



Ruff Country News



Wisconsin, Iowa, & Illinois

Volume 15, Issue 4, December 15, 2015



Wishing You All A Happy Holiday Season

Though a glance outside suggests nice, mid-Autumn weather, the calendar tells me that the holiday season is upon us and winter should be just around the corner. After two good, old-fashioned cold and snowy winters, the winter of 2015-2016 is starting out very mild. Though we had decent snow cover here in Wisconsin for the opening of our gun deer season, that snow quickly melted off and conditions have been mild since. Frequent rains have also been the norm in recent weeks, and high water levels have delayed a number of habitat projects that Mike Riggle, operator of RGS/AWS' habitat machine, has on his docket. Here's hoping for a solid freeze soon so that this important habitat work can commence.

From a bird perspective, mild weather won't impact grouse unless things turn colder without snow on the ground, which would limit snow roosting and perhaps impose some energetic challenges for ol' Ruff. The mild fall weather also seems to have led to a later-than-normal woodcock flight, as reported by many hunters I've spoken with throughout the state. For more details regarding the timing of this year's fall flight, check out RGS' Woodcock Migration Mapping System at <http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/Migration-Map-History>.

Nearly 5 months into my role as the RGS/AWS Regional Wildlife Biologist for Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa, I have only gained energy and enthusiasm for the conservation of young forest habitats and the critters we all care about. I have been daily impressed with the passion and dedication of our members, and have greatly enjoyed discussions I have had with many of you during my travels throughout the region. I look forward to continuing these discussions in the New Year.

I wish you all a safe, relaxing, and enjoyable holiday season with your family. I hope you're able to spend some time outdoors, and please contact me if you have any issues or ideas you'd like to discuss.

Scott

Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership Expands Young Forest Efforts on Private Lands



As Ruffed Grouse Society members, you recognize the value of active forest management in maintaining the habitats and wildlife species we care about. Aging aspen and oak forests are a threat to this important wildlife community, and are the focus of a new partnership among 13 agencies and organizations, with the mission of increasing levels of engagement by private forest landowners in northern Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership (WYFP) brings natural resource professionals together to discuss means of better engaging private landowners, and offers those landowners the technical and financial assistance necessary to begin actively managing their forested acres. The WYFP also works with landowners to regenerate lowland alder, to enhance habitat quality for American woodcock.

The focus on private lands is significant, as the majority of aspen and oak acreage in Wisconsin is owned by private landowners, and working with these landowners to regenerate these forests will therefore provide lasting value for our wildlife community. WYFP staff will assist landowners with developing a forest management plan, identifying sites with potential for aspen and alder regeneration, and in securing financial assistance to help get habitat projects completed on their lands. Interested landowners can learn more about the WYFP at



Wisconsin DNR wildlife biologist Jeremy Holtz works with private landowners throughout northern Wisconsin to promote young forest management.

<http://youngforest.org/wisconsin/wisconsin-young-forest-partnership>. The Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society is a committed WYFP partner, and will continue to work with our many other engaged partners to ensure that landowners in northern Wisconsin have the knowledge and tools necessary to maintain the health and diversity of their forests.

“From Seeds to Sky” Video captures WYFP efforts

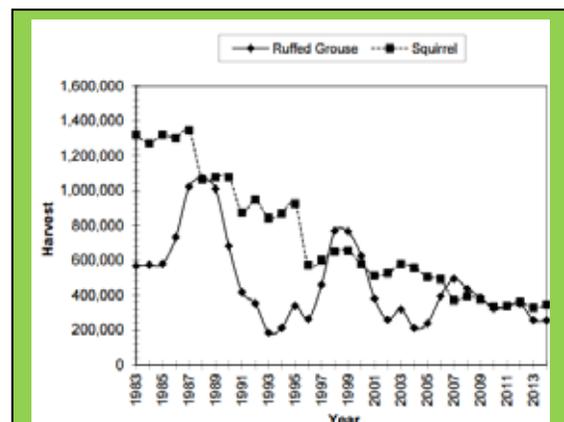


Wisconsin Young Forest Partnership members collaborated on the production of a 20-minute video, released in 2014 to serve as an outreach tool for landowners interested in learning about the value of young forests and options for healthy forest management. The Ruffed Grouse Society provided primary funding for production of this video, which has been extremely well-received by viewers. “From Seeds to Sky” is viewable from the RGS home page video area **More** button or at <http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/Prior-Videos#WYFP> or by searching for the title on YouTube.

Wisconsin Wildlife Reports Offer Unique Insight

As wildlife enthusiasts, we are all interested in how wildlife populations change through time. From annual fluctuations to long-term trends, these changes in abundance both impact our hunting experiences and indicate changes in weather or habitat conditions. The Wisconsin DNR conducts annual wildlife surveys to provide indices to the population health of various wildlife species, including ruffed grouse. WDNR survey staff also survey hunters annually, and use information gleaned from these surveys to estimate hunter numbers and effort, success rates, and overall harvests for a wide variety of game species. Reports that summarize these surveys are compiled annually, and provide an interesting picture of both Wisconsin’s wildlife and hunting communities. Want to know how many grouse were harvested in the state last year? Whether the grouse population has increased or decreased the past few years? How many days the average grouse hunter spends afield? What hunting dogs are favored by hunters in the state? All of that information is at your finger tips.

Go to [WI DNR Wildlife Habitat Reports](#) for more information. Reports on the 2014 and 2015 ruffed



Historic ruffed grouse and squirrel harvest trends. An example of the information available through the Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Reports.

grouse drumming surveys are near the top of the page, and the “small game harvest” survey linked near the bottom will provide recent harvest estimates for ruffed grouse and other small game species in the state. Peruse, ponder, and enjoy.

RGS Testifies in Congress on Effects of Fire on USFS Budgets

RGS PRESS RELEASE- November 5, 2015

Coraopolis, PA – The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) testified to the United States Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry about the effect of the United States Forest Service (USFS) wildfire suppression budget on game and nongame wildlife species including ruffed grouse, white-tailed deer and other forest wildlife on November 5, 2015. RGS addressed the growing challenges posed by wildfires and the associated suppression efforts to wildlife conservation on our nation’s federal public lands, nearby state and private lands.

“The current dedication of approximately 50 percent of the United States Forest Service (USFS) budget to combat these natural disasters is significantly affecting the ability of the agency to meet wildlife-related and other forest plan objectives and public expectations,” said RGS Director of Conservation Policy Dan Dessecker to the Committee.

National forests in the eastern United States have consistently failed to meet minimum goals for young forest and other early successional habitats as outlined in existing forest plans (On average, national forests are meeting 24 percent of minimum goals). This failure has resulted in substantial declines in populations of game and nongame wildlife that depend upon these important habitats and is in part a result of wildfire-related demands on USFS financial and personnel resources.

“We must work to increase the diversity of forest wildlife habitats on our national forests across the Nation. Common-sense solutions, such as targeted categorical exclusions, to redundant and excessive project planning requirements are essential,” Dessecker testified. “Likewise, fiscally responsible funding protocols to ease the financial burden on the USFS from wildfire suppression costs would enhance the ability of the agency to play its essential role in the conservation of forest wildlife and the protection of our nation’s hunting heritage.”

To justify its concerns, RGS testified that over a half-million sportsmen and women pursue ruffed grouse each year, and the associated expenditures are vitally important to many rural communities, particularly in the Great Lakes states and New England. Unfortunately, declines in young forest habitat on national forests and surrounding landscapes throughout much of the East have led to declines in ruffed grouse populations. Ruffed grouse have been all but extirpated from the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia, the Hoosier National Forest in Indiana, the Sumpter National Forest in South Carolina and the Wayne National Forest in Ohio.

Deer hunting is both a foundation of our Nation’s hunting heritage and a huge economic engine. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, approximately 11 million sportsmen and women hunt

deer each year and this activity accounts for a substantial portion of the \$34 billion contributed annually by hunters to the United States economy. The lack of young forest habitats on the George Washington – Jefferson National Forest in Virginia has dramatically reduced white-tailed deer hunting on the Forest. Since 1994, hunter participation and harvest on public land west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia (primarily National Forest) has declined by 30 and 57 percent, respectively.

In addition, many nongame species that require young forest habitats are experiencing population declines as these habitats decline on national forests and surrounding landscapes throughout the eastern United States. In 2007, the American Bird Conservancy classified young deciduous habitats in the eastern United States as one of the Nation's 20-most threatened bird habitats. Breeding Bird Survey data from the United States Geological Survey show that across the eastern United States, 59 percent of the songbird species that use these young forest habitats for breeding are declining, while only 11 percent are increasing.

The wildfire-related demands on the USFS financial and personnel resources are limiting the ability of the agency to implement the sustainable timber harvests and other forest habitat management practices that are required to ensure that young forest habitats and the wildlife they support remain viable components of our forest landscapes.

Again, everyone, have an enjoyable holiday season, and I hope that 2016 opens with a chance for you to get out and hit the woods (hopefully, with snow on the ground!). Please don't hesitate to contact me with comments, questions, or to chat about young forest conservation.

Scott Walter
Western Great Lakes Regional Wildlife Biologist
16885 County Hwy U
Viola WI 54664
(608) 538-3840

ScottW@ruffedgrousesociety.org

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

