



Ruby with a feathered friend. Photo by author. Can't find the bird? Look at the end of this newsletter.

Eastern Great Lakes Region FAN UPDATE

Volume 1, Issue 1

September 15th, 2014

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The Most Wonderful Time of the Year.

With apologies to Andy Williams, the cool weather and changing colors indicate the start of the most wonderful time of year for upland hunters. Throughout the region I cover ruffed grouse and woodcock seasons are open or opening soon and the weather has taken a decidedly cooler trajectory. This is my first hunting season working for RGS and I look forward to many more. Below you will find information on places to hunt, what to expect this season, and how you can get involved with promoting and protecting the hunting opportunities we have.

If you would like to get these newsletters directly or refer a friend please send me an email at erice@ruffedgrousesociety.org.

Have a safe and enjoyable hunting season! *Eric*

New Regional Biologist and Grant Writer

Hey, that's me. In mid-May of this past year I accepted the position as Eastern Great Lakes Regional Wildlife Biologist and Grant writer with the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society. That is a lot to fit on a business card but well worth it.

A little background. I am a native Michigander who grew up chasing deer and squirrels in southern Michigan and was eventually, and to my eternal gratitude, introduced to grouse and woodcock hunting by my great uncle the late Tom Ellis. Tom was a well-known outdoorsman in northern Michigan and may be remembered by some of you as the proprietor of the T.W. Ellis ski shop at Boyne Mountain for many years. Tom was also a dyed in the wool Llewellyn Setter guy with dogs out of the Michigan "DNR line", a family tradition that I am carrying on. My one and only regret about taking this position with RGS is that Tom did not get to see it happen, he would have been pretty excited about it.

I received a BS in Resource Ecology and Management from The University of Michigan in 1997. Shortly after this I moved to Mongolia where I worked with the Peace Corps as a parks/wildlife volunteer and later guided fly fishing and horse riding trips. While there I was fortunate enough on a few occasions to flush one of the world's largest grouse species, the black-billed capercaillie (*Tetrao urogalloides*). Unforgettable moments for sure. After moving back to the US in 2001 I worked for the City of Ann Arbor's Natural Area Preservation division doing prescribed burns and habitat improvement projects on city owned property. After my wife graduated from dental school we moved to the University of Idaho where I completed a MS degree at the College of Natural Resources.

For the past seven years I worked for the Conservation Resource Alliance in Traverse City where I helped private landowners and other partners protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat in northern Michigan. This work primarily focused on sustainable forest management on private lands, promoting the planting of native flora, invasive species removal, and maintaining the ecological integrity of rivers, streams, and riparian corridors. I was particularly interested in partnering with other organizations (like RGS and the MDNR) to get projects accomplished as was highlighted in last year's [Michigan DNR Wildlife Division 2013 annual report](#) (page 25).

A large portion of that position included writing and managing private, state, and federal grant proposals, something that I will continue in my current position at the regional and national level. Any RGS members or partners with ideas or information on potential granting sources (especially private foundations) should feel free to contact me to discuss these opportunities.

I enjoyed partnering with RGS in the past and appreciated their focus on young forest habitat and on-the-ground results. I am very happy to be working for the organization and doing my part to improve habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and all the other species that require this habitat.

Regional Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Status, 2014

My region includes Indiana, Ohio, the lower peninsula of Michigan and the eastern upper peninsula of Michigan accounting for some of the best upland habitat in the world, areas with zero upland birds, and everything in between. Thus, it is difficult to offer a report for the entire region but below I will summarize what we do know about these areas for the upcoming season.

First the bad news, in Indiana ruffed grouse were not heard again on the traditional spring drumming survey routes. Ruffed grouse populations are in such peril that the hunting season is

likely to be suspended in the near future. Woodcock numbers were better but are still considerably lower than what they were just a decade ago. Without significant changes in how public and private lands are managed in the state it is entirely possible that the ruffed grouse will be extirpated from Indiana in the near future.

In slightly better news, according to Mark Wiley, ODNR Wildlife Biologist “grouse populations remain low in Ohio even with increasing acreage of habitat on some state forests and wildlife areas. The 2014 drumming index (2.4 drummers per 100 stops) was 20% lower than the 2013 index (3.0 drummers per 100 stops), though the routes surveyed were not wholly consistent between these years. The best opportunity to find pockets of ruffed grouse continues to be in young forest habitat on public lands in southern Ohio including the Shawnee, Zaleski, Tar Hollow and Vinton Furnace State Forests.” It should be noted that Ohio does have more active management being conducted than in Indiana and is thus producing more habitat for birds to occupy. Woodcock numbers in the state showed a small annual decrease of 3.6% over last year.

The full Michigan Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Status Report for 2014 can be viewed at this [link](#). As to be expected, the news is much better than our southern friends with ruffed grouse drumming up around 16% over last year and all signs pointing towards the population heading up from the 10 year low. “There was an average of 12.43 drums heard per route statewide, a 16% increase from 2013 (10.77) average. Highest drumming counts were in Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula; 14.86), following Zone 2 (Northern Lower Peninsula; 11.64) and Zone 3 (Southern Lower Peninsula; 4.14).” It should be noted that the long lasting deep fluffy snow found in much of Michigan last winter made for ideal snow roosting conditions for ruffed grouse, potentially helping with the population uptick.

Woodcock numbers in the state were down 4.4% in the spring singing ground surveys, all of which can be found at this link from the USFWS: [American Woodcock Population Status, 2014](#) . Field conditions encountered by woodcock banders in the state this past spring were a mixed bag. From the Michigan report cited above we find that the average woodcock brood size for 2014 was 2.37 chicks compared with 3.0 in 2013. But, this year the number of chicks observed per 100 hours afield was 71.87. In 2013, the number of chicks observed per 100 hours afield was 53.2 in 2013. Did all you banders get new glasses and guzzle energy drinks this year or is something else at play? Regardless of the final numbers, the best habitat in Michigan will always have birds and there is a lot of great habitat out there for you to explore with friends, family and your dogs. Good luck!

Help Michigan Track Wildlife Food

Below is a portion of an email from Alex Killion with Michigan State University. MSU and the MDNR are starting a new program that may be of interest to RGS/AWS members and will provide up-to-date information on the condition of soft and hard mast species around the state. This information will be very helpful when planning future land and wildlife management.

Eric

Michigan State University has been working with the DNR Wildlife Division to create a program that allows citizens to participate in research to benefit wildlife conservation. The goal of this program is to quantify the amount of wild fruits and nuts (mast) throughout the state each year. Various species rely heavily on these food sources, and this information will help the DNR better manage these species.

The program consists of citizens “adopting” mast producing plants in their area and recording the amount of mast present each year. Anyone can participate regardless of education level, and it only

takes a few minutes each year. We believe this a great opportunity to educate landowners about natural resources and also allows them to play a significant role in conservation.

This is the first year of the program and we are looking for a small group of people to participate and share their feedback. We have developed smartphone applications and a website for quick and easy data recording. You can sign-up and find more information here www.mimast.org.

For further information contact Alex Killion at MSU.

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Northern Michigan Labor Day Tornados

This past Labor Day I was biking around Mackinac Island with my kids and got back to the hotel just before a massive storm system rolled through. Just to our south this storm produced significant damage and multiple tornados. Fortunately there were no injuries and “limited” damage to property. This outbreak was called the “biggest tornado outbreak we have had here since October 2007” and covered portions of Cheboygan, Otsego, Crawford, and Kalkaska counties. Folks who are travelling in these areas to bird hunt soon may have limited access in some spots. But, it is also important to keep in mind that these storms are likely to have created new blowdowns and future young forest habitat so have the GPS handy. Below is a press release from the MDNR on the storms and their impacts on regional trails.

Eric

The Department of Natural Resources today announced that damage caused by severe weather on Labor Day has been surveyed and cleared on northern lower Michigan off-road vehicle trails and routes.

Based on National Weather Service data and site inspections by air and ground, ORV Program volunteers and DNR staff have been able to assess and clear the debris and downed signs left in the storm’s wake. Trail systems specifically targeted for assessment and clearing included:

- Crapo Creek ORV Trail and Route and North Branch ORV Route (southeastern Otsego County)
- Kalkaska ORV Trail and Route (northern Kalkaska County)
- Frederic Trail and Route (northwestern Crawford County)

“Remember, there are thousands of miles of trails in the remote forests of Michigan,” said DNR recreation trail specialist Paige Perry. “Our clearing efforts since Labor Day were focused on the trails that had the greatest possibility of damage. We ask users to always ride responsibly and be prepared for other users or natural obstructions on the trail.”

Any individuals with questions, updates or reports about the trails network can contact Paige Perry at 989-732-3541 ext. 5086.

New Grouse Enhanced Management Systems (GEMS) in Michigan

What follows below is an edited version of an August 29th, 2014 MDNR press release on their new GEMS program. The Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society have been assisting with the implementation and promotion of this new program and will continue to assist with new sites as they are added. If you make time to visit one of these sites this fall make sure to also visit one of the local business cooperators and tell them you are there because of the GEMS site and prime grouse/woodcock habitat in the area. The two links below have detailed maps for the sites including cover types.

Eric

It isn't every day that you would find Governor Rick Snyder and Department of Natural Resources Director Keith Creagh working shoulder-to-shoulder in the vast state forest lands of the Upper Peninsula, shovels in hand, planting nannyberry shrubs and crabapple trees.

But on a hot, sunny day in mid-August, that's exactly what two dozen citizen volunteers and a handful of DNR staff witnessed at the end of a two-track trail just south of Gwinn in Marquette County, where, thanks to the collaborative efforts of all parties mentioned above, a diamond in the rough has gradually become a brilliant gem.

The GEMS – or Grouse Enhanced Management Systems – are a new DNR initiative designed to bring attention to Michigan's outstanding upland bird hunting opportunities through the creation of a series of walk-in access hunting trails intensively managed for improved ruffed grouse and woodcock hunting.

DNR Wildlife Division development of the GEMS hinged largely upon the support of the Ruffed Grouse Society and increased revenue from the state's new license fee package.

"The Ruffed Grouse Society and the American Woodcock Society are both extremely excited about the new GEMS initiative," said Eric Ellis, East Great Lakes regional biologist for the Ruffed Grouse Society. "We see this as an opportunity to get our members in the field, working on habitat improvement projects at the GEMS sites, and using hunting destinations as opportunities to promote grouse and woodcock hunting and conservation in Michigan."

To get the GEMS ready for their debut season, the DNR's Wildlife Division and Ruffed Grouse Society professional staff and members have partnered to plan and complete the necessary groundwork: clearing trails, improving habitat with strategic plantings to benefit a variety of wildlife, and placing signs, gates and trail information kiosks.

The work has also been supported with volunteer hours and financial support from the American Woodcock Society, Ducks Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, Michigan United Conservation Clubs and the U.P. Wildlife Habitat Fund.

The GEMS concept first occurred to Terry Minzey, the DNR's Upper Peninsula regional wildlife supervisor, while he was watching a television show that featured a "trail" of golf courses the public was invited to visit and play.

He recalls thinking: "Why couldn't we do something like this for upland bird hunting?"

Now, less than two years later, the GEMS have morphed from concept to reality. To date, the DNR has established [seven GEMS locations](#) (in Cheboygan, Chippewa, Dickinson, Gladwin, Gogebic, Mackinac and Marquette counties), and is committed to developing at least six more statewide by September 2015.

GEMS are developed on sites with historically good grouse and woodcock habitat that have been further enhanced with plantings of clover and fruit-bearing trees and shrubs. An additional key component of habitat improvement for the GEMS is the intensive cutting of aspen on an accelerated 40-year cycle, which will increase the presence of young aspen – the preferred habitat of ruffed grouse and woodcock.

“Cutting has already taken place on all seven of our GEMS areas,” said Al Stewart, the DNR’s upland game bird specialist. “The idea is to move these areas from being good habitat for grouse, woodcock and other young forest wildlife to being excellent habitat for those species.”

Stewart also pointed out that promoting early successional forests through intensive cutting provides an opportunity to highlight the value of young forests to stakeholders who might not be aware of the vital role strategic cutting plays in habitat management.

“GEMS management will provide a unique opportunity to showcase the relationship between habitat improvement and the timber industry,” Stewart said. “We’re not only promoting the value of young forests to the mainstream business culture, we’re providing habitat that will benefit a whole suite of species.”

In addition to improving wildlife habitat, the GEMS hold two other specific purposes: Creating safe and easily accessible hunting opportunities for new hunters or those with limited mobility, and supporting the vital tourism economy of the Upper Peninsula and northern Lower Peninsula.

The walk-in access trails, which feature minimal terrain changes, are gated and marked with signs and information kiosks at trailheads. [Detailed maps of the GEMS](#) are also available online.

“We’re looking at creating a place for a guy who’s 70 years old and still wants to grouse hunt, but can’t bust the brush anymore,” Minzey said. “Or maybe a hunter mentoring a young kid, or a wounded veteran who can’t get through the thick stuff; they can let the dogs go and stay on the trail until the dogs find a bird.

“These trails will also certainly be used by hunters targeting other species attracted to this habitat – deer, rabbits, turkey, and so on – not to mention the opportunities the GEMS will present for cross-country skiers, snowshoeing, birding, hiking and other types of outdoor recreation.”

With an eye on the many out-of-state hunters who come to the U.P. and northern Lower Peninsula to chase grouse and woodcock, Stewart and Minzey both envision the GEMS as a series of destinations that visiting hunters can follow across the state, from one end of grouse territory to the other.

Partner groups and sponsors in communities across northern Michigan also see the potential for connecting hunters with local businesses and boosting seasonal economies.

Organizations including the City of Marquette, Plum Creek Timber Company, Huron-Manistee National Forest and the Hiawatha National Forest have already joined with the DNR and Ruffed Grouse Society in support of the GEMS – with one of the current GEMS found on national forest land and future locations planned on private timber company land.

Business owners near the GEMS are also signing up to promote the program by offering discounts or other incentives to hunters who visit a GEMS site, take a photo of themselves with a GEMS sign, and then patronize the local sponsor establishment.

“The GEMS really are a win-win-win for habitat, hunters and the economy,” Stewart said. “We see the GEMS as opportunities to really work with chambers of commerce or other community leaders to promote place-based economies, support the local timber industry, and help everyone recognize the economic value of hunting.”

For more information about the GEMS and how to become a sponsor or partner, visit [this website](#)

Charter Memberships Available to the American Woodcock Society

Those who join the newly formed American Woodcock Society (AWS) through January 30, 2015 will become an AWS Charter Member, a special group who joined AWS during its inaugural year. Charter members receive a commemorative decal, patch and certificate to proudly display. To join, contact the membership department by toll free phone at 888-564-6747.

Also new or renewing members can join both RGS and AWS as a dual member for the discounted rate of \$60 (regular \$35 for each or \$180 for three years).

You can reach the RGS/AWS membership page using this [LINK](#).

Michigan DNR Invites Public Input on Forest Plans

The Department of Natural Resources will host open houses for public comment at offices around the state this fall. *The more RGS/AWS members that attend these and provide input the better off both ruffed grouse and American woodcock will be!* Be nice, be courteous, and voice your support for aspen management, native plantings, and non-commercial aspen/alder cuttings. These open houses are used by the DNR to provide information and receive public comments on proposed forest management treatments. Maps and information regarding proposed treatments will be available at the open house and are available at www.michigan.gov/forestplan. Records of decisions, recorded timber harvests and other treatments from past years are available on this page. This is the best opportunity for ruffed grouse/woodcock hunters to express their interests in maintaining habitat for their favorite birds on these public lands. It is also a great opportunity to get advice from MDNR staff on potential hunting locations. I hope to see you there!

The current Michigan DNR open house schedule can be viewed at this [LINK](#). Upcoming open houses are scheduled at the following locations:

October 1st, Crystal Falls Field Office 1420 US-2 West, 3:00 PM CDT to 7:00 PM CDT

October 2nd, Newberry Field Office, 3-6 pm

October 7th, Grayling Field Office, 12:30 - 5:30 PM

October 9th, Atlanta Field Office, 2-6 PM

October 9th, Shingleton Field Office library/conference room, 4-7pm

October 23rd, Marquette Township Hall 1000 Commerce Drive, Marquette, 4:00 PM EDT to 7:00 PM EDT

Help RGS & AWS Increase Support for Habitat and Hunting

Participate in the RGS and AWS Member-Get-A-Member Campaign – Help us increase support for habitat and hunting – recruit a fellow grouse or woodcock hunter to become a member and both current and new members receive a \$20 Orvis gift card. The participating current member is also placed in a drawing for a chance to create habitat by contributing additional funds to the state Drummer Fund of the winner’s choice. To participate, see the rules and regulations at the RGS website or follow this [LINK](#).

Upcoming RGS Events in the Region

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

9/19/2014	West Branch	MI	Annual Banquet
9/25/2014	Milford	OH	OH & MI Grouse/Woodcock Update
9/27/2014	St. Clairsville	OH	Annual Banquet
9/27/2014	Cadillac	MI	Annual Banquet
10/10/2014	Petoskey	MI	Annual Banquet
10/15/2014	Alpena	MI	Annual Banquet
10/23-26/2014	Gaylord	MI	Woodcock Celebration/Challenge
11/20/2014	Athens	OH	24th Annual 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.



Ruby’s feathered friend, a well concealed woodcock.