

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

by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

November 18, 2022



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



**This plan is dedicated to Bill Berg and all steadfast Firebird Fans** making a difference for the birds and their habitats. Bill is a founder of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society and has been a stalwart researcher, manager, and conservation voice for sharp-tailed grouse and their habitats.

**Special Thanks** to all partners and individuals who provided input, and Ross Hier for art work.

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**MISSION** – The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) is dedicated to the management and restoration of sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota for hunters and non-hunters.

**VISION** – Wide open spaces of abundant, high-quality grassland and shrubland habitats (ecosystems) support viable populations of sharp-tailed grouse, the “Firebird,” in Minnesota. These populations serve as flagship and umbrella species, indicators of ecosystem health, and provide opportunity for regulated harvest and viewing. Their habitats support a diversity of plants and wildlife, clean water, carbon sequestration, biomass, space to recreate, and other benefits to communities.

**PLAN PURPOSE** - The purpose of this plan is to serve as a communication tool with strategies for implementation over the next 10 years to assure viable sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) populations in Minnesota into the future. The strategies will guide MSGS and all organizations and individuals that desire to positively influence sharp-tailed grouse habitats, populations, and outreach, especially within the identified core habitat areas and corridors. This plan will serve as a working document, use the best available science and management practices, and be adapted as needed. It does not include comprehensive history and biology of sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota. Those topics are available in other resources (see Literature Cited and Related References).

**NEED FOR A PLAN** –When Native Americans performed their “circle dance” that originated from prairie grouse behavior, and pioneers waded through a sea of grasslands and shrublands feeding themselves on prairie grouse, neither could have imagined the day that so few grouse would remain. Native Americans called sharp-tailed grouse the “Firebird” (*pheta silo* in Dakota and *aagask* in Ojibwe) due to their dependence on habitats created and maintained by fire. They are a native, integral part of our natural and cultural heritages, biodiversity, and outdoor recreation.

Sharp-tailed grouse serve as charismatic ambassadors or “flagship” species for their required, expansive grassland and shrubland habitats (ecosystems), from prairie to open bog, leading the way for conservation of these habitats. As a species with large home ranges and need for a mix of nesting, brood-rearing, and winter habitats within a two to three-mile radius of a lek (dancing ground), they also serve as an “umbrella” and “indicator” species - i.e., when their populations thrive, a wide breadth of other plant and animal species also thrive (Appendix 1), indicating a healthy ecosystem.

Minnesota must make it a priority to conserve wide open spaces for its prairie grouse if they are to survive and thrive into the future. Due to habitat loss and other stressors, concern exists over their future in the Midwest and upper Great Plains. Sharp-tailed grouse occupy a fraction of their historical range in Minnesota. Populations declined 53-70% in Minnesota between 1980-1993 (Berg 1990, Dickson 1993). They are noted as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN, Appendix 1) in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources’ (DNR) Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025 (DNR 2016) and on Audubon Minnesota’s Action List.

A state-wide management plan for sharp-tailed grouse is necessary to serve as a communication tool and guide to increase management efficiency and effectiveness amongst partners and across land ownerships for the purpose of assuring viable populations (i.e., self-supporting with enough numbers and genetic diversity to ensure that the species will not become extirpated). DNR Wildlife developed brushland and sharp-tailed grouse plans in 1990 that were approved at the Division level. However, they were not approved at the Department level.

Conservation of grassland and shrubland habitats (ecosystems) is urgently needed on a broad scale for multiple reasons. A recent study of North American bird populations from 1970 – 2017 indicated a net loss of 2.9 billion birds, or 29% of abundance, with the grassland biome breeding bird group having the largest change at -53% (Rosenberg et. al. 2019). In Minnesota, grasslands and shrublands are used by 301 and 256 terrestrial wildlife species, respectively (DNR 2002). Fifty-three of these species are noted as SGCN in Minnesota’s Wildlife Action Plan, with 19 of them either listed as state or federally threatened or endangered, or up for listing consideration (Appendix 1).



In the face of climate change, carbon sequestration by a diversity of habitats, including grasslands and shrublands, is a critical part of the solution. Carbon stored in grasslands is mostly below ground making them less vulnerable and more resilient carbon stores than forests, especially in the face of increasing wildfires from rising temperatures and more drought (Gebhart et al. 1994, Janowiak 2017, Yongfei Bai et al. 2022, Kerlin 2018, Rosen 2022). When sufficient in quantity, quality, and connectivity, grasslands and shrublands will also help plant and animal communities spatially shift to adapt to climate change.

Great concern and management urgency have arisen from the alarming population decline in east-central Minnesota (Map 1) over the last 20 years. This decline led to close of the hunting season in 2021. Active leks there dropped from 67 in 2004 to 18 in 2021. Males per lek dropped from a high of 10.4 in 2008 to 7.3 males per lek in 2021. This decline is from loss of habitat quantity and/or quality, not inadequate genetic diversity. However, immediate restoration and expansion of primary habitat are needed to maintain genetic diversity of the declining population (Roy and Gregory 2019). Enhancing habitat connectivity to sharp-tailed grouse populations in the Northwest Sands of Wisconsin is important to sustenance of both states' populations.

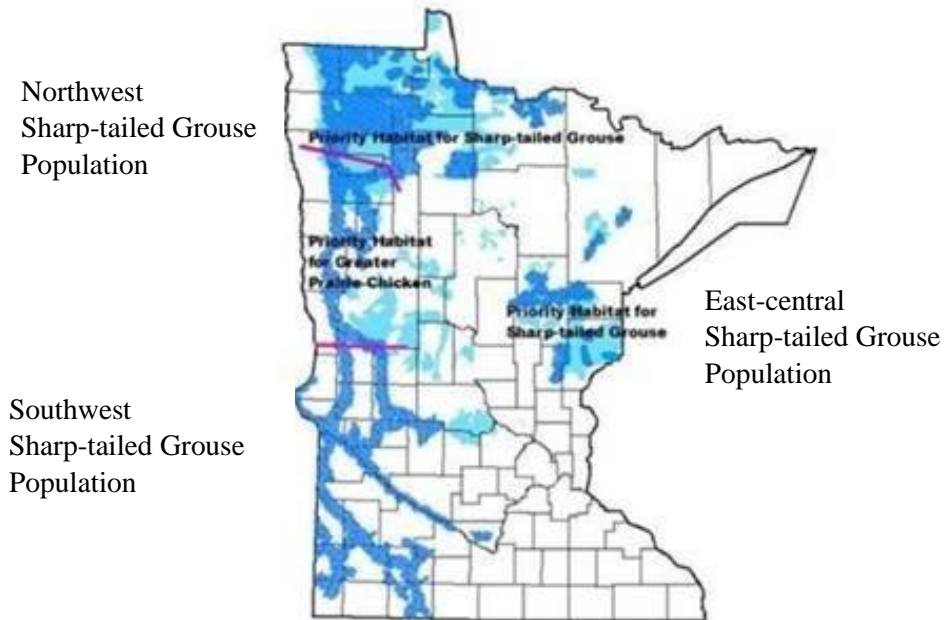
In east-central Minnesota, Pheasants Forever (PF) Farm Bill Biologists and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) has been instrumental in supporting over 8,300 acres of grassland and shrubland habitat enhancement on private land since 2017. Practices include brushland mowing, delayed haying, and prescribed burning. The Board of Water and Soil Resource's (BWSR) Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) program has protected about 100 acres of hay or pasture land in Aitkin County. The amount of USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres has not been significant in providing set-aside habitat on private land in the east-central range (1,252 acres in 2007 in Aitkin, Carlton, Kanabec and Pine Counties).

The northwest Minnesota population is relatively stable at this time but should be monitored and not taken for granted. Large prairie and aspen parkland Wildlife Management Areas (WMA), National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) lands, along with private hay lands, pastures, and CRP lands provide habitat. CRP has provided a substantial amount of grassland habitat on private lands but significantly declined in recent years causing concern. In six counties of northwest Minnesota (Kittson, Marshall, Pennington, Polk, Red Lake and Roseau), CRP acres enrolled in 2020 were 56% less than the high in 2007.

In southwest Minnesota, untapped potential for sharp-tailed grouse management exists, especially in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan core areas and corridors. These areas should be assessed and considered for more focused management. MSGS initiated a citizen-science survey in spring 2022. Despite poor weather conditions, one lek with 12 birds was verified in Yellow Medicine County and other sightings were reported. The survey may continue in spring 2023. Enhancing habitat connectivity to sharp-tailed grouse populations in North Dakota and South Dakota may be prudent to long-term population viability in the Midwest and Upper Great Plains.



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



Dark blue represents core habitat areas and corridors (or primary habitat) that were identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan for western Minnesota and by DNR Wildlife Managers in northcentral, northeast and east-central Minnesota based on lek locations and potential for habitat management. Light blue represents other potential habitat (priority open landscapes) identified in DNR Section Forest Resource Management Planning (or secondary habitat). The area in northwest Minnesota between the pink lines is priority habitat for greater prairie-chicken. This map was created for the interstate work group which is drafting range-wide plans for the plains and prairie sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chicken. The project is endorsed by the Midwest and Western Associations of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Digital shapefiles are available upon request.

## **Threats**

The primary threat to sharp-tailed grouse populations in Minnesota has been and continues to be habitat loss and degradation from succession, fragmentation, and conversion. The expansive open landscape habitats required by sharp-tailed grouse were once a conspicuous feature of Minnesota. Based on Marschner's pre-settlement vegetation map (Marschner 1974), 11.3 million acres or over 1/3 of the state's northern and central forest and transition region was vegetated with brushy prairie, oak openings and barrens, jack pine barrens and openings, conifer bogs and swamps, and open muskeg (MN DNR 2002). Sharp-tailed grouse habitats were widely distributed. During settlement, small scale farming and logging created additional suitable habitat, as well as large wildfires like the Hinckley Fire of 1894 and Cloquet Fire of 1918. Sharp-tailed grouse populations peaked in the 1940s from this impact. Based on 1990's land use and cover information (Loesch and Orning 1999), only 1.3 million acres (4%) of this same region of Minnesota remained in brushland.

Loss and degradation of the expansive, open habitats required by sharp-tailed grouse have been driven by suppression of wildfire and lack of sufficient prescribed burning and thus encroachment of woody vegetation and loss of native plant diversity; loss of small-scale farms and livestock producers and thus loss of small grains, pastures and hay lands; tree planting, including for energy and carbon sequestration initiatives; spread of invasive plants resulting in additional loss of native plant diversity; conversion of grasslands to cropland and loss of CRP acres in northwest Minnesota; and an increase in wetland mitigation in northeast Minnesota resulting in forestation and flooding of habitat. Climate change is a significant, growing factor negatively affecting habitat - heavy rain events flood nests and harm broods; high temperatures and humidity may cause nesting hens to overheat when cover is inadequate; and excessively wet ground conditions prevent dry or frozen ground in seasonal and temporary wetlands (a predominance of sharp-tailed grouse habitat on public lands) thus hindering mechanical treatment of brush, firebreak preparation, and prescribed burning.

Other threats that are known to stress or possibly stress sharp-tailed grouse populations in Minnesota include impacts from chemical pesticide use on agricultural seeds (such as neonicotinoids, Roy et al. 2017) and fields, roadsides, powerline corridors, and forests; declining insect populations; diseases, especially in small, isolated populations (such as West Nile Virus); disturbance from visitors at lek viewing blinds, especially where populations are threatened; impacts from structures such as wind turbines and solar fields; and changing predator populations. Some of these threats warrant further investigation to learn how to prevent, mitigate, or adapt to them. Finally, a patchwork of land ownerships and administrations with varying goals and policies poses a challenge to managing large habitat complexes, and a continuing long-term decline in small game/grouse hunter numbers raises concern about declining support.

### **Opportunities**

The good news is that opportunity abounds for landowners and organizations seeking to sustain and recover habitat and sharp-tailed grouse populations. Increasing interest and incentives for land practices such as cover crops, rotational and conservation grazing, delayed haying, pollinator habitat, buffer strips, and use of “precision agriculture and conservation” can provide more and better habitat. Sharp-tailed grouse can pioneer to new suitable habitats when source populations and adequate connecting habitat exist in proximity. This behavior has been observed in southwest Minnesota grasslands and northeast Minnesota spruce clear cuts.

Within Minnesota, funding for habitat projects on protected lands is available through the Outdoor Heritage Fund via the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and DNR’s Conservation Partners Legacy. BWSR administers RIM to protect lands. PF and partners support the Farm Bill Assistance Program and Farm Bill Biologists that assist private landowners. Native American communities highly value and support natural resources management. Grants supporting research are available from the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund via the Legislative Citizens-Committee on Minnesota Resources. DNR’s Native Prairie Bank and Native Prairie Tax Exemption programs, and Minnesota Land Trust protect native prairies. Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) offer technical and financial support and equipment.

At the federal level, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administer Farm Bill programs such as CRP and EQIP that positively affect private

land habitat. The U.S. Department of the Interior has the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife program to assist landowners. Potential federal programs that could provide significant funding for habitat and wildlife conservation that have been introduced in Congress or are still evolving, include "Recovering America's Wildlife Act", "America the Beautiful" (or "30% by 2030"), and the "North American Grassland Conservation Act".

Outreach opportunities also flourish through lek viewing blinds, volunteer habitat days and other events, citizen science projects, an array of technology and social media options such as the DNR Window on Wildlife camera, and more. Opportunity also lies in society's growing interest in non-consumptive activities such as wildlife watching, hiking, and camping. Seizing that interest to engage people and increase understanding and support is prudent. Minnesota has many conservation groups (as evidenced in Appendix 3), providing endless collaboration and cross-pollination prospects on all the above opportunities, hindered only by lack of imagination or organized people power. A more suitable, charismatic species than sharp-tailed grouse does not exist to inspire "saving wide open spaces."



## **SHARP-TAILED GROUSE MANAGEMENT**

**1. Habitat Goal** – Maintain and expand abundant, high-quality grassland and shrubland habitats (ecosystems) within core habitat areas and corridors (Map 1) to save wide open spaces that support viable populations of sharp-tailed grouse. Four key limiting habitat factors must be addressed: sufficient large complexes, connectivity, upland nesting cover, and use of prescribed fire.

### **Strategies:**

**On Public and Private Lands** –Sharp-tailed grouse must be managed across land ownerships to achieve large habitat complexes and connectivity.

- 1a. Support and collaborate on habitat projects across property lines to maximize project size, habitat complex size and connectivity by:
  - Establishing habitat complexes of at least 10,000 acres (Temple 1992) within core habitat areas (Map 1). Development of habitat complexes of 50,000 acres is optimal in the long-term (Houts et al. 2022). Habitat complexes are located in ecologically appropriate landscapes (i.e., adapted to dynamic processes and historically composed of early successional habitats).

- Establishing blocks of habitat or “stepping stones” at least 1,280 acres in size, and preferably 2,560 acres (Berg 1999), that are 3 - 6 miles apart within corridors (Wisconsin DNR 2013, Minnesota DNR 2011).
- Using “Defend the Core, Grow the Core” management to prioritize, i.e., remaining expansive grassland and shrubland complexes, especially those with leks, will be defended foremost and similar habitats restored secondarily to grow larger complexes.
- Engaging in landscape planning efforts and teams in Minnesota, such as DNR’s Section Forest Resource Management Planning, NWR planning, Minnesota Forest Resource Council’s (MFRC) Landscape Program, Minnesota Forest Habitat Collaborative in the forest and transition regions, Local Technical Teams in the parkland and prairie regions, USDA State Technical Committee, Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, NRCS/SWCD Local Work Groups, and Native American communities’ natural resource programs.
- Engaging in planning efforts and projects across states/provinces, such as the interstate work group’s range-wide plans for plains and prairie sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chicken (Houts et al. 2022).
- Securing and utilizing funds such as Outdoor Heritage Funds (OHF).
- Advocating for dedicated funding through DNR for sharp-tailed grouse management (shrublands), like that for ducks (wetlands) and pheasants (grassland) via habitat stamps, with distribution of funds guided by this plan and its strategies.

1b. Maintain and create additional, upland grass and shrub habitats within core habitat areas and corridors, especially within their complexes and “stepping stones”, by:

- Designing and implementing timber harvests with large harvest units, shorter rotations, and no or very few reserves and snags, especially when adjacent to or near existing grassland or shrubland.
- Using the “rolling forest” harvest method around core grassland/shrubland areas where feasible.
- Discouraging establishment of rows and blocks of trees. Instead encourage perennial grass, forb, and shrub vegetation.

1c. Increase the amount of habitat treated with prescribed burning within core habitat areas and corridors, especially within their complexes and “stepping stones”, by:

- Conducting more burns in summer and fall and maximizing size of burn units.
- Collaborating within and across agencies and partners to secure necessary burn training, crews, and equipment.
- Engaging in the Minnesota Prescribed Fire Council to assist fire practitioners, policymakers, regulators, and citizens with issues surrounding prescribed fire use.

1d. Encourage the use of management techniques that are beyond the norm (i.e., prescribed burning in spring and mechanical brush treatment in winter) within core habitat areas and corridors, especially within their complexes and “stepping stones”, to increase tools in the toolbox and plant diversity by supporting:

- Prescribed burning and mowing during summer and fall (Roy et al. 2020),
- Conservation haying and grazing,
- Seeding to increase native plant diversity, and
- Selective herbicide treatments to control invasive plants and woody vegetation.



On Public Lands - Sharp-tailed grouse habitat must be managed on expansive, designated, public/protected grassland and shrublands to provide core habitat areas/strongholds less susceptible to changing land use and source populations to re-populate recovered habitat when opportunity arises, such as increase in CRP acres.

1e. Support management of public/protected grasslands and shrublands by:

- Advocating for sufficient prescribed fire funding for training, fire staff, and equipment.
- Facilitating habitat enhancement and restoration projects through funding and people power.
- Supporting forest management and policy that maximizes size of habitat complexes, such as harvest units, shorter rotations, and no or very few reserves and snags.
- Intensively managing habitat within one to two “Intensive Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Areas” (ISGMA) in east-central Minnesota for five years, then selecting new ISGMAs for the next five years, etc. to create large scale, dynamic disturbance.

1f. Support land protection and designation of public/protected lands for management of expansive, grassland and shrubland ecosystems by:

- Engaging in land and habitat management planning by land administrators, such as DNR, USFWS, and Counties, to designate WMAs, Waterfowl Production Areas, NWRs, and county lands for management.
- Advocating for land protection and “rounding out” of public/protected lands to improve access, increase management efficiency and effectiveness (such as for prescribed burns), and build upon large, secure habitat blocks.

1g. Secure funding for the above projects through OHF, CPL or other grants, either alone or with partners. Current and potential partners include PF, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society (MPCS), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), American Bird Conservancy (ABC), the North American Grouse Partnership, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, and more.

1h. Encourage agencies such as DNR and USFWS to make it a priority to budget for and allocate internal funds specifically targeted at grassland and shrubland management projects in core habitat areas and corridors, with highest priority on ISGMAs and “defending the core.”

On Private Lands - Sharp-tailed grouse must be managed on private lands to achieve sufficiently large, grassland and shrubland habitat complexes and connectivity. Private lands often provide much needed upland habitat for leks and nesting on hay lands and pastures.

1i. Support the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership which funds PF Farm Bill Biologists within sharp-tailed grouse range.

- Sustain the three positions out of Aitkin, Hinckley, and Thief River Falls.
- Seek additional biologists to fill staffing gaps, such as in Karlstad, Baudette, and Virginia.

1j. Promote and use federal and state conservation programs to conserve habitat within core habitat areas and corridors. Programs available in Minnesota include CRP, EQIP, Working Land for Wildlife (WLFW), Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Agricultural Conservation Enhancement Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and RIM.

- Capitalize on NRCS’s recent designation of sharp-tailed grouse as a focus species for the EQIP Bird Pool.
  - Advocate for the State Grassland Priority Zone (used in State CRP and Grasslands CRP ranking factors) and CRP State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) in Minnesota to include sharp-tailed grouse core habitat areas, especially in northwest Minnesota.
  - Utilize the new WLFW Northern Bobwhite Grasslands and Savannas project which includes western and southern Minnesota.
  - Collaborate with the Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association.
- 1k. Facilitate prescribed burning by private landowners through training, equipment loans, burn contractor lists, funding, support for formation of prescribed burn associations, and other resources.
- 1l. Support working lands, such as pastures and hay lands, and incentives to rotationally graze and delay hay until after the prime nesting season (August 1). The Audubon Conservation Ranching initiative that will begin certifying ranches in Minnesota in 2023 can be one key tool.
- 1m. Encourage enhancement of other agricultural lands with cover crops, small grain food plots, and establishment of perennial grass and forb cover where soils are not productive or erodible.



**2. Population Goal** - Maintain and grow viable sharp-tailed grouse populations within core habitat areas, using them as flagship, umbrella, and indicator species. Specifically, by 2032, increase the east-central Minnesota population and range to 2012 levels, and increase the northwest population by 10% from the 2022 population level.

**Strategies:**

- 2a. Strongly support continued annual lek surveys throughout sharp-tailed grouse range. They are the most effective approach to monitoring population trends, habitat use, and success toward goals.
- 2b. Support harvest of sharp-tailed grouse populations when feasible to maintain our hunting heritage, support from hunters, and funding toward sharp-tailed grouse management.
- 2c. Advocate for re-opening the east-central hunting season via a lottery system when the population attains a level similar to 2010-2012 for at least three years (i.e., the number of leks with at least two males exceed 50 and average males per lek is greater than 7). Support use of a lottery system for at least the first five years to closely monitor harvest and population recovery.
- 2d. Encourage DNR to summarize hunter harvest by northwest and east-central sharp-tailed grouse range rather than statewide to present a more accurate representation of hunter harvest.

- 2e. Encourage DNR to set population triggers for adjusting harvest from a regular season to a lottery or closed season if a population declines. These triggers would prevent delayed regulatory management action and potential harm from hunting mortality becoming additive.
- 2f. Expand surveys to potential habitat, such as in southwest Minnesota, to assess capacity for population growth and benefit of targeted habitat projects.
- 2g. Resist translocation of sharp-tailed grouse to areas of low population to increase population numbers (such as east-central Minnesota) or genetically rescue a population unless sufficient quality habitat exists at the release area (Fandel and Hull 2011; Roy and Gregory 2019; Mussman et al. 2017). Genetic diversity in east-central Minnesota was adequate when assessed indicating that lack of quality habitat is the problem.



**3. Outreach Goal** - Raise public awareness, understanding, and support for grassland, shrubland, and sharp-tailed grouse conservation across a diverse audience, especially those known to value outdoor recreation, biodiversity, clean water, carbon sequestration, and benefits to local communities. Maintain and cultivate partnerships to facilitate the above habitat and population goals.

**Strategies:**

- 3a. Share this plan to communicate the need, core habitat areas and corridors, and strategies with partners and landowners via MSGS’s social media, newsletter, and events, and partner outlets.
  - Key partners to ensure are aware and understand the plan include DNR’s Fish and Wildlife, Ecological and Water Resources, Parks and Trails, and Forestry Divisions, USFWS, NRCS, SWCDs, PF, MPCS, TNC, American Bird Conservancy, County Land Departments, Tribal Nations, MFRC, and Ducks Unlimited.
  - It is especially critical that organizations facilitating tree planting, such as DNR Forestry’s Cooperative Forest Management Unit, SWCDs, and TNC, are aware and encouraged to help meet habitat goals for grassland and shrubland landscapes.
- 3b. Increase access to prescribed burn training, equipment, contractors, funding, and other resources for landowners.

- 3c. Encourage sharp-tailed grouse viewing blinds where populations are stable or increasing to connect and inspire the public with these amazing birds, their habitats and other wildlife (Roy and Coy 2021).
- 3d. Inform the public and stakeholders about importance of the Legacy Amendment passed in 2008, the resulting OHF and habitat projects, and need to support renewal of the Legacy Amendment when its 25-year span is done.
- 3e. Support continued use and promotion of the DNR “Window on Wildlife” camera and other cameras on sharp-tailed grouse leks, and create school curriculum around them.
- 3f. Continue MSGS’s bi-annual Spring Flings and annual Volunteer Brush Cut Habitat Days for grouse enthusiasts.
- 3g. Support access to, walking trails at, and informational signage in expansive grassland and shrubland habitats on public lands.
- 3h. Collaborate with ranchers and grazing organizations to enhance grazing lands for sharp-tailed grouse and promote their products.
- 3i. Update sharp-tailed grouse habitat management pamphlets, prescribed burn pamphlets, and other related materials with the best science. Distribute through key in-person outlets and social media.
- 3j. Share the latest habitat and sharp-tailed grouse related news via the MSGS newsletter and social media, and partner outlets such as newspapers, magazines, social media, television, videos, and podcasts.
- 3k. Collaborate with conservation partners that have aligning missions, especially for expansive, open, upland habitats. These partners include the 30 listed below. Their letters of endorsement and gratitude can be found in Appendix III. MSGS cannot and should not meet its mission alone. We are better together.



**30 PLAN SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS** (See 29 Letters in Appendix III)

American Bird Conservancy  
American Fisheries Society – Minnesota Chapter  
Audubon Minnesota  
Backcountry Hunters and Anglers – Minnesota Chapter  
Central Lakes College Natural Resource Program  
Conservation Minnesota  
Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa  
Izaak Walton League – W. J. McCabe Chapter  
Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Association  
Minnesota Conservation Federation (state affiliate of National Wildlife Federation)  
Minnesota Deer Hunters Association  
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Division of Fish and Wildlife  
Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association  
Minnesota Land Trust  
Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society  
Monarch Joint Venture  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
North American Grouse Partnership  
Pheasants Forever  
Red Lake Nation Department of Natural Resources  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
Sharptails Plus Foundation, Inc.  
Sierra Club – North Star Chapter  
Society of American Foresters – Minnesota Chapter  
Sustainable Farming Association  
Teddy Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
The Nature Conservancy  
The Wildlife Society – Minnesota Chapter  
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society



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**APPENDIX 1. SPECIES IN GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED FROM MINNESOTA WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN 2015-2025 ASSOCIATED WITH SHARP-TAILED GROUSE HABITATS**

<b>Species</b>	<b>State Threatened (T) or Endangered (E)</b>	<b>Federally Listed as T or E or on USFWS 7 Year Plan List (X) To Be Determined</b>
<b>Amphibians</b>		
Great Plains Toad		
<b>Bees</b>		
Rusty-patched Bumble Bee		E
Yellow-banded Bumble Bee		X
<b>Birds</b>		
Golden-winged Warbler		X
American Woodcock		
Bobolink		
Common Nighthawk		
Eastern Meadowlark		
Western Meadowlark		
Eastern Whip-poor-will		
Greater Prairie-Chicken		
Sharp-tailed Grouse		
Grasshopper Sparrow		
Red-headed Woodpecker		
Upland Sandpiper		
Short-eared Owl		
Loggerhead Shrike	E	
Burrowing Owl	E	
Northern Harrier		
Yellow Rail		
American Kestrel		
Marbled Godwit		
Eastern Towhee		
Dickcissel		
Field Sparrow		
Brown Thrasher		
Yellow-headed Blackbird		
Chestnut-collared Longspur	E	
LeConte's Sparrow		

<b>Species Continued</b>	<b>State Threatened (T) or Endangered (E)</b>	<b>Federally Listed as T or E or on USFWS 7 Year Plan List (X) To Be Determined</b>
Wilson's Phalarope	T	
Henslow's Sparrow	E	
Baird's Sparrow	E	
Sedge Wren		
<b>Butterflies</b>		
Dakota Skipper	E	T
Poweshiek Skipperling	E	E
Karner Blue Butterfly	E	E (extirpated)
Monarch Butterfly		X
Regal Fritillary Butterfly		X
<b>Fish</b>		
Topeka Shiner		E
<b>Mammals</b>		
Eastern Spotted Skunk	T	X
Franklin's ground squirrel		
Richardson's Ground Squirrel		
Plains Pocket Mouse		X
White-tailed Jackrabbit		X
Least Weasel		
American Badger		
Elk		
<b>Reptiles</b>		
Blanding's Turtle	T	X
Plains Hog-nosed Snake		
Eastern Hog-nosed Snake		
Gopher Snake		
Smooth Green Snake		
Common Five-Lined skink		



## **APPENDIX 2. BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR SITE-LEVEL SHARP-TAILED GROUSE HABITAT PROJECTS IN MINNESOTA**

These best habitat management practices (BMP) were added for convenience of managers of private and public lands that want to sustain viable sharp-tailed grouse populations. Their implementation, especially in core habitat areas and corridors, will help provide sharp-tailed grouse the space, food, and cover they need throughout their life cycle. Much of the information comes from Berg 1999. It still rings true today. Management to create and maintain open habitats is not “rocket science” – think BIG and OPEN the habitat up! The work is in the details. Each project site and landscape are different.

### **1. Develop and implement a habitat management plan.**

- Use thoughtful, long-term planning that considers the below BMPs to meet sharp-tailed grouse habitat needs in the landscape and on the land and site of interest.
- Map and plan which habitats need management, when they need it, and what techniques to use.

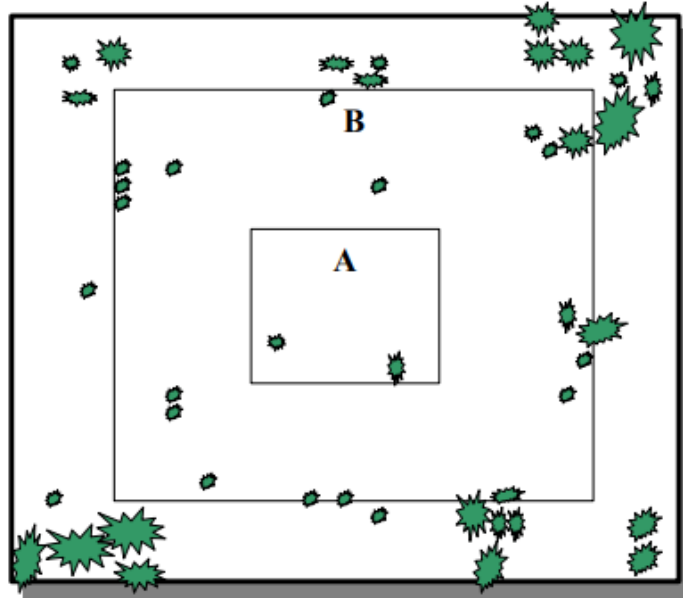
### **2. Conserve existing open habitats, especially in large, open complexes.**

- The larger and more diverse the complex, the greater probability it will meet an array of sharp-tailed grouse life cycle needs.
- Large areas of natural, less frequently disturbed habitats such as prairies, grasslands, savanna, sedge meadow, shrub swamp, open bog, or old fields are critical, especially upland.
- Well managed pasture, hay land and cropland can complement the natural habitats.
- Minimum habitat size depends on its configuration in the landscape. Where suitable habitat is remotely scattered, habitat size must be a minimum of 2 square miles, preferably 4 square miles.
- Where habitat exists rather uniformly in scattered but connected blocks, open habitat must be at least ½ square mile.
- The optimum habitat composition is 35% grass-legume, 15% cropland, 7% sedge, 13% young aspen/willow/birch, and 25% lowland brush. See the below image for an example of suitable brush and tree distribution.

### **3. Add open habitats to complexes** where feasible to meet the above criteria by restoring/seeding native vegetation, removing woody vegetation, and establishing pasture and hay land where feasible.

### **4. Treat/disturb natural, open habitats every 5-10 years or as needed to set back succession.**

- Maintain optimum cover of shrubs 3-7 feet tall and a scattered shrub density of 10-38%.
- Use techniques such as prescribed burning, mowing, chopping, grazing/browsing by livestock, timber harvest, hand cutting, and selective herbicide treatment.
- For nesting habitat, strive for structurally diverse habitat, dominated by dense herbaceous cover and small shrubs or small trees to nest near or under. Nesting generally occurs within 0.5 to 2 miles of the lek.
- For brood-rearing habitat, strive for more open habitat with less woody vegetation (such as unmowed hay land, lightly grazed pasture, and burned habitats) and abundant forbs and insects, though some shrubs can provide cover.
- For winter habitat, strive for a higher shrub component, especially at the periphery of open habitats, to provide cover, browse, and snow roosts. Important woody species include quaking aspen, birch, willow, bog birch, serviceberry, snowberry, and hawthorn. Sharp-tailed grouse may travel several miles in winter.

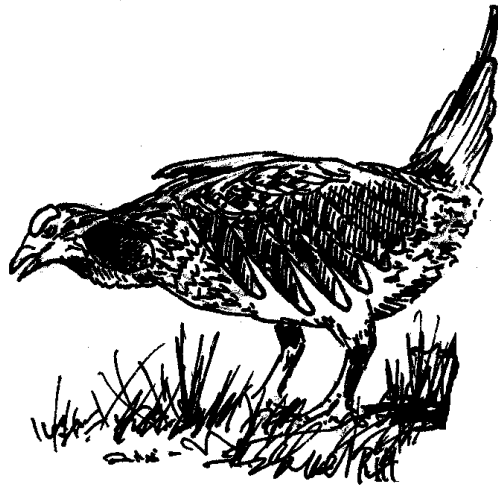


MN Sharptailed Grouse Society

Example of brush and young tree distribution in one square mile of habitat, showing 40 acres of open area where dancing ground would be located (A), and scattered clumps of woody vegetation (B). The perimeter may contain some hardwoods (aspen), but should be as open as possible. Conifers must be avoided.

5. **Maintain existing leks and create new leks where feasible.** As the hub of sharp-tailed grouse populations, lek sites are crucial and require special consideration.
  - Remove and do not plant trees, especially conifers, within a ½ mile.
  - Leks should be a minimum of 1/8 mile in diameter and relatively free of woody vegetation.
  - The terrain should be flat to slightly convex and consist of grass, sedge, hay, crop stubble, open pasture, or tilled cropland.
  - In the absence of existing leks, new ones can be created by mowing a 100-200 foot oval area in the midst of quality nesting habitat in the fall. Two to three sites per 160 acres is adequate.
6. **Do not fragment open habitats by planting trees within them.** Blocks and rows of trees fragment the open vista needed by sharp-tailed grouse, and provide raptor perches and predator denning sites and travel lanes.
7. **Prevent and control invasive plant species** to maintain native plant diversity and thus quality food and cover.
  - Prevent, detect early, and swiftly treat invasive plants to stop their spread.
  - Ensure all equipment such as OHVs, mowers, and logging equipment are thoroughly clean before arriving at and leaving habitat sites.
8. **Use rotational grazing and rest periods in pastures.**
  - Light to moderately graze pasture with adequate rest periods to leave at least 6 inches of cover.
  - Alternate timing of grazing to promote plant diversity.
  - Graze leks more heavily to keep them open and attractive to males in spring.

- 9. Delay haying and mowing of roadsides until August 1**, after the prime nesting season to reduce harm to nests and young broods.
- Use flushing bars and haying from the inside to outside of fields.
- 10. Plant small grain food plots (at least 1 acre), a diversity of cover crops, avoid fall tillage, and leave row crops and small grains** adjacent to, or within ¼ mile of winter cover and/or the lek for brood-rearing and winter food.
- A diversity of small grains (such as wheat, oats, flax, buckwheat, and rye), crop residue, and waste grain can provide valuable food.
  - Avoid corn, sorghum or sunflowers near leks due to their height.
  - Remove trees near food plots and/or locate food plots at least 100 yards away from trees over 15-20 feet tall to minimize predation by raptors.
  - Where food plots are not feasible, baled small grain can be transported to the site.
- 11. Limit use of chemicals** in agricultural practices. Evidence is growing that some chemicals, such as certain pesticides, are harmful directly and indirectly to wildlife and insects.
- 12. Encourage neighboring landowners to also manage sharp-tailed grouse habitat** and follow these BMPs. It is essential to collaborate to manage large, open habitat complexes.
- 13. Connect open habitats across the landscape** by collaborating with private and public landowners to promote gene flow and the ability to move and adapt to climate change.
- Provide stepping stones of habitat every 3-6 miles.



## APPENDIX 3. LETTERS FROM PLAN SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS

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*Bringing back the birds*

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

American Bird Conservancy (ABC) wishes to extend its appreciation and support for your organization's efforts to conserve grassland and shrubland habitats across Minnesota. These habitats benefit a range of resident and migratory wildlife species including numerous Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse (STGR) Management Plan, "*Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird*" compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

American Bird Conservancy is dedicated to conserving wild birds and their habitats throughout the Americas, focusing specifically on preventing species extinctions, preventing declining species from becoming endangered, restoring habitat to help bird populations recover, reducing threats to all birds, and building capacity in the bird conservation movement. This mission has guided us throughout our history of more than 25 years.

This plan is very useful for a number of reasons: 1) It provides clear data showcasing STGR population decline; 2) It provides a summary of possible funding support for STGR habitat conservation; and 3) It compliments existing plans, such as the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan when highlighting the importance of grassland and brushland habitat protection, enhancement, restoration, and connectivity.

Please consider the following suggestions to make the plan even more effective: 1) More completely describe Best Management Practices associated with quality STGR management; and 2) Include a list of additional species (especially SGCN) that benefit from sharp-tailed grouse habitat conservation; 3) If available, provide direction to where additional information can be found relating to STGR conservation.

American Bird Conservancy strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and utilize it to inform habitat management in Minnesota.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

*Peter Dieser*

Peter Dieser  
American Bird Conservancy  
MN Public Lands Coordinator  
Phone: (952) 567-1967  
Email: [pdieser@abcbirds.org](mailto:pdieser@abcbirds.org)

4301 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 451 • Washington, DC 20008  
Tel: 202-234-7181 • [abc@abcbirds.org](mailto:abc@abcbirds.org) • [abcbirds.org](http://abcbirds.org)

13 September 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

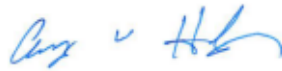
Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Minnesota Chapter of the American Fisheries Society wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – "*Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird*" compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The Minnesota Chapter of the American Fisheries Society endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



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Andrew W. Hafs, Ph.D.  
President MNAFS  
Professor of Biology  
Aquatic Biology Program  
Bemidji State University



April 20, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

I am writing on behalf of Audubon Minnesota to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

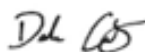
Audubon Minnesota's mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. We support this plan because the restoration and enhancement of grassland ecosystems in the regions that will benefit Sharp-tailed Grouse are well conceived and likely to lead to have their intended effects, while also creating critical habitat for a suite of other grassland birds.

Please consider the addition of the [Audubon Conservation Ranching](#) initiative as a strategy to create Sharp-tailed Grouse habitat on private lands. Audubon recently secured funding to bring the Conservation Ranching initiative to Minnesota and will begin certifying ranches in 2023. We believe that this will be an effective strategy for grassland bird conservation that should also help develop habitat for Sharp-tailed Grouse.

Audubon Minnesota strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs' leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Dale Gentry Ph.D.  
Conservation Manager  
Audubon - Minnesota





**BACKCOUNTRY  
HUNTERS & ANGLERS  
MINNESOTA**

To: Minnesota Sharptail Grouse Society

From: Minnesota Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

Date: July 11, 2022

Subject: 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan - "Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird".

The Minnesota BHA board of directors has reviewed and offer our full support for the 2022-2032 Sharptail Grouse Plan developed by MSGS.

BHA stands in solidarity with MSGS in continuing to fight for issues that our natural resource agencies either cannot or will not fully recognize, one of them is Sharptail grouse and brushland habitats.

In lieu of a Department of Natural Resource lead planning effort we thank MSGS for taking a leading role in defining the issues and potential solutions to keeping Sharptail grouse on the landscape. Dedicated conservation organizations and citizen scientists are the unrecognized voice of conservation in North America and MSGS is definitely one of those voices. We thank your organization for your persistence on planning and habitat work in Minnesota.

Please include Minnesota Backcountry Hunters and Anglers as full supporters of the plan in all correspondence with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other conservation organizations.

Sincerely,

Greg Kvale  
For Mn BHA BOD





MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
Dave Pauly - President  
P.O. Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

To whom it may concern,

5 July 2022

On behalf of the Natural Resources program at Central Lakes College in Brainerd, I would like to lend our full support to the newly released 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – “Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird” compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022. We are encouraged by the actions of the MSGS in putting this plan together and are hopeful it will serve as the basis for more concerted management actions by the MN Department of Natural Resources to not only stop the current decrease in sharp-tailed grouse numbers in MN, but in fact allow them to rebound in both the east central and northwest subpopulation areas.

If there is any further action required on our part, don't hesitate to contact me as the Natural Resources Program Lead. We wish you the best of luck in securing many other endorsements from other conservation partners and thank you for the opportunity to offer our endorsement for the current plan.

In conservation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Bill Faber".

William E. “Bill” Faber  
Natural Resources Program Lead

July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

**Conservation Minnesota** is committed to protecting Minnesota from the adverse impacts of pollution and climate change and ensuring that everyone has access to the Great Outdoors and opportunities to enjoy it. We are grateful to the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society for bringing this work to our attention and for creating this plan. Conservation Minnesota supports the plan and the need for more frequent, better connected, and healthy public land and habitat; not only for sharp-tailed grouse and wildlife that depend on them, but for the health of our communities, water quality, climate mitigation, outdoor recreation, and so much more.

This plan provides a good road map to work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other stakeholders to provide habitat that will help the sharp-tailed grouse. It will also add more value to important habitat funds and programs like the Legacy Amendment, LCCMR, and the Federal efforts to protect, enhance, and connect 30% of our land and water by 2030.

The unprecedented challenges we face as one of the fastest changing climates in the country requires us to create healthy land and water that builds resiliency and provides recreation opportunities for everyone. We believe that this plan will be part of a well-rounded approach to protecting the Minnesota we all love.

Sincerely,  
Avery Hildebrand

Public Land & Outdoor Recreation Program Manager

[avery@conservationminnesota.org](mailto:avery@conservationminnesota.org)

P: 612.767.1572

1101 West River Parkway, Suite 250  
Minneapolis, MN 55415

# Fond du Lac Reservation

## Resource Management Division

1720 Big Lake Rd  
Cloquet, MN 55720  
Phone 218-878-7101  
Fax 218-878-7130



Administration  
Conservation  
Enforcement  
Environmental  
Forestry  
Fisheries  
Natural Resources  
Wildlife

July 22, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly,

The Fond du Lac Resource Management Division is pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – “Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird” compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS), dated June 20, 2022.

Our Division greatly appreciates the work MSGS has done to protect and promote *ishkode mitchiess*, the sharp-tailed grouse, in Minnesota. The Ojibway have long recognized the connection between these birds, fire and open landscapes of brush and grass. These lands are valuable not just for the grouse, but a host of other species, such as *omashkoozoog* or elk, which the Band is working to restore as well. Maintaining and restoring these open landscapes and their associated species requires a high degree of thoughtful, deliberate planning, and we’re pleased to support your efforts.

We strongly endorse the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGS. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGS’s leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Reginald DeFoe  
Director, Fond du Lac Resource Management Division



**W.J. McCABE (DULUTH) CHAPTER  
IZAAK WALTON LEAGUE OF AMERICA**

P. O. Box 3063. • DULUTH, MN 55803

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July 18, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
P.O. Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly,

The W. J. McCabe Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America (Ikes) is in its 99<sup>th</sup> year of existence, while the National Ikes organization is celebrating its centennial this year. As one of the nation's oldest conservation organizations dedicated to the preservation and protection of our soil, air, woods, waters and wildlife, we feel compelled to speak up for all wildlife species threatened with habitat loss and for our ever-diminishing wildlife populations within the state. Sharp-tailed grouse are a key indicator species for the broader health of our grassland/openland/shrubland habitats, which have been rapidly disappearing due to ever greater human intrusion into wild areas and habitat conversion for other human uses. The Ikes wish to extend our appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"*, compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

We support this strong plan for the following reasons:

- Our once abundant grasslands/shrublands are key habitats for not just sharptails, but for a host of species that depend on these transitional habitats between the prairie and the forest. Maintaining these habitats for sharptails also provides benefits for these associated species.
- There is growing evidence that the loss of fire on the landscape has negatively impacted all of our natural landscapes, from prairies to shrublands and forests. Restoration of fire as a tool for habitat development and maintenance of our grasslands and shrublands is critically important. The use of mechanical tools will only take us so far; it is more

expensive than fire and does not lead to the same habitat development benefits and results as those achieved by using fire.

- Finally, there is growing interest in harnessing fire to improve and maintain grassland and shrubland habitats among conservation non-government organizations (NGOs) as well as private landowner organizations that are dedicated to the use of fire for rangeland maintenance, wildlife habitat improvement, and as a tool to reduce the growing threat of wildfires driven by changing climate patterns. Both the conservation NGOs and these private landowner groups have proven their capability as responsible users of fire, and good stewards of the lands they own and administer.

Please consider the following suggestions to make the plan even more effective:

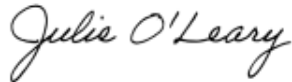
- The challenges to save these shrubland habitats are unfortunately large. The proposed idea of rotating habitats around the landscape might help, but it's may be difficult to accomplish within today's mixed land ownerships patterns. As parcelization continues, that becomes more challenging. The best tool, prescribed fire (RX), often intimidates people until they become comfortable with its use and more assured that it can be done safely. It's even more challenging in locales where more homes are invading rural areas, and with climate change making it either too dry or too wet to accomplish these burns. There is a perception that the burn windows seem to be narrowing. But the Kirtland's warbler (a federally listed endangered species), is an example of an early-successional, (young jack pine stands) fire-dependent forest bird that has survived, and has come back from the brink of extinction to increase in numbers and spread to new suitable habitats. This serves as a positive example that reintroducing prescribed fire can and will work to the benefit of struggling wildlife populations and their habitats.
- The pressure to grow more trees, whether for mills or carbon storage, needs to be overcome. It may be beneficial to add more language about the carbon storage benefits of grassland/shrubland habitats, so the public sees that as a positive side benefit of retaining these openland habitats for wildlife. While trees and forest soils do store carbon, so do native prairies, managed grasslands, and shrubland soils, and that needs and deserves more attention than it gets.
- More time should be given to discussing the other species that could/would benefit from these well-managed openland habitats, from elk and moose to songbirds and cranes. The sharptail isn't alone in that fight for better habitat.
- We believe there's a need for a discussion about rural communities that became organized to conduct RX (prescribed) burns (examples include those in Nebraska, and southeastern Minnesota). Something like this centered around our state's openland/shrubland habitat management would point the way as an example of this private initiative. This would expand the potential benefits, without any additional taxpayer expense. Rural communities are losing the social license to burn, and it's too important to managers and landowners to allow that to happen. If landowners are at the heart of the RX crew, and are conducting these burns, we believe they and others will see the value of fire as a tool for land management.

- It's possible that legislative action will be needed to help facilitate greater private burning for habitat purposes, so the plan might summarize those in a separate chapter.

The W. J. McCabe Chapter strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGS. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies, including our state's sovereign tribal governments, recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGS's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Julie O'Leary  
President, W. J. McCabe Chapter  
Izaak Walton League of America

[jloinduluth@gmail.com](mailto:jloinduluth@gmail.com)  
(218) 724-6806

August 5 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Association wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Associations mission is "Dedicated to the Restoration of Grassland Ecosystems". We support this strong plan for the benefit of Sharp-tailed Grouse, grass land habitat and the many other creatures that depend on that same habitat.

The Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Association strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Marty Sarrault  
14633 Inverness Trail Cheboygan Mi 49721  
231-420-8600





Jul 20, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Minnesota Conservation Federation wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – "*Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird*" compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The Minnesota Conservation Federations's mission is to encourage the knowledge and connection of Minnesota's citizens to the fish, game, non game, lands, minerals, and waters that are theirs' to conserve, protect, and respect through advocating for the intelligent management of these life sustaining resources and engaging Minnesota's diverse citizenry in our shared outdoor traditions.

The Minnesota Conservation Federation strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

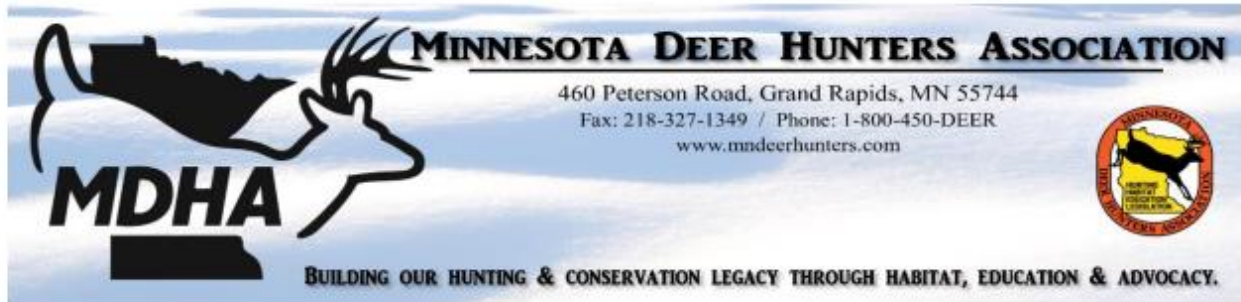
Sincerely,

Brad Gausman

Executive Director- Minnesota Conservation Federation

[brad@mncf.org](mailto:brad@mncf.org)





August 9, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) wishes to express its appreciation to the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs) for its efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *“Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird.”*

Included in MDHA’s main tenets is the support of habitat for deer and other game and non-game species. The MSGS Plan will lead to increase management efficiency and effectiveness amongst partners and across land ownerships to assure viable populations of Sharp-tailed Grouse and benefits to other wildlife.

Consequently, MDHA strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGS. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGS’s leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Craig L. Engwall  
Executive Director



Ray Marshall  
MSGs Director  
2839 Woodridge Lane  
Stillwater, MN 55082

October 24, 2022

Dear Mr. Marshall,

It is with great gratitude that I am drafting this letter to you and the members of the Minnesota Sharp-Tailed Grouse Society (MSGs). While I am still relatively new to the DNR, the spirit of partnership and collaboration around the stewardship of our wildlife resources in this state has been both exciting and inspiring. The plan you drafted, and the support you have received from conservation organizations across the country, reinforce just how important our sharp-tailed grouse populations are to Minnesota. I sincerely thank you and your team for your efforts.

I am pleased to say that our staff have found many points of alignment with priorities outlined in your plan. We agree that maintaining sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota is important, and that conservation of grassland and brushland habitats on a broad scale is needed to support sustained populations of many species. We agree that coordination across agencies and organizations is needed to meet shared goals; this is particularly important given the patchwork of land ownership and the different roles partners and private landowners can play. We agree on the continued need for research and adaptive management that improves our understanding of how to best maintain habitats. Finally, we value Minnesota's hunting heritage and want to continue to provide opportunities for hunting sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota, as well as other activities that foster the connection between people and the outdoors.

If I recall from our conversation in early August, it was not the intention of MSGs to request DNR adopt the Plan in its entirety; rather, the Plan provides a much-needed "jumpstart" for improved emphasis on brushland management. Fortunately, we are at a unique time in conservation where cross-agency and cross-ownership planning is both supported and encouraged. Similarly, we have been actively filling vacancies in area offices, including roving crews that are well trained and well equipped for large wildlife habitat projects. Finally, I am happy to share that we are creating a new Resident Gamebird Consultant position to help advance sharp-tailed grouse habitat and population work; that position is currently in our hiring process.

I want to thank you again for your thoughtful, comprehensive strategies and expertise. We are committed to the protection and enhancement of our unique brushlands and recognize the importance of habitat complexes for species, such as sharp-tailed grouse, that require large blocks of land to thrive. I have encouraged our staff to set up time to discuss management and partnership opportunities with you; I look forward to being part of those discussions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kelly Straka'.

Kelly Straka DVM MPH  
Wildlife Section Manager

Cc: Dave Olfelt, Director, Division of Fish and Wildlife, Minnesota DNR  
Leslie McInenly, Populations and Regulations Program Manager, Section of Wildlife  
Doug Franke, Acting Northwest Regional Wildlife Manager  
Lindsey Shartell, Acting Northeast Regional Wildlife Manager

July 21, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Minnesota Grazing Lands Conservation Association (MNGCLA) wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The MNGCLA mission is to preserve, enhance and expand the quality and quantity of grazing lands in Minnesota, and to enhance the profitability of the businesses that depend on them through education, technical assistance and partnerships. We support this plan because grazing can be a major tool to improve quality of grasslands, wildlife habitat and soil health. Public lands should utilize adaptive grazing principles to improve our resources while partnering with responsible land managers to improve opportunities for agriculture. Please consider increasing grazing as a management tool to make the plan even more effective.

The MNGCLA endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it. Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,



Mark Gutierrez  
Executive Director  
[mark@mnsoilhealth.org](mailto:mark@mnsoilhealth.org)  
505.980.1360  
<https://www.mnglca.org/>



MN Grazing Lands Conservation  
Association



## MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

July 20, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Minnesota Land Trust wishes to applaud your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The Land Trust protects and restores Minnesota's most vital natural lands in order to provide wildlife habitat, clean water, outdoor experiences and scenic beauty for generations to come. We work in every corner of the state – including areas where sharp-tailed grouse persist – with communities of dedicated conservation partners and private landowners that share this commitment. We believe this plan will bring much needed attention to one of the state's iconic native bird species.

The Minnesota Land Trust strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. We appreciate your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

Wayne Ostlie  
Director of Land Protection  
[wostlie@mnland.org](mailto:wostlie@mnland.org)  
Direct: 651-917-6292 | Cell: 651-894-3870

September 5, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037



Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society's mission is to increase public awareness of prairie chickens and their critical grassland habitat. Since forming as an organization almost 50 years ago, we have worked with our partners to accomplish that goal. The fact that we still have a huntable population of prairie chickens in MN is proof of our success!

Habitat loss and lack of management of critical lands has had devastating impacts on many of our grassland birds, and prairie grouse are no exception. The recent closing of the hunting season for sharp-tailed grouse in the East-Central population should be a cause for concern. More needs to be done to stabilize and increase that population if Minnesotans will again be able to enjoy a day afield with their favorite dog hunting sharpies! This plan also recognizes the importance of the Northwest population, which has shown more stability, and certainly much more work needs to be done to secure that population for the future.

The Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society supports the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Winter".

Brian Winter, President

Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society  
14834 28<sup>th</sup> Ave. South  
Glyndon, MN 56547

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Monarch Joint Venture wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The Monarch Joint Venture's mission is to protect monarchs and their migration by collaborating with partners to deliver habitat conservation, education, and science across the United States. We support this plan because Minnesota lies in a conservation priority area for the monarch butterfly and is an area that will contribute to having the greatest impact for increasing the eastern monarch population. Part of the habitat work proposed in this plan will work to reduce undesirable woody encroachment that is taking the place of high-quality native grasslands. The support of more prescribed fire, sound grazing plans, and general advocacy of boots on the ground for habitat management on the landscape to create more desirable, native broadleaf flowering and host plant vegetation is of high priority to the MJV and the needs of the monarch butterfly. This plan encourages one of the MJV's core values, which is to foster resilient ecosystems and sustainable actions for the long-term health of our planet through grassroots conservation work.

The Monarch Joint Venture strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely, 

Wendy Caldwell

(612) 208-3741







7/20/2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The National Wild Turkey Federation wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – "Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird" compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The National Wild Turkey Federation's mission is "the conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of our hunting heritage". The benefits achieved by implementing this plan for the sharp-tailed grouse will also overlap with benefits to the wild turkey among other species. We support the science-based management objectives outlined in the plan.

The National Wild Turkey Federation endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Linden Anderson".

Linden Anderson  
Minnesota State Chapter President  
National Wild Turkey Federation



**Staff**

**Ted Koch, Executive Director, Idaho**

**Terry Riley, PhD, Policy Director, Colorado, Certified Wildlife Biologist ®**

**Jodie Provost, Communications Director, Minnesota, Certified Wildlife Biologist ®**

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**Robert Manes, Kansas**

**Doug Pineo, Washington**

**Ralph Rogers, Montana**

**Steve Sherrod, PhD, Oklahoma**

**James Weaver, New Mexico**

**Quenton McEntee, South Dakota**

**North American  
Grouse Partnership**

P.O. Box 343  
Garden Valley, ID 83622

**Email:**

[NAGP@GrousePartners.org](mailto:NAGP@GrousePartners.org)

**Website:**

[www.grousepartners.org](http://www.grousepartners.org)

**Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/  
GrousePartners](http://www.facebook.com/GrousePartners)

June 26, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) is writing to formally endorse the "2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan - Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird". It is a strong plan with specific recommendations, and it supports NAGP's mission to promote the conservation of grouse and the habitats necessary for their survival and reproduction.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan. Here are a few ideas to strengthen it even more. Consider adding that development of one or more core areas of 50,000 acres would be optimal in the long-term. This addition will more strongly link the plan to the sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie chicken plan by the MAFWA and WAWFA Interstate Work Group.

Also consider selecting a number of specific core area and related corridors for focused management. PF data suggest that a well trained private land biologist can effectively and efficiently work within about a 30 mile radius of their office. Restore and maintain habitat in the number of core areas equal to the number of private land biologists secured. In addition, identify restoration and protection methods within each core area. Clearly identify the expected costs and expected measurable outcomes. Average lek counts per core area over the last 10 years and that goal for the long-term could be added. After goals are met in a few core areas, then seek better and more long-term funding to expand to other core areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and support the plan. MSGS's leadership is greatly appreciated. Best wishes in plan implementation.

Sincerely,

Ted Koch, Executive Director  
North American Grouse Partnership  
208-912-5233

*The Mission of the North American Grouse Partnership  
is to promote the conservation of grouse and  
their habitats for their survival and reproduction.*



# PHEASANTS FOREVER

July 15, 2022

Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinkley, MN 55037

To whom it may concern,

Pheasants Forever, Inc. (PF) wishes to express our full support the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan created by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs). We believe that this plan is necessary for the successful management of this species.

The mission of PF is to conserve pheasant, quail, and other wildlife through habitat improvements, public access, education, and conservation advocacy. Minnesota PF's Conservation Delivery plan for FY2022-2026 has identified habitat restoration including that needed by Sharptails as a priority. We strive to build upon our past and present partnership investments including seven funded phases from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) and three Farm Bill Biologists that serve in Aitkin, Pine, Marshall, Pennington, and Polk counties that protect, restore, and enhance public and private lands for the benefit of Sharptails and other brushland species. Our efforts are already working toward achieving all three management goals laid out in the proposed management plan; however, it is vital that all conservation partners within the Sharptail range work under a unified plan to successfully recover and grow the population.

The holistic approach outlined in this plan will be extraordinarily beneficial for several reasons:

1. No one agency or organization will shoulder the burden of recovering the population alone,
2. Identification and intensive management of large priority areas will create optimal habitat for all life stages all while being effective and efficient with funding,
3. All brushland species will benefit from the habitat produced as a result of this plan,
4. Future generations of both hunters and non-hunters will be able to enjoy the wildlife that will flourish under this plan.

It is in the best interest of our organization to fully endorse this management plan and encourage you to adopt this plan.

Thank you for your time,



Eran Sandquist  
State Coordinator - Minnesota  
Pheasants Forever, Inc.

**RED LAKE BAND  
of CHIPPEWA INDIANS**  
*RED LAKE NATION HEADQUARTERS*



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SAMUEL R. STRONG, Secretary  
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DONALD GOOD, SR.  
ADRIAN BEALIEU  
MICHELLE (BARRETT) COBENAE

**ADVISORY COUNCIL:**

7 HEREDITARY CHIEFS

PO Box 550, Red Lake, MN 56671

Phone 218-679-3341 • Fax 218-679-3378

Date: June 29, 2022


TO: Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
RE: Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa, I am writing this letter in support of the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society's 2022-2032 *Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – "Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"*. The Red Lake Band of Chippewa controls over 850,000 acres of land in northwestern and north-central Minnesota. Thousands of these acres contain suitable sharp-tailed grouse habitats. This plan promotes management actions that will help preserve sharp-tailed grouse, and a wide variety of other grassland and shrubland – dependent species for future generations to enjoy.

The Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians officially endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society's efforts to support effective, long-term management strategies for this important species, and encourages the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) to pursue similar management actions. Sharp-tailed grouse are designated a "species of greatest conservation need" in the MNDNR Wildlife Action Plan, and habitat loss and degradation are identified as key factors leading to declining populations. Unfortunately, the MNDNR has not developed a state-wide management plan for sharp-tailed grouse. Collaborative partnerships and coordinated efforts will be necessary to achieve sharp-tailed grouse management objectives, and we appreciate the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society's efforts that continue the process of forming these partnerships.

Sincerely,

  
Darrell G. Seki, Sr.

Chairman  
Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians  
Red Lake Nation Headquarters  
P.O. Box 550  
Red Lake, MN 56671

**TRIBAL COUNCIL Organized April 18, 1918** (Revised Constitution & By-Laws, January 6, 1959)

**CHIEF COUNCIL OF 1889:** *May-dway-gwa-no-nind, Nah-guan-gwon-abe, Mays-co-co-caw-ay, Ahnah-me ay-ge-shig, Naw-ay-tah-wowb, Nah-wah-quay-ge-shig*



**Sharp-Tails Plus Foundation**  
Winnipeg, MB  
e: [sharptailsplus@gmail.com](mailto:sharptailsplus@gmail.com)  
w: [www.sharptailsplus.org](http://www.sharptailsplus.org)

July 21, 2022

Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Attention: Dave Pauly, President

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

Dear Mr. Pauly:

Sharp-tails Plus Foundation Inc. is a volunteer group of gamebird hunting enthusiasts and recreationists, which formed because of a collective and deep concern about the loss and degradation of sharp-tailed grouse habitat in Manitoba, Canada. The Sharp-tails Plus Foundation was established as a registered not-for-profit organization with the goal of informing conservation efforts through inclusive citizen science, education and outreach.

The Sharp-tails Plus Foundation strongly endorses the 2022-2031 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan - "Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird" ("the Plan") prepared by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs) and dated June 20, 2022. As a Canadian organization sharing the international border with Minnesota, we recognize the importance of the Plan and its overall benefit to the northern population of Sharp-tailed Grouse.

We concur with the challenges, threats and opportunities identified in the Plan and which are consistent with those experienced by our organization in Manitoba. We found that the goals and strategies regarding habitat, population and outreach as outlined in the Plan are clear and pertinent.

We would also encourage the MSGS to include a 4<sup>th</sup> Goal that indicates the need to develop a monitoring and assessment strategy for each of the Habitat, Population, and Outreach Goals.

We thank you for sharing the draft Plan with us and for the opportunity to provide feedback, and we would like to commend your organization for the continuous leadership and for the effort dedicated to the management and restoration of sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota for hunters and non-hunters. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the Plan, and work collaboratively with other organizations such as the MSGS to support and implement it.

Yours truly,

On behalf of the Sharp-tails Plus Foundation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "A Percheron".

Ambroise Percheron  
President



North Star Chapter  
2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260  
St. Paul, MN 55114

November 15, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
P.O. Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

RE: Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan, 11/1/2022

Founded in 1968 the Sierra Club North Star Chapter is a non-profit environmental organization representing over 20,000 members and 80,000 supporters across Minnesota. The Sierra Club works to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and litigation. As a leading grassroots voice working to preserve and protect Minnesota's environment, we empower volunteer leaders to act through environmental advocacy, community organizing, and outdoor exploration. We participate in the administrative process to encourage environmental health and sustainability, long term wildlife and habitat protection, and biodiversity goals.

For these reasons, we appreciate the opportunity to review and comment on the "Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird*", Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, November 1, 2022. We feel a need to support and protect wildlife species that are threatened with habitat loss within Minnesota. The Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan is comprehensive and detailed in how to restore pre-settlement prairie and shrubland habitats that would favor sharp-tailed grouse populations and many other prairie wildlife species such as those listed in Appendix 1 of the Plan.

We recognize the value of natural landscapes that store carbon in root systems that are a hallmark of prairie habitats. We encourage your considerations of these factors as an important part of helping to mitigate climate change.

We also take note that providing opportunities to increase populations of the "Firebird" are important in continuing the past and present traditions of Dakota and Ojibwe cultures. Grouse populations continue to drop as habitat continues to degrade, so measures are necessary to improve landscapes and, subsequently, increase the numbers of sharp-tailed grouse.

We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will fully support the Plan and directly enact actions listed in the Plan's Strategies that are within DNR's areas of responsibility.

**Sierra Club North Star Chapter endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as prepared and written by the MSGS.** We thank the MSGS for your leadership in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Margaret Levin, State Director  
Sierra Club North Star Chapter  
2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260  
St. Paul, MN 55114  
[margaret.levin@sierraclub.org](mailto:margaret.levin@sierraclub.org)

Bob Graves  
Forests and Wildlife Stewards, Chair  
Sierra Club North Star Chapter  
[bob.graves@northstar.sierraclub.org](mailto:bob.graves@northstar.sierraclub.org)



July 25, 2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037



Dr. Mr. Pauly,

The Minnesota Chapter of the Society of American Foresters wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – "Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird" compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS), dated June 20, 2022.

The mission of the Society of American Foresters is to advance sustainable management of forest resources through science, education, and technology; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish professional excellence; and to use our knowledge, skills, and conservation ethic to ensure the continued health, integrity, and use of forests to benefit society in perpetuity. We support the proposed sharp-tailed grouse management plan because we think it aligns with much of the conservation and land stewardship ethics and actions we support. We believe it supports thoughtful landscape-level planning, active land stewardship, restoration of native species, and advocacy for restoration of surface fire in the form of prescribed fire. While we cannot support deforestation for the advancement of grassland and shrubland habitats or disregarding Minnesota's sustainable forestry guidelines on reserving trees and snags in timber harvests, we recognize that these are nuanced land stewardship decisions to be made at the regional planning and prescription levels.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'K G Gill'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Kyle G Gill

Minnesota SAF Chapter Chair



4924 Upton Ave S  
Minneapolis, MN 55410  
sfa-mn.org  
1.844.922.5573

Mr. Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly,

The Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota (SFA) appreciates your organization's effort to conserve beneficial expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota. We have received and reviewed a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan titled "*Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird*" compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs).

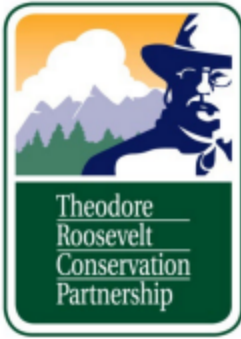
SFA) is a membership organization comprised of 1,300 farmers, educators, food advocates and agricultural professionals with a mission to advance environmental stewardship, economic resilience and strong, diverse communities through education, innovation, outreach and farmer-to-farmer networking. SFA supports this proposal because we believe that conservation of wildlife and avian habitat is crucial to the health and diversity of our ecosystem.

SFA wholeheartedly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGS. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies recognize the plan, and support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGS's leadership in habitat conservation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lucinda Winter, Executive Director  
612-685-9115 mobile  
lucinda@sfa-mn.org



*His Vision*

~

*Our Mission*

22232 Seifert Beach Road  
Pelican Rapids, MN  
218.770.5193  
WWW.TRCP.ORG

To whom it may concern,

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP), in keeping with our mission of guaranteeing all Americans quality places to hunt and fish, would like to offer our support for the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGS) as they advocate for the adoption of a Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan. The TRCP works to advance commonsense policies and practices that improve habitats and create hunting opportunities nationwide, and grassroots efforts like this one are incredibly valuable as we do so.

The MSGS' proposed management plan is based on several strategies that the TRCP has found to be successful in other states. These include conserving and improving core habitats, creating corridors for dispersal and migration, establishing voluntary conservation incentives on private land, and raising public awareness to build support. This plan has a solid scientific basis and will support both game and non-game species, many of which are currently experiencing rapid population declines due to habitat degradation and conversion. In particular, building capacity for prescribed fire applications will benefit multiple fire-dependent Minnesota ecosystems, especially those threatened by invasive species and woody encroachment.

We recommend that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) adopt this plan or use it as a framework for the creation of an internal Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan. In doing so, we recommend that MN DNR emphasize the following items:

- Ensure that the multiple positive outcomes of this plan are communicated to other stakeholders, especially hunters who favor other species.
- Maintain a commitment to voluntary, incentive-based management and hunter access programs on private lands.
- Make certain that management activities (grazing, haying, mowing, etc.) are applied according to the best possible scientific principles.

The TRCP appreciates the direct engagement and challenging work done by the MSGS in creating this plan and would like to thank the MN DNR for their willingness to collaborate directly with stakeholder groups like MSGS. In times of limited capacity and funding, partnerships are more important than ever. We look forward to seeing increased and improved grassland and brushland habitat in Minnesota, strengthened sharp-tailed grouse populations statewide, and greater opportunities for sharp-tailed grouse hunters.

Thank you for your consideration,

Aaron Field, PhD  
Director of Private Lands Conservation  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
[afield@trcp.org](mailto:afield@trcp.org)



*The Minnesota Chapter  
of The Wildlife Society*

July 19, 2022

This letter highlights The Minnesota Chapter of the Wildlife Society's support of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan - "Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird" prepared by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs). We believe this is an excellent plan that would benefit not only Sharp-tailed grouse but all grassland/shrubland dependent wildlife species. We endorse this plan for several reasons.

First, The Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society has provided, in detail, a well-articulated purpose and need and well thought out goals and corresponding strategies for success. This is critical considering Sharp-tails are a listed Species of Greatest Conservation Need with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR). We believe it would be imprudent for agencies not to this species-specific plan.

Secondly, the members of the MSGS have the knowledge and skillset necessary to execute this Sharp Tailed Grouse Plan. Some of the members are former researchers of sharp-tailed grouse, while others have extensive, firsthand knowledge in managing prairie grouse and their habitat.

Thirdly, grassland habitats face a whole host of challenges including intensive agriculture, urban and rural development sprawl, invasive species and climate change. Without implementing strategies outlined in this Plan, Sharp-tailed grouse and other species populations will continue to decline further eroding the state's natural heritage.

In conclusion, we believe the MNDNR should strongly consider adopting the plan written by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society for the reasons above.

Sincerely,

*Bruce D. Anderson*

Bruce D. Anderson (he, him, his)  
President Minnesota Chapter of the Wildlife Society  
[bdandersons1953@outlook.com](mailto:bdandersons1953@outlook.com)  
218-451-0382



## United States Department of the Interior



### FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

5600 American Boulevard West, Suite 990  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/R3/NWRS/

Mr. Dave Pauly  
President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
P.O. Box 76  
Hinckley, Minnesota 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

On behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in Minnesota, I would like to offer our support for the draft copy of the 2022-2023 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – “Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird.” This plan is consistent with our current collaborative relationship restoring wetlands and uplands in the state of Minnesota. The Minnesota Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provided technical assistance in the development of the plan to assist the Service in coordinating with the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society and other partners to strategically restore habitat on the landscape through collaborative focus areas, additional grant leveraging opportunities, and expanded outreach.

The amount of land use change, specifically with the loss of grasslands that has occurred within the state has already resulted in a tremendous loss of wildlife habitat. Efforts to protect and restore these habitats are vital for benefiting wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the state.

Open grassland and shrubland habitats expressed in this plan are vital to numerous species in Minnesota. This plan will help provide a collaborative framework to protect, restore and enhance these habitats. Furthermore, the plan will assist the efforts of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to conserve, restore and enhance expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for the benefit of many Federal trust species.

We are in full support of this plan. Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

CARL  
MILLEGAN

Digitally signed by CARL  
MILLEGAN  
Date: 2022.08.17  
16:22:52 -05'00'

Carl Millegan  
Acting Regional Chief  
National Wildlife Refuge System



1101 West River Parkway, Suite 200  
Minneapolis, MN 55415

9/27/2022

Dave Pauly, President  
Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society  
PO Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear Mr. Pauly:

The Nature Conservancy of Minnesota/South Dakota/North Dakota wishes to extend its appreciation and support for the MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Society's efforts to conserve expansive grassland and shrubland habitats in Minnesota for their many benefits. We are pleased to have reviewed a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs), dated June 20, 2022.

The Nature Conservancy's mission is to address the dual threats posed to our natural world as a result of a changing climate overlain with the looming biodiversity crisis. We support this plan to encourage habitat management and restoration for Minnesota's sharp-tailed grouse population. We are particularly excited about the intersection between the Management Plan and the MN Prairie Conservation Plan and are confident that prioritizing prairie core and corridor landscapes for management actions will result in both stable or increased sharp-tailed grouse populations and protection of our precious remaining native prairies.

The Nature Conservancy strongly endorses the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGs. We hope that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and other public resource agencies support and implement it.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the plan and provide support. MSGs's leadership in conservation is greatly appreciated.

Yours in conservation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neal Feeken".

Neal Feeken,  
Director, Land Conservation



www.wisharptails.org  
information@wisharptails.org  
102 E Crex Ave. Grantsburg, WI 54840

Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Soc.  
Dave Pauly - President  
P.O Box 76  
Hinckley, MN 55037

Dear President Pauly,

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society wishes to extend its appreciation for your organization's continuing efforts to provide and improve science-based management of Sharp-tailed grouse in the neighboring state of Minnesota. We are especially pleased to have received a draft copy of the 2022-2032 Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan – *"Saving Wide Open Spaces for the Firebird"* compiled by the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, dated June 20, 2022. At the same time, we are somewhat concerned that this work is the sole effort of the MSGS, a private, non-profit organization and not part of a statewide effort by the MN Dept. of Natural Resources. We would have expected that the state agency charged with protection and management of a native species of "Greatest Conservation Need" to have led the effort in planning for the long-term viability of sharp-tails throughout their historic range in Minnesota.

The objective of the MSGS STG plan to serve as a working document using the best available science and adaptive management practices to enhance open spaces for sharp-tailed grouse to continue thriving well into the future, is clearly stated and defined through the outlined strategies of the plan. We also share your great concern for the ongoing population decline of more than 70% in the east-central Minnesota STG population over the last 17 years. This population segment is closely linked to the NW WI sharp-tailed grouse population, and we agree that continued loss of habitat and not genetic diversity is the variable most responsible for the decline. However, as pointed out in the plan there is a need for maintaining genetic diversity in the declining isolated population of sharptails in E.C. Minnesota through enhancement of habitat connectivity. Any effort to connect with the N.W. Wis. population is a means to accomplish that goal. In both the short and long term, habitat connectivity is critically important to population and genetic welfare of STG in both states.

The WSGS strongly endorses the MN Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan as presented by the MSGS. The concerns, goals and strategies provided in the plan are soundly based in the best available science and recommend wildlife management actions that are most likely to succeed. We hope that the MN Dept. of Natural Resources recognizes this effort and re-thinks their involvement in developing a new 10-year Sharp-tail management plan. At a minimum we advocate full implementation of the MN Sharp-tail Grouse Society plan as a map to manage sharp-tail grouse across the state's range for the benefit of the species and those who appreciate it.

Yours in Conservation

*Ken Jonas*

Interim President  
Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society