

Minnesota Region FAN UPDATE

November 2009



2009 National Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Hunt Results

The National Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Hunt provides an unparalleled opportunity to study the population ecology of these two important upland game birds. The Hunt is conducted in the same locale, the same time each year, and using the same methods, which provides an outstanding opportunity to study the annual variation of the local ruffed grouse population and how that variation relates to the birds 10-year cycle.

The 2009 Hunt was conducted on 8-9 October and was headquartered out of the Sawmill Inn in Grand Rapids, Minnesota. Due to an increase in ruffed grouse drumming activity documented by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' spring drumming survey, expectations ran high that hunters would find more birds than during the 2008 Hunt.

Hunt results suggest that the 2009 ruffed grouse population is very similar to what was found in northcentral Minnesota in 2008. Because the number of Hunt participants can vary slightly from year to year, the best measure of hunter success is the average number of birds harvested by each hunter each day. In 2008, each Hunt participant harvested 1.16 grouse per day; this number dropped just slightly in 2009 to 1.1 grouse per hunter per day.

One confounding factor this year at the Hunt was leaf cover – virtually all of our seasoned huntsmen and hunters found that there were many more leaves still on the trees and shrubs than in previous years. As all veteran grouse hunters understand, the birds are tough enough to bag when they give you a good look. When flushing behind a screen of leaves, grouse can be especially difficult to hit, which may account for the lower than anticipated harvest at the Hunt this year.

On the flip side, we had reasonably good weather both days of the Hunt this year (although a bit windy the first day), whereas the second day of last year's hunt brought steady rain to northern Minnesota that probably dampened both hunter interest and effort. The proportion of the total grouse harvest that was comprised of birds born this spring was just a bit below the long-term average, which suggests that reproductive success was close to normal in 2009.

The woodcock harvest this year was down substantially from 2008. Each hunter bagged an average of only 1.1 woodcock each day at the 2009 Hunt, whereas the average daily bag last year was over 1.5. This is due in large part to very few migrant birds being present on most hunt areas this year compared to 2008.

Ruffed Grouse Society and Department of Natural Resources enhance shrubland in northeast Minnesota.

The Ruffed Grouse Society provided approximately \$9,000 in funding to restore important shrubland habitats on the Sax-Zim Wildlife Management Area near Eveleth this September. These shrublands can provide important breeding and migration habitats for American woodcock, as well as important year-round cover for the remnant sharp-tailed grouse population that still exists in the area.

The Society and the Department of Natural Resources identified expanses of upland shrubs declining in vigor due to old age and in need of restoration. A private contractor was hired to mow these shrub stands during the fall to encourage the growth of healthy young plants next spring – thereby extending the life of these habitats for woodcock, sharp-tails, golden-winged warblers and a host of other critters. The implementation of this project is due in large part to the strong support provided by the DNR Wildlife and Forestry professionals stationed at the Eveleth field office.

Tickets now available for the Ruffed Grouse Society 2009-2010 National Raffle

Tickets are now available for the 2009-2010 RGS National Raffle. The raffle winner will receive a Winchester Model 21 Baby Frame 28 gauge shotgun. This one-of-a-kind gun features 28" barrels choked IC/M with two beads, a straight English stock crafted from AAA fancy feathercrotch walnut to a checkered butt, and a 14 1/2" LOP. The beavertail forend has an ebony insert in the tip. It has a single selective trigger and the RGS logo is hand-engraved in gold on the bottom of the receiver. The approximate retail value of this gun is \$28,000. Tickets are \$100 each with the winner drawn on June 30, 2010. To buy your raffle tickets, contact Dan Dessecker at 715-234-8302 or rgsdess@chibardun.coop, or print and mail the following order form to:

RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY

PO Box 2

Rice Lake, WI 54868

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____

_____ Tickets @ \$100.00 Each =

\$_____ Total Enclosed

CHECK (Payable to Ruffed Grouse Society)

CREDIT CARD

CC # _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Minnesota's new source of funding for wildlife conservation

In November 2008, voters in Minnesota approved a constitutional amendment to increase the state sales tax by 0.375%. One third of the funds generated by this increase are dedicated to the restoration, protection, and enhancement of wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and other wildlife. The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (Council) was subsequently established to make recommendations to the state legislature regarding the disbursement of the funds dedicated to conservation.

Initial projections suggest that approximately \$60 million will be available annually for conservation initiatives. The Council plans to divide this total equally among the three landscape components identified in the amendment – wetlands, prairies and forests. Funds generated through the increased sales tax first became available for disbursement in June 2009.

In March 2009, the Council recommended to the legislature that all \$20 million available for forest wildlife related projects in Fiscal Year 2009 be dedicated to a single project – the Forests for the Future/Upper Mississippi River Project. The goal of the Upper Mississippi River Project is to acquire a permanent conservation easement for 187,000 acres of industrial forestland in Itasca, St Louis, Aitkin, Cass and Koochiching Counties. This land is currently owned by UPM-Kymmene (Blandin). Because the initial estimated total cost of this easement acquisition is \$36 million, the Council has recommended that funds available for forest wildlife related projects in FY 2010 be dedicated to complete the Upper Mississippi River Project.

There is broad support within the conservation community in Minnesota for securing a permanent easement to this vast tract of working forest. Although the economic downturn that occurred in late 2008 has cooled interest in the acquisition and commercial development of these types of properties, development pressure in better economic times would seriously threaten public access to and enjoyment of these wild lands. The Society's Grand Rapids Chapter coordinated the submission of a letter to key legislators voicing support for the Upper Mississippi River Project on behalf of 9 Society Chapters in Minnesota.

To help the Council better understand the essential role of active forest management in the conservation of forest wildlife, the Society helped coordinate an informational workshop for the Council and the public in July. A series of indoor presentations by the Society, the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the Wildlife Management Institute on the status and trends of ruffed grouse, woodcock and other wildlife that require young forest habitats set the stage for an afternoon fieldtrip. The field tour was conducted on a tract of industrial forest land near Grand Rapids and included various stops designed to demonstrate how and why we manage our forests to benefit both rural economies and forest wildlife. Several of the Council members on the tour voiced strong support for the use of thoughtful timber harvest operations as one element of a balanced approach to forest conservation.

The Society is currently working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, various County Land Departments in Minnesota, and other wildlife conservation organizations active in the state to identify opportunities for shrubland

restoration through noncommercial mowing or shearing. These management opportunities will form the foundation for a second proposal to the Council that will be submitted when additional funds become available for forest wildlife related projects."

For more information, please contact Dan Dessecker at rgsdess@chibardun.coop

