

# **MN/WI/MI Collaboration on Brushland/Barrens Habitat Conservation**

Oct. 20, 2014 Conference Call Notes

**PURPOSE:** Scope out an ecosystem, multi-state approach to conserve brushland/barrens habitats and benefit sharp-tailed grouse and other wildlife for which they serve as “ambassadors”.

## **ATTENDEES:**

**MN DNR** - Charlotte Roy (Grouse Project Leader), Ted Dick (Forest Game Bird Coordinator), Jodie Provost (Private Land Habitat Coordinator on the Forest Habitat Team)

**WI DNR** - Bob Hanson (Northwest Sands Biologist), Scott Walter (Upland Wildlife Ecologist & Farm Bill Coordinator)

**MI DNR** – Dave Luukkonen (research biologist and U of MI adjunct professor), Mike Parker (Private Land Program Coordinator)

## **AGENDA:**

**Background** – This discussion stemmed from concern for sharp-tailed grouse populations in e-c MN, WI and MI and a resulting effort to encourage the ABC to include habitat mgt. for sharp-tailed grouse in their recent RCPP proposal to NRCS. Scott suggested we keep an RCPP pre-proposal for “barrens/STGR/KIWA/GWWA habitat enhancements” in mind for next time they are solicited. Bob and Jodie like the idea. Bob suggested we draft a concept plan for a multi-state approach to be shovel ready, so a conf. call of interested persons was convened.

## **Where we’re at** –

**MN** – NW MN sharptail are faring well, but E-c MN sharptail appear to be declining based on the drop in leks. A landscape genetic study recently got underway. A nesting and brood rearing habitat and survival study is in its second of three years.

**WI** - Sharptail population has declined and their range contracted for last decades. Decent populations remain in only a couple places, with variability in how they are faring. Focus is on NW Sands to reconnect populations, including mgt. in large clear cut areas on public working forests adjacent to areas occupied by sharptail. Their impaired genetics are not tied to fitness.

**MI** – Sharptail exist in the UP only, with the largest population in the far east end where a season was re-opened a couple years ago. The harvest area may be expanded. They occur on mostly private land and ag areas with young aspen and shrubland in a forest matrix with openings, jack pine and dry soils that were burned in the past. DNR has not have a good handle on the rest of the MI population.

Dave is interested in this effort due to development of a model for sharptail mgt. in MI that will inform activities such as harvest, habitat mgt. and possible translocation. A research project has been underway about two years by Heather Porter. A fellow in Ontario is interested in genetics. Sharptail samples from MI the 1940s are available to examine.

**Where we want to go / our vision** – Connected brushlands/barrens habitats and sustainable sharptail populations.

**MN** – Want sufficient, quality, connected habitat and sustainable populations of sharptail and other brushland wildlife, to meet DNR’s harvest goals for hunters, and other recreationalists. MN is working on a SWAP revision that could be useful – priority habitat areas (PHA) are being identified.

**WI** - Easy to envision connecting MN and WI habitat, but not WI and MI. Focus on connecting and enhancing NW Sands habitat, implementation of the plan and research. Sharing information on sharptail habitat types and mgt. techniques would be helpful. MI is embarking on a SWAP revision too, as well as a ten-year plan for the feds for P-R funds.

**MI** - Western MI has limited sharptail habitat. Greater potential exists to connect MI’s UP and Ontario habitats. Would be useful to include other species that will also benefit from a collaborative, brushland/barrens project(s). Want to work on habitat more in w. MI, reconnecting and possible sharptail reintroduction. MI has had good luck partnering by pulling in other species and on state wildlife grants with other states. We need to keep ABC in the loop, as well as the Karner Blue Butterfly folks and others.

**How to get there / Next steps -**

1. **Find effective method to share and store information** - share point website (are they public?) or list serve (e-mail group)? Or other?
  - **Jodie** - ask NAGP if they can assist. (Done. Steve Riley created an e-mail group and website for Lakes State prairie grouse enthusiasts on 11/12 & 11/13.)
2. **Share information on our state’s habitats and species of interest, current plans, research findings, maps, shapefiles, etc. – All**
  - **Bob** - E-mail [WI DNR’s sharptail web page](#) with plans. (Done 10/27)
  - **Mike** - Ask AI to share MI info.
  - **Charlotte** - Share MN DNR info and any related plans. Send info on the [2007 Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Joint Venture, land bird conservation plan](#) (Done 10/27 & 10/31) - includes much of same region and is under revision by a [committee](#). We should tap into planning efforts like it. It identifies priority species, some of which use brushlands/barrens. Sharptail are not a priority species but we could suggest it.
3. **Formalize collaboration between states (and provinces?)**
  - **Scott** - draft a statement of our common goal, species and habitats of interest, and how it our collaboration will serve our states’ goals and our common, higher level goal.
4. **Draft a skeleton plan** for use in an RCPP pre-proposal and other opportunities that arise.
  - **Jodie** – begin rough draft for review once enough info is shared amongst the group.