

# Eastern Great Lakes Region FAN UPDATE

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## **A Promising Start to 2015.**

Summer is here in northern Michigan after another snowy winter with limited ice that was good for snow roosting ruffed grouse. The grouse and woodcock chicks are hatched and we are all hoping for no cold rainy weather. So far the conditions have been OK. Preliminary chatter from woodcock banders, drumming surveyors, and people who get into the woods a lot is that the woodcock numbers in Michigan are slightly up and drumming grouse are either the same as last year or way up, as high as 40% in some places. The weather the rest of the summer will dictate how our fall is and I look forward to the reports from the state agencies and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Have a safe and enjoyable summer.

If you would like to get these newsletters directly, be removed from the list, or refer a friend please send me an email at [erice@ruffedgrousesociety.org](mailto:erice@ruffedgrousesociety.org).

Regards *Eric*

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## **RGS Petitions the USFS Over a Failure to Sustain Young Forests.**

**Below is a May 30<sup>th</sup> article from the Marquette Mining Journal that does a wonderful job of outlining our recent Petition for Rulemaking with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service. RGS took this legal action due to the agency's consistent failure to provide the young forest habitats required by ruffed grouse, American woodcock, golden-winged warbler and other game and nongame wildlife on national forests throughout the eastern United States. Across this region, 59% of the songbird species that use these young**

**forest habitats for breeding are declining, while only 11% are increasing. Conversely, only 29% of the songbird species that breed in mature forest habitats are declining, while 31% are increasing.**

**Species that require old habitat are obviously important and should be managed for. But on all national forests in the east, wildlife populations that thrive in young forests continue to decline while the habitat they need (and is required in their forest plans) is not being created. For example, the Wayne National Forest in Ohio has established only 2 percent of the young forest acreage identified as a minimum goal in its forest plan. The Jefferson National Forest in Virginia has established only 12 percent of the young forest acreage identified as a minimum goal, while the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee has established only 13 percent. I continue to work with USFS staff within the region and admire the dedication of the many Forest Service employees to getting work done that improves habitat for young forest species. Further on in this newsletter I outline two such projects.**

**Along these lines, RGS is sponsoring legislation in Section 104 of HR 2647 (Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015) that would establish a streamlined planning process for projects designed to provide these important wildlife habitats. This would dramatically enhance the ability of the Forest Service to meet the pressing conservation needs of wildlife dependent upon young forest habitats and protect our nation's hunting heritage.**

*Eric*

By JOHN PEPIN  
Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — The Ruffed Grouse Society recently filed a petition with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service for the agencies' "consistent failure" to provide young forest habitat needed by ruffed grouse and other game and non-game wildlife species in the eastern part of the country.

The petition for rulemaking specifically concerns the U.S. Forest Service's southern and eastern regions which encompass 33 states east of the Rocky Mountains, including Michigan and the Upper Peninsula's Ottawa and Hiawatha national forests.

The society wants the secretary of the agriculture department and the Forest Service chief to issue immediate written directives to move promptly to achieve duly established minimum goals for early-successional forest habitats within each forest unit.

In the petition, the society said the two forest regions have continually failed to meet minimum goals for early successional forest habitats as detailed in forest plans from 2004 to 2007.

"By law, federal agencies are required to implement forest plans to develop forest resources, protect wildlife diversity and manage wildlife and wildlife habitats to enhance hunting activities," the petition read. "The Forest Service has failed in this in regions 8 and 9 to the detriment of the law and hunters that depend on early successional habitats for game wildlife."

Since 1987, the society has corresponded and met with the Forest Service at district, regional and national levels, to urge more action on early successional forest habitat declines, the petition stated.

"From the heart of ruffed grouse country in the Great Lakes region, to the historic covers of New England and the hills of the Appalachians, ruffed grouse and other wildlife of young forests have been poorly served by the Forest Service," Ruffed Grouse Society President and CEO John Eichinger said in a news release.

Eichinger said the society is reluctantly taking the step of filing the petition, but has little alternative given the Forest Service's lack of response to repeated efforts to work collaboratively.

"These deficiencies indicate a systemic problem that demands the attention of our most senior officials within the Forest Service," Eichinger said.

The petition said aspen forests are a foundation for populations of three "extremely popular" game species in the northern Great Lakes region, including ruffed grouse, American woodcock and white-tailed deer.

"National forests in the Great Lakes region are regenerating these important aspen forest communities at rates well below goals identified in existing forest plans," the petition stated.

The petition said from 2003-2012, the Chequamegon National Forest in northern Wisconsin met only 28 percent of its aspen regeneration goal and from 2006-2011, the Ottawa National Forest in the western U.P. reached only 41 percent of its aspen regeneration goal and the Huron-Manistee National Forest downstate hit only 48 percent of its aspen and birch regeneration goal from 2006-2011.

“These low levels of accomplishment in regenerating aspen forest habitats are directly contributing to the loss of the early-successional forest habitats that support non-game and game wildlife and, likewise, reduce hunter opportunities on national forests throughout this region.” the petition read.

The petition details some songbird declines found in breeding bird surveys on the Hiawatha and Ottawa national forests. The species showing significant decreases included brown thrasher, field sparrow, golden-winged warbler and gray catbird on the Hiawatha forest and chestnut-sided warbler, common yellowthroat, gray catbird and yellow warbler on the Ottawa forest.

“As a general rule, we don’t talk about legal matters when they are ongoing. What I will say is we appreciate our partner’s concerns and I can assure you we are constantly striving for the best balance between resource use and resource conservation,” said Hiawatha National Forest Supervisor Jo Reyer. “Our shared goal is the long-term sustainability of the ruffed grouse and its habitat.”

Reyer said the Hiawatha National Forest appreciates its local partnership projects with the Ruffed Grouse Society over the past several years including an edge treatment to regenerate aspen and alder for food and cover for upland game birds and deer within a spruce-fir-aspen forest matrix on the St. Ignace District in 2011.

Additional partnership projects between the society and the Forest Service have included a Nahma Marsh Tag Alder Regeneration project to benefit woodcock on Rapid River/Manistique Ranger District in 2013; the Sprinkler Early Successional Habitat Maintenance project on the St. Ignace Ranger District in 2013 in which small blocks of early successional (aspen/opening) habitat were maintained to benefit woodcock and ruffed grouse; and the Rudyard Early Successional Habitat Maintenance project on St. Ignace Ranger District this year where small blocks of early successional habitat will be maintained for woodcock and ruffed grouse.

“These projects, along with an array of other Forest vegetation management projects, have supported important management goals,” Reyer said.

The Ruffed Grouse Society was formed in 1961 and has about 15,500 members in the U.S. and Canada, with 113 local chapters. The society is the only non-profit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to promoting favorable conditions for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and other wildlife dependent on young forests to sustain hunting traditions and outdoor heritage.

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## **Getting Your Dog (and Yourself) in Shape for the Fall.**

Having yourself and your canine companion in shape before the fall arrives makes for an enjoyable and safe transition into hunting season. Now is the time to start thinking and acting on this. There are as many ways to do this as there are bird hunters but myself and another RGS Biologist shared our preferred methods (running and biking with our dogs) on a YouTube video produced at the National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt last October in Minnesota. You can check it out at the RGS YouTube channel or by following this [LINK](#).

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## **Be on the Lookout in the Woods**

Ruffed grouse and woodcock hunters are well known for searching out the thickest most isolated chunks of habitat when pursuing their quarry. This often times leads them to remote sections of public land that very few other people venture to. There are rewards with this and,

apparently, new found risks. A June 10th Detroit News article highlighted the rise in meth production sites found in rural areas of Michigan which, along with Indiana and Ohio, is one of the top 5 states for such discoveries. You can read the entire article at this [LINK](#). From the article:

## How Mich. ranks on meth lab incidents

Michigan was among the top five states in 2014 for the number of incidents of meth labs, dump sites and equipment found by police.

Rank	State	Incidents
1.	Indiana	1,470
2.	Missouri	1,034
3.	Tennessee	957
4.	Ohio	914
5.	Michigan	750
6.	Illinois	726
7.	N. Carolina	535
8.	Kentucky	465
9.	Virginia	309
10.	Penn./Okla.	209

Source: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration  
The Detroit News

*“hazardous evidence is popping up in the kinds of places in Michigan — remote, rural areas — that rarely are associated with drug problems.*

*“You know when the stuff we (come across) makes us nervous, it should make the public nervous, too,” said Schultz, a public safety officer for the city of Petoskey in lower northern Michigan.*

*Michigan's meth mess is on the rise. Law enforcement agencies have discovered more than 1,500 methamphetamine active labs, abandoned dump sites and caches of ingredients across the state since 2013, according to the Michigan State Police. The number of such annual methamphetamine incidents has more than quadrupled since 2007, according to the state police.*

*Michigan last year had 750 incidents of clandestine labs, dump sites and equipment, putting it among the top five states in incidents. That's about half the number of neighboring and nation-leading Indiana's 1,470, according to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.*

Your chances of finding such a site across the millions of acres of public land in the region are very small but if you do please use caution and report the sites to the local authorities.

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## Michigan GEMS Need Your Support

In 2015, the UP Wildlife Division will be proposing five new GEMS (Grouse Enhanced Management Sites) on State Forest Lands in the Upper Peninsula. Two of these systems will be located in the Shingleton Forest Unit. The Baraga, Newberry, and Escanaba Forest Units will contain one each. As you are aware, the GEMS process includes gating off the logging roads and providing secure walk-in access to intensively managed early successional habitat. You may also be aware that there is increasing pressure to keep all roads on State Forest Lands open to vehicular traffic. Without the road closures, the GEMS will not exist.

Each of the proposed GEMS will be introduced in the Compartment Review and Open house process this summer/fall. The following is the open house schedule for the four Forest Units mentioned above. If you find the GEMS system to be valuable, it will be important that you show your support by providing comments, either in writing or in person, at the associated open house.

Baraga 6/23/15

Escanaba 8/11/15

Shingleton 10/1/15

Newberry 10/13/15

Additional GEMS locations are coming on board in the lower peninsula in 2015 as well, including the following:

Little Betsie, near Thompsonville in the Traverse City Unit. Review date 7/28/15.

Greasy Creek, Montmorency County, Atlanta Unit. Review Date 8/4/15.

Evart, Osceola County, Cadillac Unit. Review Date 8/20/15.

All of these sites will need your support, check out the MDNR listing of all compartment reviews at this [LINK](#).

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## Wayne National Forest Research will Benefit Young Forests

**New research that looks at the control of Tree-of-Heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) in Ohio may someday prove useful for controlling this invasive tree that competes with**

**native plants. Ailanthus is also known to take over sites where cutting was done to improve young forest habitat severely limiting the benefits of these cuts. Below is a press release from the Wayne NF on this research that can be accessed at this [LINK](#).**

*Eric*

NELSONVILLE, Ohio – Research beginning this week on the Wayne National Forest will explore whether a native fungus can help land managers rein in an aggressive, non-native invasive tree that has been steadily encroaching on Ohio forests, particularly in the southern half of the State.

Trial sites include the Wayne National Forest, Athens Ranger District-Marietta Unit; Tar Hollow, Perry, and Blue Rock State Forests; and the Wilds a private, nonprofit wildlife conservation center in Muskingum County. Joanne Rebbeck, a USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station scientist will inoculate Ailanthus trees with *Verticillium nonalfalfae* (*V. nonalfalfae*) to evaluate how effective it might be in controlling Ailanthus. Forty trees will be inoculated with the fungus at each of the five sites.

On the particularly hard-hit Marietta Unit, almost 3,000 seed-bearing Ailanthus located through aerial surveys across 124,000 acres, which is one reason to focus the study in this area because herbicide treatments on this large a scale would be cost-prohibitive. ([View Inventory Map](#))

“Throughout Ohio, Ailanthus has the potential to replace oak and other native tree species and dramatically affect native food sources for wildlife,” said Tony Scardina, Wayne National Forest supervisor. “Research at the Wayne National Forest this summer will help assess the potential value of *V. nonalfalfae* as a non-chemical, sustainable means of controlling Ailanthus, which could be a first step in restoring healthy native forests.” ([View Images](#))

The effect of *V. nonalfalfae*, often called “Ailanthus wilt,” was first documented in Pennsylvania in 2002 by Penn State researchers. Rebbeck, shown here, has studied the fungus in the lab and greenhouse and has contributed to studies showing that *V. nonalfalfae* does not affect over 70 species of trees and shrubs, including Ohio tree species such as ash, beech, elm, hickory, and oak.

“In addition to studying the effectiveness of *V. nonalfalfae* as a biological control for Ailanthus, this research will also explore how native forests respond when Ailanthus is absent,” Rebbeck said. “Do native trees regenerate, or will another invasive species replace the Ailanthus?”

Ailanthus, also known as “tree of heaven,” is a native of Taiwan and central China that was introduced to the U.S. by a gardener in Pennsylvania in 1784. The tree is a master of regeneration, growing 3 to 4 feet in its first year, producing 300,000 seeds per female tree, and spreading through root systems. Ailanthus is often found in open spaces, but is increasingly found within disturbed forest sites.

“The aggressive growth habits of Ailanthus are a threat to the biodiversity of Ohio’s forests,” said Robert Boyles, Ohio Department of Natural Resources deputy director and state forester. “The results of this research could have a significant, positive, and lasting effect on forest health throughout the state.”

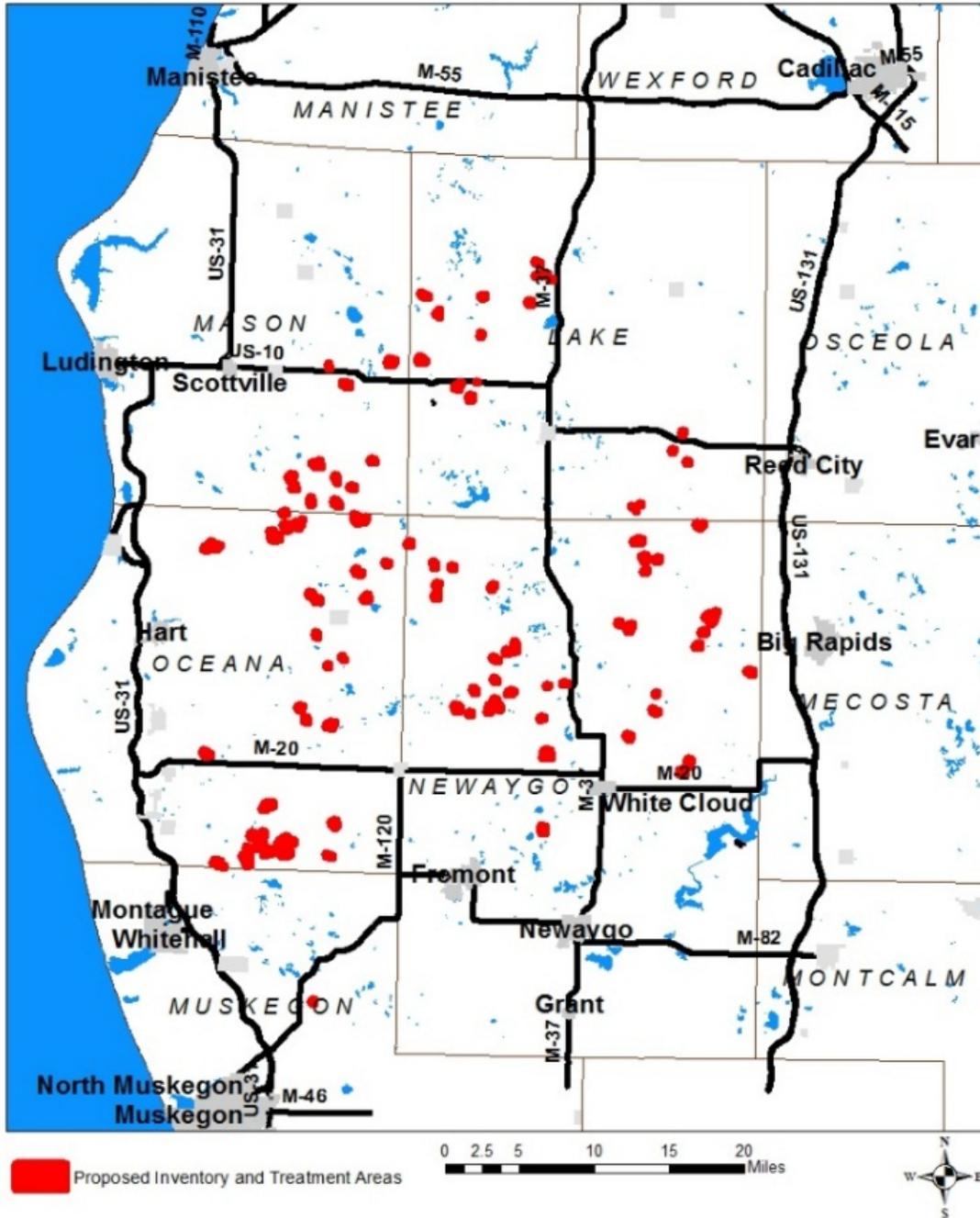
Learn more about the project by downloading an [educational brochure](#).

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## **The Baldwin Area Young Forest Restoration Project**

A roughly 10 month process of meetings, database work, field visits, and planning between myself and biologists with the Huron-Manistee National Forest Baldwin Ranger District has culminated in a project outline that will now be submitted to various funding programs until completion. This project will keep roughly 750 acres aspen on National Forest land from converting to more shade tolerant species and effectively eliminating prime ruffed grouse, woodcock, and other early successional forest species habitat. The project sites will

## The Baldwin Area Young Forest Restoration Project



also be planted with a variety of native trees and shrubs to improve species diversity that will benefit game and non-game species. The sites selected can be seen on the map on the left and include all areas 5 acres or larger not currently planned for future timber harvests where the aspen component is aging and in danger of being eliminated from the stand.

### Upcoming RGS Events in the Region

For detailed information on these events go to the [RGS events page](#) on our website.

6/27/2015	Manton	MI	Highland Chapter 2015 Fun Shoot
7/22/2015	Ada	MI	RGS/TU 2015 Cast & Blast
7/25/2015	Nunica	MI	West Michigan Lakeshore Chapter Youth Day
8/15/2015	Indianapolis	IN	18th Annual Banquet

8/22/2015	Metamora	MI	Robert J. Lytle Chapter Fun Shoot
8/26/2015	Grand Rapids	MI	34th Annual Banquet
9/5/2015	St. Clairsville	OH	30th Annual Upper Ohio Valley Chapter Banquet
10/15/2015	Novelty	OH	Inaugural American Woodcock Society Northern Ohio Banquet

**Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions and notify me of any email address changes. I also welcome any ideas for future FAN or RGS magazine articles:**

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The Ruffed Grouse Society is North America's foremost conservation organization dedicated to preserving our sporting traditions by creating healthy forest habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and other wildlife. For information on the Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society, please call 888-564-6747 or check out the RGS website at [www.ruffedgrousesociety.org](http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org).