eligibility for USDA program payments, producers are required to implement an appropriate conservation system on all Highly Erodible Land HEL fields. Many farmers with expired CRP acres may be intending to destroy the existing cover in order to prepare the soil for planting. Intensive tillage on expired CRP acres which are also identified as HEL fields may prevent participants from being able to implement a required conservation system. "Conservation systems are specific to each HEL field on a farm. Every farmer with HEL fields should understand the requirements of the conservation system for their farms," said Don Baloun, Minnesota NRCS State Conservationist.

Keep in mind that field operations and drainage activities performed during winter and spring could impact a producer's compliance status. "All farmers that participate in USDA programs are required to notify USDA of planned drainage activities that have not been previously evaluated. Participants are reminded to file an updated AD-1026 form at their location FSA Service Center." said Linda Hennen.

Participants are encouraged to consider reviewing their conservation systems on fields that are classified as HEL. Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff is available to help make the right choices for an operation based on specific soil resources and characteristics.

For additional information regarding HEL conservation systems and wetland compliance call or stop by your USDA Service Center for an appointment or visit <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp>.

How to pay for the good things that society gets from conservation programs?

"Add environmental benefits to conservation equation"

From: John Weiss, The Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN. Dec 24, 2012

"If you factor in less-obvious benefits of conservation, such as fewer chemicals in the water and better wildlife habitat, it's economically feasible to have more conservation programs, a study has found. But the study authors said it's not clear who would pay landowners who change their operations for better conservation. Two University of Minnesota researchers reported their results Wednesday at the meeting in Rochester of the Basin Alliance of the Lower Mississippi in Minnesota.

Brent Dalzell and Stephen Polasky used the 35-square-mile Seven Mile Creek Watershed northeast

of Mankato as a microcosm of the entire Minnesota River Watershed. The creek flows into the Minnesota and that joins the Mississippi River before it widens out into Lake Pepin. That lake has been the source of many studies because a major effort has started to slow it from filling in. One study found the lake, a natural reservoir of the Mississippi, would naturally fill in about 3,000 to 4,000 years, but that has speeded up to 300 to 400 years because of human changes in the landscape.

This Minnesota watershed, one of three major ones leading to Pepin, has been fingered as the major cause of the sediment. It has been found the river needs to lower its sediment load by 25 percent to 50 percent to significantly help Pepin.

The two researchers used full-cost accounting when looking at benefits, seeking a "golden sweet spot" where there are significant environmental benefits without sacrificing economic return, which average about \$4.4 million for that small watershed, Dalzell said. They found that changing the landscape about 25 percent for better conservation would not mean economic losses even without factoring in the intangible benefits. "It's a little bit of a free lunch," he said.

Once you go beyond 25 percent and turn more row crops into native prairie or switchgrass, the economic drop grows much faster, they said. If you add the intangibles, economic losses drop slower, they found.

In concluding the presentation, Dalzell said 'it's important to include those things (non-economic benefits) in the conversation.' The big challenge, he said after the talk, is figuring out how to compensate landowners who use more conservation practices or turn farm fields into prairie or switchgrass. 'There are big societal benefits, but we have to figure out how is a way for society to pay for them,' Polasky said. 'You can't put them all on the back of the farmer.' "

REPORTS FROM THE STATES AND PROVINCES

ILLINOIS REPORT

From; Scott Simpson, Illinois Department of Conservation. Scott.Simpson@illinois.gov

"In the spring of 2012, the 50th consecutive census in south-central Illinois indicated 53 Greater Prairie-Chicken males, perhaps about 100 total birds. The 2012 counts included 21 males in Jasper County and 32 males in the Marion County flock. In 2012, the males in Jasper County were down 50% from 2011 and 47 % below the 10 year average of 39.7. In 2012, the males in Marion County were down 20% from 2011 and 30% below the 10 year average (45.2). The intensively managed grasslands in scattered tracts in Jasper and Marion Counties total 2,900 and 1,425 acres, respectively.

Prairie chicken numbers have declined drastically due to poor nesting conditions from 2008 – 2011. Above normal rainfall (35% above normal precipitation during these 4 years as compared to the average of the previous 20 years) in April/May/June, a localized severe hailstorm on April 22, 2011 in Jasper County and then followed by the historic 2012 drought in both counties are likely factors.

The long term solution is to restore and manage adequate habitat in the core areas for self-sustaining populations. In the 20 years since Illinois' initial translocation effort, major improvements have been made, with the Illinois Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources acquiring nearly 2,200 acres – more than doubling the amount of available habitat for Illinois Prairie-Chickens. Unfortunately, a string of bad nesting seasons and a disastrous hailstorm have made it tough for the prairie-chickens to respond to the best habitat conditions in a generation and rapidly rising farmland prices have slowed the pace of land acquisition considerably. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources continues to work with its partners to implement the approved "A Plan for the Recovery of the Greater Prairie Chicken in Illinois.

I forgot to mention there is a minor league baseball team in Schaumburg, Illinois that has the greater prairie chicken as their mascot. Check out their website: www.boomerbaseball.com They're trying to raise the awareness of the greater prairie chicken in Illinois and other states. I Thought the PGTC folks might find this interesting." **Scott Simpson**

Coop, the Schaumburg Boomers' new mascot, being introduced at the Schaumburg Park District's Community Recreation Center, to the delight of baseball fans young and old.



Coop, the Schaumburg Boomer

From: Schaumburg Daily Herald report. 10 February 2012

Three months before the start of its inaugural season, the Schaumburg Boomers baseball team introduced its mascot at a gathering of area youngsters Thursday afternoon.

Coop the Boomer met fans, signed autographs and posed for pictures at the Schaumburg Park District's Community Recreation Center. He also led the crowd in the new "Booming Dance," adapted from the dance of the male greater prairie chicken from which the team gets its name. The Boomers announced that they are now accepting requests for Coop's appearances at community events, birthday parties, school events and more. Such requests can be made through the "[Book Coop](#)" page under the "Fan Zone" heading at [boomersbaseball.com](#).

And out on the booming ground. (Scott reports that goshawks are not that common in Illinois but they can sure raise cane when they show up on a booming ground!)



Male Prairie Chicken killed by Northern Goshawk

PRSNA Jasper County, IL 4-7-07

Photographed by: John Blok's group from viewing blind

KANSAS REPORT

FROM: Information forwarded from Christian Hagen, Oregon State University

Bob Robel - a legend passes

From: **Ron Klataske**, Executive Director, Audubon of Kansas, 210 Southwind Place, Manhattan KS 66503, 785-537-4385, Ron_Klataske@audubonofkansas.org

"Friends, it is with considerable sadness that we learned this morning (17 January 2013) that Bob Robel died yesterday. As we featured in the recent edition of *PRAIRIE WINGS*, Dr. Robel was a 'Great Wildlife Research Scientist, Conservationist and Sportsman.' We only touched the tip of the iceberg in terms of his leadership involvement in wildlife conservation and his influence on many, many people in that article, but it is a brief glimpse of his career and interests. Prairie grouse conservation has benefitted immensely from his monumental work and from his students.

You can share that article with others by forwarding this link on our website:

<http://audubonofkansas.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/4-6-Profile-of-a-Great-Scientist-Robel.pdf>



Among his many other contributions to wildlife, Bob has been a member of the Audubon of Kansas Board of Trustees for a number of years. We will miss him, his knowledge and wisdom, and counsel.

We have been blessed to have known Bob Robel, and his wife Anice. In my case, I knew Bob for almost exactly 60 years; he was my undergraduate advisor, I took his classes, conducted research under him, hosted him for wild turkey hunting. We will all miss him." **Ron Klataske**

Bob was 79 and was born May 21, 1933, in Lansing, Michigan. He was accepted into medical school at Michigan State University when he was a senior in high school. He switched from pre-medicine to wildlife ecology in his junior year because he didn't want to be confined to an office if he became a doctor. While still an undergraduate he sought out advisors and had funding lined up at the University of Idaho and Utah State University for his master's and doctoral degrees, respectively.

In 1961, he was hired as an assistant professor at Kansas State University. On a Fulbright Scholarship, he traveled to the United Kingdom to study Black Grouse in 1967. While in the United Kingdom he was also asked to help with a long-term study of Red Deer, a close cousin to the North American Elk. He developed a management plan to help increase Red Deer by culling females that were not capable of producing healthy offspring. Most of Robel's research in Kansas was devoted to upland game bird

species, including Greater and Lesser Prairie Chickens and Northern Bobwhites. In addition to wildlife research, he was involved with the National Institute of Health in evaluating effects of herbicide exposure and cancer. Other projects involved problems of the storage of radioactive waste from nuclear power plants and conducted environmental impact statements for companies and industries across the country. He served as a consultant and science advisor for several Kansas governors, energy companies and numerous committees and task forces. He was the recipient of numerous conservation and science honors and awards and advised and mentored some of the top wildlife professionals in the country. Two of these, Nova Silvy and Warren Ballard, were part of a graduate student group at Kansas State in the late 1960's who were the first to attach radio transmitters to Greater Prairie Chickens.

On a personal note, I became aware of Dr. Robel from a flyer advertising him speaking at the student chapter meeting of The Wildlife Society at the University of Missouri, probably in the fall of 1965. I was a bit adrift at the time, bouncing between majors and looking for my way as a young college student. I located the meeting at a room in the Student Union where he spoke on Red Grouse in Scotland, a bird of the Moorlands which he annually trekked to hunt most of his professional life. That serendipitous occasion introduced me to The Wildlife Society and helped launch a career path. I would later use the now famous, "Robel Pole" in measuring habitat structure as part of my Ph.D. research on Greater Prairie Chickens in Minnesota. I believe the last time I saw Bob and his wife was at a knife factory in Rovaniemi, Finland as we were returning from the International Grouse Symposium. Sometimes in life, we just get lucky!

Minnesota Report

The following is a joint report from Minnesota folks who are laboring valiantly to help these magnificent birds save their grass. First, from Brian Winter, regional prairie manager with The Nature Conservancy in Glyndon, MN, and long-time President of the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society:

"A few comments. The Minnesota Prairie Plan is a great document (see <http://www.nature.org/media/minnesota/mn-prairie-conservation-plan.pdf>) and is worth highlighting for Minnesota grassland conservation. The general trend of late is all bad! Grassland conversion to cropland is proceeding at a rate not seen in decades (especially 1973 and '74) due to high commodity prices. Tile is going in by the train load, land values are sky rocketing and making it hard to do much protection of grassland with limited conservation dollars and even harder for landowners to let land sit 'idle.' It is somewhat of a perfect storm against chickens right now. It is somewhat old news now but we are so lucky in MN to have the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Conservation funding.* These funds are getting the good work done now in the state.

* In 2008, the Minnesota Constitution was amended to state: **Sec. 15. Outdoor heritage, clean water, parks and trails, and arts and cultural heritage; sales tax dedicated funds.** Beginning July 1, 2009, until June 30, 2034, the sales and use tax rate shall be increased by three-eighths of one percent with 33 percent deposited in the **outdoor heritage fund** to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife; 33 percent to the **clean water fund** to protect, enhance, and restore water quality in lakes, rivers, and streams and to protect groundwater from degradation, and at least five percent of the clean water fund must be spent only to protect drinking water sources; 14.25 percent of the receipts shall be deposited in the **parks and trails fund** and may be spent only to support parks and trails of regional or statewide significance; and 19.75 percent shall be deposited in the **arts and cultural heritage fund** and may be spent only for arts, arts education, and arts access and to preserve Minnesota's history and cultural heritage.

Census data show a downward trend for several years and some of that was weather and habitat loss related. I think the future is ugly on chicken numbers in MN with the loss that is now happening. Even with better nesting weather, I expect birds to be up slightly in my area (east of Moorhead in western Minnesota) this spring but the number of booming grounds will likely be down as a result of grassland loss compressing birds to the core prairie conservation areas.” **Brian Winter.** bwinter@tnc.org

And from Greg Hoch, formerly with the Wetlands Management District office of the FWS in Detroit Lakes and now with the Farmlands Population and Research Center of the MNDNR in Madelia:

“The traditional prairie chicken range in the northwest is the narrow line of the beach ridges of Glacial Lake Agassiz. (See maps in Prairie Plan referenced above.) In the past several years approximately 40 ‘new’ leks have been identified to the east of the beach ridges in Clay, Mahnomen, and Becker Counties. While the beach ridges contain a relatively continuous tract of grassland habitat running north-south, the area to the east is highly fragmented with habitat consisting of relatively isolated grasslands, many as state Wildlife Management Areas and federal Waterfowl Production Areas. In this landscape, the average patch size was 818 acres, with the minimum patch size being around 250-320 acres. This analysis also shows patches that are large enough to hold prairie chickens but don’t. We can investigate these areas more thoroughly to determine why there are no chickens present on these sites and focus management, such as tree removal, on them.

Average distance between leks in this fragmented landscape was 1.9 miles. A similar analysis was done in the landscape between the existing range and the Lac Qui Parle area. There are at least 38 grasslands that meet the minimum size threshold of 320 acres. However, inter-patch distance is two times greater in the Grant/Big Stone County area relative to the Becker/Mahnomen area. This analysis can also provide a spatially explicit model on where to focus conservation efforts, both acquisition and management in the existing range and on the edges of the range to expand the population. This effort dovetails closely with Minnesota’s new Prairie Plan, a 25-year plan for regional prairie and wildlife conservation built around the idea of identifying the core areas with high densities of remaining prairie and corridors connecting these areas.” **Greg Hoch.** greghoch1@gmail.com

(Greg has been a real champion as far as landing grants for prairie grouse management, primarily from the Heritage Fund; totaling around 2.7 million. Holy Moly!)

From: Ross Hier, Minnesota DNR wildlife manager based in Crookston, wildlife artist, and historian of the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society:

“We tell it ‘like it is’ in the good times and should continue as such in the darker days. I have nothing to add that people like Dan Svedarsky doesn’t witness every day en route to town and back. I think the northern end of the prairie grouse range will be greatly reduced in numbers of birds over the next 5 years until those that can do so stabilize along our secure beach ridge grasslands corridor. Declines started in the past couple years will be accelerated as more grass comes out and farming continues to intensify. I’ve come to a very dark place in my mind with the handling of CRP by FSA after talking to many farmers that really liked ‘some grass near their farm’ and would have re-upped if FSA was not absolute on the need to break-up the old contract grass to re-seed. What does a farmer do once he/she is told you have to break sod to replace it with sod at prices so ridiculously below commodity levels? They say, ‘Sorry grass ... if I’m forced to plow you under I’m switching to crops.’ Again, the USDA sometimes punishes those who want to keep grass around and it is a bit absurd!

Now that I have that off my chest, sharptails have certainly expanded southward in the past 5-8 years. Svedarsky knows this better than most as sharps have mostly replaced chickens in the winter at his crabapple trees in his yard at Booming Flats (10 miles southeast of Crookston). I've seen sharps as far south as Twin Valley on a couple of occasions. They likely moved south as some of the oldest CRP gained more and more brush cover. Of course, that will change now. A plus for our secure grasslands will be the greater ease we will have using fire as a grassland management tool. This will take some mind-searching though since there will be less nesting cover to start the spring with and burned areas will reduce that even more for the initial nesting cycle." **Ross Hier.** ross.hier@state.mn.us



To amplify Ross Hier's comments about intensifying land use adjacent to wildlife areas. Photo to left; sometimes rocks from adjacent lands "wander" across the property line. Above photo; New ditches for old lands.

On sharp-tailed grouse, from Bill Berg, retired MN DNR biologist who has worked with sharp-tailed grouse habitat for many years and helped found the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society:

"Sharptail status in the northwest is covered well in Ross Hier's report, especially the (perhaps temporary) range expansion to the south that in part is in traditional prairie chicken range. In the far northwest, sharptails are doing great, thanks to brushland habitat work under the now defunct Heritage Enhancement Program that funded the *Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society* habitat grants. Abundant large wildfires last spring and autumn also rejuvenated habitat, but at the high monetary cost of controlling the wild fires.

In the east-central sharptail range, where about one-third of the state's sharptails live, sharptails are doing well but continue their long-term, very gradual decline. The loss of brushlands to low-timber quality woodland is the main culprit, together with the disappearance of marginal habitat as leks become more genetically isolated. The east-central range's bright spots include the acquisition of several habitat parcels in the southern part, largely due to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council funding (the sales tax increase amendment) to the *Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society*, which was helped by the folks who know how to acquire habitat---*Pheasants Forever*. Funding remains a problem to continue to manage grass and brush habitat on these parcels. Sharptail harvests have changed little over the last two decades, and hover around 8,000 to 12,000 annually. This suggests a relatively stable

remnant population but is a far cry from the 50,000 harvested just 5 decades ago.” **Bill Berg**.
terblbrg@uslink.net

Wanted: A Place to Dance - for Sharp-tailed Grouse in east-central Minnesota

From; Jodie Provost, MN DNR. jodie.provost@state.mn.us

“The east central Minnesota sharp-tailed grouse population continues a gradual, long-term decline due to loss of suitable brushland habitat. Places to ‘dance’ and raise broods for this species in greatest conservation need have slowly been lost through the cumulative impact of natural succession, conversion of hay and pasture lands, tree planting, and development. Preliminary sharptail genetic analysis from northwestern Minnesota to Wisconsin has shown higher genetic diversity in northwest Minnesota and poor genetic diversity in Wisconsin, with east central Minnesota diversity values lying in between. In an effort to reverse this trend and keep Minnesota and Wisconsin brushlands and sharptail populations connected, several conservation partners have stepped up to the plate in a team effort to increase brushland protection, enhancement, and restoration. Each partner has brought different and valuable resources to the table, varying from technical expertise and financial resources to boots-on-the-ground power. All are greatly appreciated.

State Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), state forests, county lands, National Wildlife Refuges, state parks, and other public lands where open landscape habitat is managed, serve as secure, core areas for sharptails and other brushland dependent wildlife. A notable addition to this network of public conservation lands has occurred thanks to *Pheasants Forever* and the *Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society* (MSGs) securing grants from the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund. They’ve protected over 2000 acres of habitat and more land is in the protection process with nearly \$4 million obtained to date. These lands will be managed as WMAs by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR). Pine barren and oak savanna restoration are also underway at St. Croix State Park which borders Wisconsin. Blow-down events there in 2008 and 2011 have provided opportunities to open up habitats through timber harvest, bio-baling, mowing and prescribed burning.

To truly increase the probability that sharptail populations will persist in east central Minnesota, public brushlands must be buffered and connected through targeted encouragement and support of private land habitat management. Thus, conservation partners including the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners (USFWS) for Fish and Wildlife Program, DNR Wildlife Habitat Program, Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), St. Croix Watershed, Minnesota Forest Resource Council (MFRC), and Farm Service Agency are collaborating to identify target areas, interested private landowners, and potential projects to implement. Resources brought to the joint venture include information sharing and planning through MFRC landscape committees and watershed steering committees; lek survey, preliminary habitat modeling and connectivity analysis data and technical expertise from MN DNR to identify target areas; and funding and field assistance from NRCS, SWCDs and USFWS. NRCS has been especially supportive, setting aside a pool of Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program or Environmental Quality Incentive Program funds for the past several years. Landowners competitively apply for these funds to implement activities such as shearing, mowing, tree removal, prescribed burning, and improved pasture management. NRCS staff suggested and now display a unique sharptail “Wanted” poster at their offices to capture their customers’ attention.

To really crank up the private land habitat effort, landowners with suitable and potential habitat within a targeted area of Kanabec and Pine Counties are being sent letters by NRCS informing them of

opportunities to enhance and restore brushland habitat. Several positive responses have already been received. Interested landowners are encouraged to attend a workshop on April 6 in Hinckley where sharptail habitat needs and brushland management techniques will be explained, aerial photos provided, individual project ideas discussed, and a tour of brushland projects and lek sites led.

Partners in this east central Minnesota brushland venture know there is much work to accomplish in order to secure sharptail and other brushland wildlife's future. Opportunities to collaboratively conduct more habitat management with increasingly better science bring great hope however. Outdoor Heritage funds for protection, enhancement and restoration are available for 20 more years; the MN DNR will begin a sharptail nest and brood-rearing habitat selection and survival study in the spring of 2013; the MSGS and *Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society* will host a joint meeting at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area on April 26-27, 2013 to share information and increase interstate collaboration; our Wisconsin neighbors are working hard on their side of the border; and many dedicated natural resource colleagues and landowners are on the job. Together, we'll save many places for sharptails to dance.

Jodie Provost

From: Mike Larson, former grouse scientist for the MN DNR and now Forest Wildlife Research Supervisor. Michael.Larson@dnr.state.mn.us Charlotte Roy is the new state grouse scientist, based in Grand Rapids. Charlotte.Roy@state.mn.us):

The sharp-tailed grouse harvest is estimated through the Small Game Hunter Survey, and the results are published in a *Status of Wildlife Populations* report that is available on the web; <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/publications/wildlife/index.html>. That report usually comes out in August of the year following the hunting season. The grouse scientist summarizes the harvest for prairie-chickens and that annual report is usually completed by December and is also available on the web; <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/hunting/prairiechicken/index.html>. Mike Larson.

Results for the 2012 prairie chicken hunting season are not yet tabulated, but in 2011, an estimated 138 hunters bagged around 92 chickens after spending an average of 2.2 days afield during the 5-day season from 22-26 October. At that time of year birds tend to flush at some distance and there are current discussions of moving the season up a bit so they hold better for dogs. Minnesota's chicken season was opened in 2003 after being closed from 1943 through 2002. A lottery system is used for Minnesota residents only and with a landowner preference.

MISSOURI REPORT

From; Max Alleger, Missouri Department of Conservation. Max.Alleger@mdc.mo.gov

"Between 2008 and 2012, 435 Greater Prairie-Chickens (GPC) were translocated from Kansas to Missouri. GPC were trapped from 46 booming grounds across a 580 square mile area of Kansas' Smoky Hills. Trappers worked on Ft. Riley during 2008, and on the Smoky Hills Bombing Range from 2008-2010. All other sites were located on privately-owned land, which required coordination with more than 60 Kansas ranchers and farmers.

The majority of translocated birds stayed on Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie, the release site. Several birds moved (<10 miles) into the native population at Taberville Prairie; others moved a similar distance west to private lands which historically held GPC. Some translocated birds dispersed >30 miles across rivers, roads and woodlands to seek out suitable grasslands or interact with native birds. Overall, survival and nest success among translocated birds has been comparable to estimates from studies of resident birds in other states. Currently, 80-100 birds remain in the vicinity of the release site in three sub-populations. Less than 50 additional, native birds remain in a handful of profoundly isolated sub-populations elsewhere in Missouri.

Intensive telemetry monitoring of released birds and their offspring suggests the importance of providing a patchwork of herbaceous cover of differing heights and densities within large (>2,000 acre) core areas. Management unit size within our large prairies has been significantly reduced to increase the extent of, 'soft edge' which GPC seek. Further analysis of telemetry data and continued monitoring of females within the release geography through 2016 will continue to inform future management.

Translocation has been an integral and highly publicized facet of the Department's more comprehensive GPC recovery effort. The project appears to have established a local population, the long-term stability of which hinges on continued intensive grassland management on public lands and upon further efforts to reduce fragmentation and add viable nesting and brood-rearing cover on private lands. **Max Alleger**

NEBRASKA REPORT

From: Jeff Lusk, Nebraska Game & Parks Commission. jeff.lusk@nebraska.gov

"Three Rural Mail Carrier Surveys are conducted each year in April, July, and October across Nebraska. On the July and October surveys, all prairie grouse observed by mail carriers along their routes are recorded, and an index (grouse observed per 100 miles) is used to track trends in abundance on a statewide and regional basis. In July 2012, the statewide index was higher than in 2011, and was higher than the long-term means (5, 10, 20 year means). Significant regional declines were noted only in the southwestern Nebraska. Similarly, the statewide index from the October survey was higher than in 2011, and higher than the long-term means (5,10,20 year means). A note of caution on this year's results, however; the July survey occurred during a severe drought and heat wave. As such, grouse behavior and/or detectability might have been affected. For example, drought conditions stunted the growth of grasses and other vegetation, possibly making grouse more visible to mail carriers.

Beginning in 2010, breeding ground survey methodology was altered to reduce personnel time requirements. Each year, half of the survey routes in each district are surveyed, with the other half surveyed the subsequent year. Therefore, a survey of all routes is completed every two years. Prairie grouse are surveyed along 24, 19-mile routes during 1-20 April. Surveys consist of a listening portion, when observers listen for grouse leks at stops spaced 1 mile apart along the route. During the second part of the survey, leks detected during the first part of the survey are located and the number of grouse at each lek is counted. Leks located in previous years, but not detected during the current survey, are also checked and counted if active.

Sharp-tailed grouse counts on all routes run in 2011 (Newport, North Platte, Antioch, Sunday School, and Mullen) were lower than their five year means. There were no significant 10 year trends, but North Platte and Antioch had significantly negative 25-year trends (-0.08, $P < 0.05$ and -2.73, $P < 0.01$, respectively). Only the Mullen route had no significant trends over any of the time frames investigated.

Sharp-tailed grouse counts on routes run in 2012 were lower than their five year means for Arthur, Swan Lake, Bassett, Lake Side, and Wildhorse routes, but were higher for Newport, Johnstown, and Wheeler routes. There were no significant 10 year trends, but Arthur, and Wheeler had significantly negative 25-year trends (-3.4, $P < 0.01$ and -1.6, $P < 0.05$, respectively) and Swan Lake and Wildhorse had significantly positive 25-year trends (1.1, $P < 0.01$ and 0.3, $P < 0.01$, respectively).

In 2011, greater prairie-chicken counts in the west on the Newport and North Platte routes were above their five-year means, whereas counts on Sunday School and Mullen were below their 5-year means. The North Platte route had significantly positive 10- and 25-year trends (9.23 and 3.24, $P < 0.05$, respectively), and the Newport route had a significantly negative 25-year trend (-1.18, $P < 0.10$). In 2012, greater prairie-chicken counts in the west on the Arthur, Swan Lake, Bassett, Johnstown, O'Neill, and Wildhorse routes were lower than their five-year means, but were higher on the Atkinson, Newport, Wheeler, and Lincoln SW routes. The Atkinson route had a significantly positive 10-year trend (18.4, $P < 0.05$), whereas the Arthur route had a significantly positive 25-year trend (4.3, $P < 0.01$). The Johnstown and Wildhorse routes had significantly negative 25-year trends (-2.0 and -4.2, respectively, $P < 0.01$).

In the southeast in 2011, lek counts on the Harlan North, Jefferson-Thayer, Pawnee, and Gage routes were lower than the five-year means. Harlan North and Jefferson-Thayer routes had significantly positive long-term trends, but the Gage route had significantly negative trends. In the southeast in 2012, lek counts on the Harlan South and Johnson routes were lower than their five-year means, but were higher on the Gage and Otoe routes. Harlan South (5.2, $P < 0.01$) had a significantly positive long-term trend, whereas the Gage route (-7.0, $P < 0.01$) had a significantly negative long-term trend.

During the 2011-2012 prairie grouse season, an estimated 6,426 hunters spent approximately 32,500 days afield to harvest 28,500 prairie grouse (0.89 grouse harvested per hunter day). As part of our annual parts collection survey of grouse hunters, 105 wing envelopes were returned by the end of the 2011-2012 season, containing 222 grouse wings from 62 cooperators. Cooperating hunters reported harvesting 289 grouse for an average of 1.21 grouse harvested per hunter-day. The statewide sample contained 76 sharp-tailed grouse wings (71.1% juvenile) and 146 greater prairie-chicken wings (56.2% juvenile). Statewide, there were 2.46 juveniles/adult sharptail and 1.32 juveniles/adult prairie-chicken. Most wings returned were reported to have been harvested in September.

The Nebraska Game & Parks Commission is currently funding a study of the persistent effects of wind-power development on the greater prairie-chicken. The project will not only investigate lek attendance at wind-power facilities and control areas, but will also track hen movements at large (VHF transmitters) and fine-scales (GPS transmitters), investigate stress-hormone responses to wind facilities, and investigate the acoustic ecology of lekking among wind turbines. Currently graduate students and a Post-Doc are preparing for the first field season. Preliminary attempts to isolate stress hormones from fecal matter left on leks were successful. The funded research involves a team of researchers from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and Omaha, Boys Town National Research Hospital, and Creighton University. The research is funded through the end of 2016.

Lars Anderson, a graduate student at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln recently completed a study focused on greater prairie-chickens in the Nebraska Sandhills. Below is the abstract from his thesis titled, *Nest and Brood Site Selection and Survival of Greater Prairie-Chickens in the Eastern Sandhills of Nebraska*.

Greater prairie-chickens (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*) are a grassland bird species of conservation concern. Although greater prairie-chickens have declined over much of their range, the Nebraska

Sandhills has the largest population in North America. However, the responses of nest and brood site selection and survival to vegetation characteristics are unknown. I studied prairie-chickens on private rangelands in Rock and Brown Counties from 2009-2011. I fitted 139 females with radio collars to locate nest and brood sites and to determine nest and brood survival rates. Females were trapped on leks during the breeding season and I monitored them throughout the summer using radio telemetry. At nest and brood sites, I collected vegetation structure and composition data. Plant composition was estimated by functional groups using a quadrat method and vegetation structure was measured using the Robel pole and coverboard. I identified the ecological site and plant community at each nest and brood site. I then sampled to determine the relative availability of ecological sites and plant communities in each pasture to assess preference at a macro-scale level. I also collected weather data throughout the reproductive season to assess variation in nest and brood survival. Prairie-chicken females tended to choose upland ecological sites for nesting and brood-rearing. Nest sites had more vegetation cover (VOR) (mean VOR: 10.8 cm; SD=0.7) than coupled random sites (mean VOR: 4.6 cm; SD=0.4). Nest site selection is positively associated with moderate levels of VOR and residual vegetation. Daily nest survival was poorly associated with habitat measures and was marginally associated with weather and temporal effects. Brood-rearing sites tended to have higher VOR and LD (mean VOR: 6.92 cm, SD=0.62; mean LD: 0.06 cm, SD=0.1) than at coupled random locations (mean VOR: 6.45 cm, SD=0.37; mean LD: 0.05 cm, SD=0.1). Higher forb cover and greater litter depth positively impacted daily brood survival. My research gives grassland managers much-needed information for managing prairie-chicken breeding habitat in the Nebraska Sandhills." **Jeff Lusk**

From: Caroline Jezierski, 22 January 2013. Subject: Prairie Chickens vs. Wind Turbines - Fox Business

"Hello All,

Last week, a reporter from Fox Business interviewed Jay Lininger, an ecologist for the Center of Biological Diversity, about prairie chickens and wind energy. The video is just over 3 minutes long, yet hits on many of the concerns/issues of wind energy development and wildlife.

<http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/2103790718001/>"

Caroline Jezierski, Nebraska Wind Energy and Wildlife Project Coordinator, Nebraska Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit, School of Natural Resources, University of Nebraska - Lincoln
Lincoln, NE 68583-0995

NORTH DAKOTA REPORT

From: Aaron Robinson, North Dakota Game and Fish Department. arobinson@nd.gov

"Surveys and inventories were conducted in North Dakota from January 2012 through December 2012 for sharp-tailed grouse, sage grouse, and prairie chickens.

Prairie grouse were censused on 27 census areas and all known sage grouse strutting grounds to determine breeding populations. Sharp-tailed grouse increased 17% statewide from 2011. Sage grouse

increased 14% after a steady decline for the past 4 years. Prairie chickens were relatively the same on the Sheyenne Grasslands and down a little on the Grand Forks area.

Sharp-tailed grouse brood routes were used to evaluate production from 4,836 miles of roadside counts. Average brood size was down, -13.6% from 2011 but the numbers of broods observed was up 71% in 2012, grouse/mile increased 75%. No sage-grouse or prairie chicken broods were observed.

Wing data have not been completed for the 2012 hunting season but as of January 1, 2013, 447 sharp-tailed grouse wings have been analyzed to determine age and sex information. The age ratio from hunter harvested wings to date is 1.13 which is slightly lower than 1.31 observed in 2011. Sex ratios were not significantly different from a 50:50 ratio for either adults or immatures. There were no wing data gathered on sage grouse or prairie chickens in 2012 because the season was closed to hunting.”

Aaron Robinson

OKLAHOMA and all those other states in the Southern Great Plains with Lesser Prairie-Chickens

From: Jon Haufler, Ecosystem Management Research Institute. Jon_Haufler@emri.org

“Lesser prairie-chickens have seen a flurry of activity directed towards them since the USFWS indicated last year its intent to release a listing rule for the species, and then followed through on this with the release of a proposed rule in December to list the species as threatened. Since this release, the Service has held four public meetings and solicited input on the science contained in its proposed rule.

Oklahoma was concerned about the anticipated listing status of the species, and its legislature issued a joint resolution calling for the state to prepare a conservation plan for the species. Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation initiated this task and contracted with the Ecosystem Management Research Institute (EMRI) to assist in the plan development and public involvement process. A collaborative plan was produced that set population goals for lesser prairie-chickens within the state, and used this to identify a system of core conservation areas which hold the greatest promise for developing large blocks of habitat required by the species. The goal of the core areas is for agencies and organizations to concentrate their conservation efforts towards the species in these areas, encouraging the restoration, enhancement, and maintenance of blocks of high quality habitat. Fifteen core areas were identified, as were connectivity zones designed to encourage movement among the areas. A series of public meetings were held to present drafts of the plan and obtain input from diverse stakeholders. The plan was completed last summer, and can be downloaded from the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation website. In addition, Oklahoma worked with the Service to complete a landowner CCAA that would give landowners conducting habitat improvements on their property assurances that they could continue their land management activities in the future should the species be listed.

In the spring of 2012 a range-wide aerial lek survey was initiated. The survey (McDonald 2012, see the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) website) conducted a random sampling of transects distributed across the species range. It estimated a spring population of approximately 37,000 birds, reflecting the effects of two years of drought. WAFWA has indicated its intent to continue this survey annually assuming funding availability.

The NRCS continues its refinement and implementation of the Lesser Prairie-chicken Conservation Initiative (LPCI). Partnerships with various organizations have helped add field biologists to assist in the delivery of this program. The Farm Service Agency continues to make enrollment of lands into CRP a priority within the range of lesser prairie-chickens, and has used the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) to specifically target needs of the species in some areas.

Following the development of the Oklahoma plan, all five states supporting lesser prairie-chickens (Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado) decided to develop a range-wide plan. They tasked the Lesser Prairie-chicken Interstate Working Group (IWG), working through WAFWA to take on this task, and received funding assistance from the Great Plains LCC. WAFWA contracted with EMRI to assist in coordinating the development of the plan. Building from the Oklahoma plan, the IWG worked with various agencies, organizations, industries, landowner groups, and other stakeholders to identify population goals and to delineate a system of core (focal) areas where habitat conservation efforts can be focused to build large blocks of habitat linked by connectivity zones. A mitigation framework designed to discourage development from occurring in higher quality habitat, provide funding for mitigation, and encouraging offsite mitigation to occur in focal and other important areas for the species has been developed. Several drafts of the plan have been prepared and made available for public input while numerous public meetings have been held for the same purpose. The plan is expected to be provided to the USFWS by the end of March.

With the breeding season just beginning, fingers are crossed that the drought of the past two years will lessen and allow for a normal or even wet spring. While lesser prairie-chicken populations can rebound rapidly when adequate precipitation allows for the vegetation growth needed for good habitat conditions, repeated years of drought have stressed not only the population but the preferred grasses and other plant species required by the birds.” **Jon Haufler**

SOUTH DAKOTA REPORT

From; Travis Runia, SD Department of Game, Fish and Parks. Travis.Runia@state.sd.us

“The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks annually conducts prairie grouse lek surveys within 9 township-sized blocks throughout the state. The number of sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chicken leks counted and the number of displaying males counted declined from 2011. The number of greater prairie-chicken leks detected declined more severely (22 vs. 34) than for sharp-tailed grouse (36 vs. 38). Similarly, the total number of males counted declined from 335 to 204 for greater prairie-chickens and from 372 to 306 for sharp-tailed grouse. Although the number of leks and total males declined, the number of males/active lek remained similar to 2011 and slightly higher than the previous 5 years average.

Detailed survey data can be found at the link below.

<http://www.gfp.sd.gov/hunting/small-game/prairie-chicken-ruffed-grouse.aspx>

The 2011 grouse season covered 17 September 2011 - 1 January 2012 statewide. An estimated 13,000 hunters harvested an estimated 48,000 prairie grouse. Harvest was similar to the previous 9 years, but well below the 20-year average. Annual prairie grouse harvest has steadily declined since the mid-1970s when harvest exceeded 175,000.

Detailed harvest reports can be found at the link below.

<http://gfp.sd.gov/hunting/harvest/default.aspx#>

Wings from hunter-harvested birds are collected from throughout the state to estimate annual productivity. The statewide production index of young of year wings/adult wings plummeted to 0.99 in 2012. The previous 5-year average was 1.91. Severe drought during the spring and summer of 2012 likely reduced production. The Department is currently using 20 years of production data to model prairie grouse production as a function of weather variables.

Long-term and short-term habitat trends continue to be unfavorable for prairie grouse in South Dakota. Unprecedented high crop prices during the past 2 years have resulted in accelerated rates of prairie to cropland conversion throughout the state. ***It is likely that in excess of 3 million acres of prairie have been converted to cropland since 1985.*** In addition, Conservation Reserve Program acreage declined to below 1 million acres in 2012, down from a peak of nearly 1.7 million acres in the late 1990s. Loss of grassland has certainly reduced the distribution and abundance of these area-sensitive birds and this is most apparent in our statewide harvest trends. Without federal agricultural policy reform, loss of grasslands at the tax payers' expense will continue. Specifically, a strong Sod Saver provision and recoupling of Federal Crop Insurance eligibility to conservation compliance would certainly benefit prairie grouse by de-incentivizing conversion of prairie habitat." **Travis Runia**

TEXAS REPORT ON THE ATTWATER'S PRAIRIE CHICKEN

From: Mike Morrow, Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR, U.S. F. & W.S. mike_morrow@fws.gov

"A total of 23 male Attwater's prairie-chickens (APC) were observed on booming grounds in early March 2012, down 58% from the 55 observed in March 2011. This decrease was undoubtedly due to extremely poor 2011 reproduction during historic drought conditions. In addition to free-ranging individuals, 153 APC were held in captivity at the end of 2012.

Research continues to point to number of insects available to broods, especially during the 1st 2 weeks posthatch, as a critical limiting factor for APC populations. The impact of imported red fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) on numbers of insects available to broods is currently being evaluated through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. In 2 of the last 3 years, survival for 57 APC broods (40%, 6%, 36% for 2010-2012, respectively) was comparable to average survival for 263 wild Minnesota

greater-prairie chicken broods (38%) and 11 historic wild APC broods (36%) (Pratt et al., manuscript in prep.).

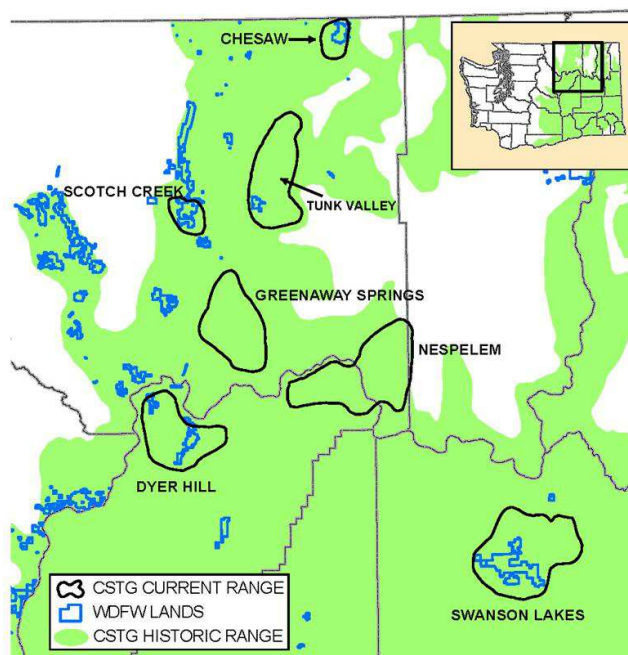
Funding has been secured for a new APC propagation facility at the Sutton Avian Research Center near Bartlesville, OK. It is expected that this facility at completion will double the current captive breeding flock of 50-60 hens, providing a substantial increase in the number of birds produced for recovery efforts. Until this facility is online, beginning in 2012, recovery focus shifted to building one population at a time rather than attempting to spread the limited number of birds available for release among multiple release sites.” **Mike Morrow**

WASHINGTON REPORT

Sharp-tailed grouse

From: Michael A. Schroeder, michael.schroeder@dfw.wa.gov, and Derek Stinson, derek.stinson@dfw.wa.gov
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

“Columbian sharp-tailed grouse were historically found in many of the shrub-grass habitats of central and southeastern Washington. Surveys have indicated that sharp-tailed grouse are virtually extinct everywhere except Okanogan, Douglas, and Lincoln counties (figure below). Remaining populations are small and localized within isolated areas of relatively intact shrubsteppe as well as Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) fields. The total population in Washington was estimated to be about 850 birds in 2012. Management activities include land acquisition, publication of a recovery plan (<http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/00882/>), support of federal farm programs (e.g., CRP and SAFE), fence marking to reduce collisions, improved grazing management, habitat restoration, and translocations.



Translocations of sharp-tailed grouse from 'healthy' populations outside the state are being conducted to improve the genetic health of populations within Washington. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, in cooperation with the Colville Confederated Tribes and Bureau of Land Management, translocated 329 sharp-tailed grouse from central British Columbia, southeastern Idaho, and north-central Utah to Washington State in spring 2005-2012. Efforts to monitor movement, survival, and productivity of the translocated birds are ongoing. Although it is too early in the process to determine whether the augmentations should be considered a success, the results to date have been promising."

Mike Schroeder and Derek Stinson

WISCONSIN REPORT

From: Scott Walter, WI DNR. Scott.Walter@wisconsin.gov

Sharp-tailed Grouse

"Formerly well distributed throughout Wisconsin, sharp-tailed grouse are now primarily restricted to the far northwest corner of the state, primarily on large blocks of public land where barrens and associated grassland management remains a priority. The number of dancing males on traditional lek sites in this region are counted during annual spring surveys, and used to index and track changes in population size. The number of males observed on managed properties during March and April of 2012 was 21% greater than the number observed in 2011 (131 vs. 108), but was well below historic levels and still 25% below the average number observed on these areas between 2007 and 2010. The mean number of males per dancing ground was 18.7 (range 3 - 40). Populations on these managed lands have been declining since 1998. Recent genetic work also suggests sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin exhibit significant genetic structure; although overall genetic variation is similar to that found in larger populations to the West, there is little gene flow among subpopulations and each subpopulation has lower genetic diversity and many contain unique alleles.

Wisconsin maintains a limited hunting season for sharp-tailed grouse, with permits available through a random drawing process. For the fall 2012 season (20 Oct – 11 Nov), 213 hunters received 235 permits (22 hunters received 2 permits each). A harvest of 9 sharp-tailed grouse was reported, for a permit success rate of 3.8%.

Though greatly restricted in range and with a current population in decline, there are reasons to be optimistic about the persistence of sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin. A large (>130,000 ac) blowdown in July of 2011 opened up significant acres of forest cover within the current grouse range, creating patches of usable cover for birds within the forested matrix surrounding managed properties and providing excellent opportunities to promote long-term barrens management across this landscape. Local biologists have also been very proactive in partnering with the local forestry community to integrate sharp-tailed grouse habitat into existing forest management plans, and in networking with conservationists across the region to promote barrens management. Utilizing this network to implement the recently-approved state Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan will be critical to achieving our goal of long-term population persistence.

Greater Prairie Chickens

Once found in all Wisconsin counties, the range for prairie chickens has contracted in the state to such an extent that the species is now found only in central Wisconsin, predominantly in association with four public properties where large blocks of grassland remain. Annual surveys of males at traditional lek sites are used to index prairie chicken population size in Wisconsin. There was a 9% decrease (from 280 to 254) in the number of male prairie chickens observed on booming grounds in central Wisconsin in the spring of 2012 compared to the spring of 2011. The population in this area experienced a population bottleneck in the 1950s that resulted in a significant reduction in genetic diversity. To address this issue, 110 hens from an established population in Minnesota were translocated to Wisconsin from 2006-2009. The success of this translocation effort is currently being assessed from both genetic and demographic perspectives, but it is clear that many Minnesota hens survived and successfully fledged young, and that introgression resulting from the translocation has at a minimum offset the continued loss of diversity due to genetic drift.

Pressure to convert grassland acres to agricultural purposes (corn, potatoes, cranberries) imposes the most significant challenge to expanding the habitat base for prairie chickens in southwest Wisconsin. Current subpopulations on the four 'core' public properties are nearly completely isolated, and restoring gene flow among these population segments via habitat development on surrounding public lands will be important in ensuring the long-term persistence and genetic health of prairie chickens in Wisconsin.

Scott Walter

Wisconsin Greater Prairie-Chicken Conservation Genetics Meeting convened in Madison, Wisconsin, 31 January-1 February 2013.

From; Scott Hull, Scott.Hull@wisconsin.gov and Scott Walker. Scott.Walter@Wisconsin.gov WDNR

"In 2005, WDNR assembled a nationwide panel of conservation genetics experts to advise the agency and our partners on Greater Prairie-Chicken genetics issues. The panel ultimately recommended that we initiate a genetic rescue project by translocating Greater Prairie-Chicken hens from Minnesota to the Buena Vista Wildlife Area. A team of partners and WDNR initiated this project in 2006 and completed data collection in spring of 2011.

We are reconvening the genetics panel to review the genetic and demographic results of the translocation project and to offer guidance on future direction, specifically as it pertains to the conservation genetics of Greater Prairie-Chickens in Wisconsin. We expect to have draft translocation reports available in January."

Joint meeting of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society and the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society slated for April 26-27 2013 at Crex Meadows Wildlife Management Area at Grantsburg, Wisconsin.

From: Jodie Provost, MN DNR jodie.provost@state.mn.us

“MSGs and WSGs are making plans for a joint gathering of their flocks on Friday-Saturday, April 26-27, at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area at Grantsburg, WI. I attended the WI folks’ meeting on Dec. 6 to help get things rolling for a Friday technical session targeted at sharptail/brushland managers and researchers. It will include presentations and discussion from researchers in both states and perhaps Michigan, in the morning (9 am to noon), and a field tour in the afternoon (1–5 pm) to habitat and techniques on Crex and probably nearby Burnett Co lands that are part of the trade and blowdown clearcuts. An evening social, supper, and fundraiser will follow.

At this point, presentation ideas include Saint Croix State Park savanna restoration, WI translocation results and genetics, Crex Meadow research results, MN’s sharp-tailed habitat model, connectivity analysis, and research project, and WI’s sharp-tailed grouse management plan. We’d like the Friday agenda to be high quality and considered as training for our wildlife managers and researchers so they can attend on work time. Saturday’s agenda will be targeted at general membership, including early morning options of assisting with surveys, going on a tour or enjoying blinds, then reports from managers and membership meetings in the afternoon, with a wrap up about 3 pm.

It should be another great grouse get-together of information sharing, networking, discussions on how to make more and better brushland habitat, and sharing of hunting stories as well. Please spread the word and get the dates on your calendar. The *Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society* annual meeting is April 20, 2013 so it does not conflict with it.” **Watch the MSGS web site for details as the date approaches (<http://www.sharptails.org>).**

Call for Papers – 30th Prairie Grouse Technical Council

Abstracts for the 30th Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting are now being accepted. **The deadline for receipt of the abstracts is 1 August 2013.** Authors will be notified about the acceptance of their submissions by 1 September. Selected papers will be scheduled at 20-minute intervals. Presentations should be limited to 15 minutes to allow 5 minutes for questions and comments. Speakers will be notified of the day, time, and location of their presentations.

An example of the abstract format is given below. First, give title in caps, double space, then provide author(s) and their affiliation. Capitalize all authors' names and state abbreviations. In cases of two or more authors, place an asterisk after the name of the person presenting the paper; then double space again and start the abstract. Do not indent any part of the abstract. Abstracts, including authors and title lines, should be no more than 250 words (including title and authors).

Following the abstract, provide the following information:

- 1) E-mail address (if available) for corresponding author
- 2) Full address of corresponding author
- 3) Telephone number of corresponding author
- 4) Type of presentation (Paper or Poster)

5) Audio-visual needs (E.G. SLIDE PROJECTOR, POWER-POINT PROJECTOR, OVERHEAD PROJECTOR, VIDEOTAPE PLAYER, AUDIO TAPE PLAYER, etc.)

6) Any additional comments about the presentation.

Abstracts should include a statement of objectives, brief description of methods used, presentation of results, and a summary of conclusions/inferences drawn.

Sample abstract:

ALL PROBLEMS OF PRAIRIE GROUSE RESOLVED.

I. M. SMART*, Dept. Biological Sciences, Slapout Univ., Slapout, OK 73848 USA, N. O. ITALL and D. UNNIT, Oklahoma Conservation Dept., Foraker, OK 74000 USA.

Biologists have been plagued by problems of prairie grouse conservation since time immemorial. Our research has shown that the solution to all of these problems is ...

imsmart@slapout.edu

I. M. Smart

Department of Biological Sciences

Phillips Building

123 Highway 270

Slapout, OK 73848

580-555-1212

Please e-mail abstracts to: **Emily Hutchins** in MSWord or plain text format. If you do not have e-mail available, you may mail the abstract (in the same format) to:

Emily Hutchins

Private Lands Wildlife Specialist

MN Department of Natural Resources

31077 Hwy. 32 S

Mentor, MN 56736

(218) 637-2156

emily.hutchins@state.mn.us

Call for Hamerstrom Award Nominations

The Awards Committee is currently seeking nominations for the Hamerstrom Award for the 30th PGTC Conference. This award was established in honor of Fred and Fran Hamerstrom, pioneers of prairie grouse research and management. It will be awarded during the banquet held on Friday night, 11 October of this year's meeting. The award will consist of a plaque with the engraved name of the recipient. **The deadline for nominations is 1 September 2013** so be thinking about nominations now.

HAMERSTROM AWARD CRITERIA:

1. To recognize an individual(s) and organization(s) who have made significant contributions in prairie grouse research, management or other support programs which have enhanced the welfare of one or more species of prairie grouse in a particular state or region.
2. The contribution should be evidenced by a sustained effort over at least 10 years.
3. The contribution may be related to research, management activity, promotion of an integrated program, or some combination thereof. The relative importance given to these three categories of contributions is the prerogative of the Awards Committee but it should be based on how it has helped the overall welfare and survival of prairie grouse.

Selection Procedure:

1. The selection of award recipients will be made by the three-member Executive Board and two additional members appointed by the Chair.
2. Nominations will be accepted at large as well as from members of the Awards Committee.
3. Nominations will be submitted to the designated Awards Committee Chair at least one month before the biennial meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council.
4. A maximum of two individual awards and two organization awards may be presented at a biennial meeting. No awards will be given if the Awards Committee feels that no deserving individuals or organization are available at the time.
5. Nominations should include the following information:
 - A. Name, address, and phone number of nominee.
 - B. Biographic sketch of individual or brief history of an organization.
 - C. Overview of contributions indicating the nature of the contributions, duration, how it has contributed to the welfare of one or more species of prairie grouse, and the geographic area influenced by the contributions.

SEND NOMINATION MATERIALS TO:

Dan Svedarsky, Chair of 30th PGTC
Research Biologist, NW Research and Outreach Center
U of MN, Crookston, MN 56716
218-281-8129. dsvedars@crk.umn.edu

(PGTC FOLKS: LOOK OVER THE FOLLOWING OVER AND SEND ME ANY COMMENTS. THANKS, DAN SVEDARSKY)

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE NORTH AMERICAN GROUSE PARTNERSHIP AND THE PRAIRIE GROUSE TECHNICAL COUNCIL

This Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is made and entered into between the North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) and the Prairie Grouse Technical Council (PGTC).

I. PURPOSE

This MOA establishes a general framework of cooperation between NAGP and PGTC to enhance achievement of mutually recognized goals and objectives for the conservation and management of prairie grouse, i.e., Attwater's prairie-chicken, greater prairie-chickens, greater sage-grouse, Gunnison sage-grouse, lesser prairie-chickens and sharp-tailed grouse. This MOA formalizes the relationship between NAGP and PGTC to work together to advance prairie grouse management and conservation in its many applications across a broad spectrum of management contexts.

II. STATEMENT OF MUTUAL INTERESTS AND BENEFITS

In August 1999, thirteen concerned wildlife professionals formed The North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP), a new national and international advocacy group for grouse, in response to the clear conservation needs of several species. NAGP is a 501(C) 3, not-for-profit organization created to address the various challenges facing grouse species. North American grouse species, especially those occupying prairie and sage communities, have experienced serious population declines during the last 50 years. Most recently, petitions have been filed with the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service requesting that sage grouse and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse be placed on the threatened and endangered species list. Some data suggest that within 10 years most prairie grouse species could be endangered. Grouse habitat encompasses millions of acres of private and public land. These magnificent birds function as primary indicator species for the health of their particular habitats, and they are held in especially high esteem by sportspersons, birders, biologists and land managers. NAGP works to bring the plight of declining grouse species and their habitats to the attention of the public provides oversight for the health of grouse populations, implements solutions to the problems causing grouse declines and encourages public policies and management decisions that will enhance important habitats and grouse populations.

The Prairie Grouse Technical Council was formed in (1952) to provide a forum for biologists and conservationists to share knowledge, data and appreciation for prairie grouse, initially referred to as the "National Committee on the Prairie Chicken". This initial start was formed by the National Wildlife Federation. The committee was made up of 13 members from MN, MO, TX, NE, KS, ND, IA, WS, NM, SD, MI, OK, and IL. Most of the first members were top-level game division administrators rather than "field biologists." The committee met from 1952 to 1961. In 1961, the group was charged with developing an Organization and Objectives Charter, and the name was changed to Prairie Grouse Technical Council (PGTC). This group met and adopted this charter on September 21, 1961. The National Wildlife Federation continued to sponsor the group, but after 1961 it was mostly in name only. In 1967, the NWF suggested the PGTC should be a stand-alone organization, and since that time the PGTC has had no sponsorship or affiliation.

Thus, NAGP and the PGTC have a substantial potential for achieving mutually beneficial goals through collaboration and cooperation. Where appropriate, it is the desire of both parties to collaborate with each other on issues related to the management and conservation of prairie grouse.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. NAGP shall:

1. Provide PGTC with opportunities to offer perspectives and recommendations concerning the content and direction of articles in publications and communication outlets for the purpose of promoting and enhancing scientific professionalism;
2. Assist with the hosting of the PGTC website and associated information by securing a URL and establishing a continuous presence on the internet and provide access to PGTC to easily and regularly add content;
3. Ensure NAGP technical reviews address the scientific and management needs and concerns of the members of PGTC;
4. Encourage members of PGTC to contribute articles for NAGP publications and its other communication outlets;
5. Provide helpful and transparent fiscal services to PGTC to help them manage resources especially associated with the biennial official meeting of the PGTC.

B. PGTC shall:

1. Encourage participation in NAGP;
2. Collaborate with NAGP on technical reviews to insure that those reviews address the scientific and management concerns of PGTC;
3. Pay for reasonable and agreeable costs associated with establishing and maintaining a website;
4. Collaborate with NAGP to facilitate selected independent expert reviews of draft plans, reports, policies, and other documents that may benefit from the input of wildlife professionals outside of PGTC;
5. Provide any funds to the PGTC subaccount of NAGP in a fiscally sound manner;
6. Encourage PGTC members to participate in activities considered mutually beneficial to both PGTC and NAGP such as: attending NAGP conferences and meetings, and serving in leadership positions within NAGP to enhance their resource management capabilities and advance the state of knowledge of grouse management and conservation.

C. NAGP and PGTC jointly agree to:

1. Designate an individual who is a member of both organizations to be the formal representative and serve as liaison between the two organizations. This person can be nominated by either NAGP or the PGTC, and is appointed jointly by the presidents of the two groups. This person shall liaise with the executive managers/directors of the two organizations and others as identified;
2. Help publicize meetings, publications and other items of interest to the members of both organizations;
3. Encourage dual membership and active participation in the two organizations, including committee assignments, special assignments, and other mutually advantageous activities;
4. PGTC will consider and offer professional judgment and advice on questions relating to prairie grouse populations and habitats submitted to it by NAGP. NAGP will consider and offer professional judgment and advice on question of grouse management and conservation submitted to it by the PGTC;
5. Cooperate in the development of conferences, scientific publications, technical workshops, continuing education courses, and other education and communication strategies to enhance wildlife health and management;
6. NAGP and the PGTC shall designate representatives to serve as coordinators for any other specific activities and projects initiated pursuant to this MOA;
7. NAGP and the PGTC shall, upon execution of this MOA, cooperate fully, to the extent possible, with each other conducting any and all activities and projects initiated pursuant to this MOA. Each party shall ensure that the other party is fully informed, in a timely fashion, as to the nature and scope of any and all meetings and materials relevant to this agreement, and the other party receives full recognition for their involvement;
8. Collaborate on public information announcements/releases that reference this MOA.

IV. IT IS MUTUALLY AGREED AND UNDERSTOOD BY AND BETWEEN NAGP AND PGTC THAT:

- A. This MOA, or supplements hereto, in no way restricts NAGP or the PGTC from participating with other private or public agencies, organization, and individuals or from accepting contributions and/or gifts for research, communications, education or other purposes relating to prairie grouse conservation and/or management;
- B. No part of this MOA or supplements hereto shall entitle NAGP or the PGTC to any share or interest in each other's activities other than that provided for explicitly by mutual agreement;
- C. Nothing in this MOA shall be construed as giving either party any type of exclusive arrangement with the other to the exclusion or detriment of other interested groups or organizations;

- D. This MOA may be revised as necessary by the issuance of a written amendment, consented to, signed, and dated by both parties;

- E. This MOA may be canceled by either party with 60 days written notice to the other party. This agreement shall expire on December 31, 2018 unless mutually agreed upon by a jointly signed and dated letter that it should continue for another similar duration;

- F. During the performance of activities and projects initiated pursuant to this MOA, any supplements hereto, or any separate agreements entered into pursuant to the authority of this MOA, the parties shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, gender, age, physical handicap, or national origin.

V. EFFECTIVE DATES:

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this MOA as of the last written date below.

Steven P. Riley, President, North American Grouse Partnership Date

Dan Svedarsky, Chairman, Prairie Grouse Technical Council Date

A piece of our history contributed from Mike Schroeder:

Meeting number	Month	Year	Location
1	September	1957	Grand Island, Nebraska
2	March	1959	Emporia, Kansas
3	September	1960	Stevens Point, Wisconsin
4	September	1961	Pierre, South Dakota
5	September	1963	Nevada, Missouri
6	September	1965	Warroad, Minnesota
7	September	1967	Effingham, Illinois
8	September	1969	Woodward, Oklahoma
9	September	1971	Dickinson, North Dakota
10	September	1973	Lamar, Colorado
11	September	1975	Victoria, Texas
12	September	1977	Pierre, South Dakota
13	September	1979	Wisconsin Rapids, WI
14	September	1981	Halsey, Nebraska
15	September	1983	Emporia, Kansas
16	September	1985	Sedalia, Missouri
17	September	1987	Crookston, Minnesota
18	September	1989	Escanaba, Michigan

19	September	1991	Billings, Montana
20	July	1993	Fort Collins, Colorado
21	August	1995	Medora, North Dakota
22	February	1998	College Station, Texas
23	September	1999	Gimli, Manitoba
24	September	2001	Woodward, Oklahoma
25	September	2003	Siren, Wisconsin
26	September	2005	Valentine, Nebraska
27	October	2007	Chamberlain, South Dakota
28	October	2009	Portales, New Mexico
29	September	2011	Hays, Kansas
30	October	2013	Crookston, MN

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