

THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK SOCIETY

Increasing the Scope of Young Forest Habitat Efforts

By John Eichinger, President/CEO

We are proud to announce the formation of a sister organization to the Ruffed Grouse Society called the American Woodcock Society. The purpose of this new forest conservation organization is to enhance and increase young forest habitat efforts and upland hunting opportunities nationwide.

The RGS Bylaws and the RGS Mission Statement have long recognized the connection between ruffed grouse, American woodcock and other wildlife that require young forest habitat for survival. So you may be asking, “Why is a new organization necessary?”

Creating AWS broadens awareness with the general public of the work we already do.

Although woodcock conservation has been part of our mission for decades, when people read the name “Ruffed Grouse Society” we shouldn’t assume they know that the habitat work we do impacts woodcock as much as grouse.

Creating AWS raises our profile among government agencies and NGOs.

With AWS we improve our access to migratory bird conservation programs, initiatives and funding. Being a migratory bird, American woodcock conservation involves federal and international coordination across state and national boundaries. Conservation programs that affect woodcock are included in Farm Bill appropriations and various initiatives within the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Creating AWS broadens hunting opportunities.

There are some states that had huntable grouse populations in the past, but habitat loss has caused grouse populations to decline and grouse hunting opportunities are extremely limited (MA, CT, NJ, OH, IN among others). In other states grouse seasons have been closed (RI, MO). For these states woodcock hunting provides the only wild bird upland hunting opportunity for hunters who would otherwise pursue grouse.

Creating AWS extends the geographical impact of our habitat work.

We recognize that in the southern states, grouse hunting opportunities are extremely limited and in many states don’t exist at all. The South has an honored tradition of hunting with bird dogs that is based on wild bobwhite quail. With the declining quail populations from GA to TX, bird hunters who want to hunt wild birds, and who enjoy keeping bird dogs, are finding woodcock hunting to be an outstanding alternative. The internet has plenty of chat sites that are buzzing with former quail hunters discovering the joys of woodcock hunting.

Creating AWS attracts members who share common cause with the habitat work we do.

We need to be more open and inviting to upland bird hunters who do not identify themselves primarily as grouse hunters. We need to recognize the importance of these people and include them in our effort to promote active management of forest lands.

The goal of our organization is, and always has been, to preserve our sporting traditions by creating healthy forests for grouse, woodcock and other forest wildlife. At this crucial time in forest management from Alaska to the Gulf of Mexico, the AWS allows us to positively affect our nation's forests and to spread awareness of our mission to a significantly larger group of supporters. The bottom line is that RGS and AWS will be able to collectively benefit more members, officials, conservationists and hunters who are passionate about the birds we love.

