



*Photo by Paul Smith*

# Western Great Lakes Region FAN UPDATE

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## **We made it!!**

The dog knows it, the calendar says it and our weather will soon show it. Grouse season is just a few days away with Wisconsin's opener this Saturday (in most of the state) with Michigan's season to follow on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The months of waiting are behind us as we look forward to our visit to that favorite cover and the memories the season will bring.

Despite where we are in the grouse cycle it is always a good time to be in the grouse woods. Reports (see below) we are getting are not indicating a bumper crop of birds this year but I've seen enough to be encouraged. Take a look at the rainfall map for this summer (below). Note how variable the precipitation has been across the region this summer. But as always the best covers seem to always hold birds and most likely will again this year.

So good luck to all this fall and have a safe and fun hunt. *Gary*

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# Wisconsin **Preliminary** Brood Survey Results, 2014

By Brian Dhuey, WI Department of Natural Resources

Most of the winter was below normal for temperature and normal to above for snow fall, lingering snow cover continued into early spring and led to a later than normal spring green up. Timing of spring green up can effect game bird survival and physical condition going into the breeding season and in turn effect brood survival. Brood rearing conditions in Wisconsin in 2014 were average for temperature with much of the state seeing temperatures about average or slightly below for the months of June and July and average for August. Above average precipitation was the norm for much of the state for June, with the state average 2.53" above normal (see map below). Precipitation levels returned to normal or below for the months of July and August for the southern parts of the state but continued to be average or above for the northwest. Early June weather is the most critical for turkey, pheasant and grouse broods as this is when recently-hatched chicks are most susceptible to hypothermia if they get wet. Large rainfall events in much of Wisconsin could have affected brood survival during June. Much of July and August weather was excellent for brood rearing and survival.

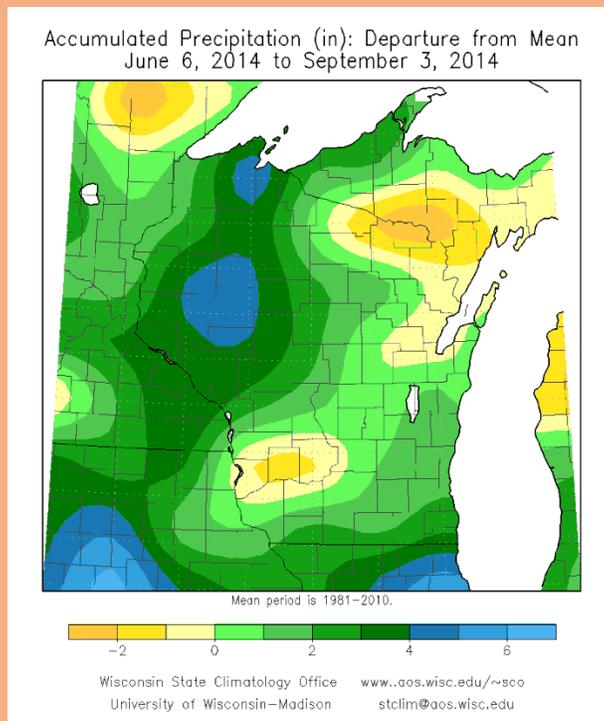
DNR field personnel were asked to report the number and size of game bird broods observed from 8 June through 16 August during their normal working hours. At the end of the survey period, brood reports were then summarized and compiled by the wildlife surveys program. Reports from field staff fell 9% in 2014 from the previous year and are below historic averages.

Ruffed grouse broods seen per observer hour were down 10% compared to 2013 levels. Ruffed Grouse production was down in 2 of the 3 regions that compose the primary range for ruffed grouse, central (-59%), northern (-2%), and southwestern (56%). Ruffed grouse brood size rose from 3.8 in 2013 to 4.0 young per brood in 2014. While some areas of the primary ruffed grouse range will be better than others, it appears that ruffed grouse numbers will be no better than last year and well below their cyclic high of a few years ago.

*2013-14 Ten-Week Brood Survey, broods seen per observer hour and average brood size.*

	2013 Broods / Observer Hour	2013 Average Brood Size	2014 Broods / Observer Hour	2014 Average Brood Size
Turkey	0.020	4.2	0.024	4.5
Pheasant	0.007	5.2	0.010	4.7
Ruffed Grouse	0.012	3.8	0.011	4.0
Gray Partridge <sup>1</sup>	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

<sup>1</sup> no gray partridge broods were observed in 2013 or 2014



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## WI DNR Announces New Gamebird Hunting Tool

The Fields & Forest Lands Interactive Gamebird Hunting Tool (FFLIGHT) was designed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to help upland gamebird hunters locate cover suitable for ruffed grouse and woodcock, managed dove fields and properties stocked with game farm pheasants.

In recognition of the passion with which these hunters pursue upland birds and to help make their time in Wisconsin's outdoors more productive and enjoyable, the Wisconsin DNR has developed the Fields and Forest Lands Inventory Gamebird Hunting Tool.

### **Launch desktop**

### **Launch mobile**

This tool allows hunters to quickly locate:

- cover suitable for ruffed grouse and woodcock
- fields managed for mourning doves
- properties stocked with pheasants by the DNR

Additional information on this new tool is available at on the WI DNR website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/fflight.html> .

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## **Storms Damage Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest**

A Note from Paul Strong, Forest Supervisor

Two weather events are significantly affecting normal operations on the Chequamegon/Nicolet National Forest. Intense storms blew through the area the morning of Thursday, September 4. In addition, rain and wind occurring Tuesday night and Wednesday (September 9 and 10) resulted in excessive high water conditions across much of the Forest. We are experiencing **road washouts, culvert failures, overflowing ditches, and motorized and non-motorized trail damage** across the Forest. A number of developed recreational facilities including **campgrounds, trail heads, and boat launches** received significant damage from excessive water and fallen trees and limbs.

With several hunting seasons underway or starting soon, our roads and trails and some recreation sites are about to receive a high pulse of activity from hunters who primarily want to drive as close as they can to their desired hunting locations. They are likely to find some roads blocked by trees or limbs, surface damage from runoff, standing water, culvert issues, or weakened shoulders. A few may be administratively closed temporarily to any vehicle use. We are urging extreme caution on roads for personal and vehicular safety and conservative use of roads and trails where heavy or untimely use may create additional damage.

Many of the affected roads are haul routes for logging operations on the Forest and other ownerships. Many serve as primary transportation routes for private individuals to their homes and for emergency vehicles, school buses, service vehicles, etc. These are the highest priority for our response work. We are working closely with Town road crews on these roads.

We have established a **September Storm Damage web page** on our Internet site for the public to view information on the status and availability of roads, trails, recreation sites, etc. This will be updated daily until we are able to get infrastructure assets repaired and resume normal operations on the Forest. We anticipate this will be several weeks.

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/cnnf/home/?cid=STELPRD3816026>

Additionally, we have a Facebook site where other photographs of damage, repair work, and information will be available as well as the opportunity for comments to be made.

[https://www.facebook.com/CNNF002?ref=br\\_tf](https://www.facebook.com/CNNF002?ref=br_tf)

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## **New Grouse Enhanced Management Systems in Michigan Give Hunters a Gem of an Opportunity**

The GEMS – or Grouse Enhanced Management Systems – are a new DNR initiative designed to bring attention to Michigan’s upland bird hunting opportunities through the creation of a series of walk-in access 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 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 (MUCC) and the U.P. Wildlife Habitat Fund.

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.”

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.

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

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 [www.michigan.gov/hunting](http://www.michigan.gov/hunting) .

A GEMS kick-off event took place at the 2,800-acre Drummond Island GEMS site on Thursday, Sept. 4, featuring speakers from the conservation and business communities as well as Director Creagh, along with a tour of the GEMS trail system.

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## **Pedal Your Way to Prime Habitat And Lower Hunting Pressure**

By Shawn Hagan, The Forestland Group, LLC

Many hunters will hit the field this fall after putting away the fishing gear, boats and bikes from the summer’s activities. But before you hang the bike for the year consider taking it with you on your next trip afield chasing ruffed grouse and woodcock.

The Forestland Group (TFG) manages over 200,000 acres in Wisconsin and permits outdoor enthusiast to utilize mountain bikes in conjunction with those permitted activities on their MFL Open lands located in the following counties: Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, Forest, Iron, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Polk, Price, Rusk, Sawyer and Washburn Counties. In Wisconsin, these lands are managed by Shawn Hagan, Senior Director of Forest Operations for The Forestland Group. Hagan noted, “These lands will appear in the newer plat books, county tax maps and WDNR MFL maps as either Heartwood Forestland Fund VI or VII, Great Lakes NMTC or Wisconsin Northern Highlands NMTC. Maps of these lands can be found at our website as well at: [www.tfgoperations.com](http://www.tfgoperations.com) .

While the Managed Forest Law Program does not grant the use of bicycles on lands enrolled without owners' permission, TFG is granting the necessary permission on MFL Open lands they manage. "The balance between access for recreational use and resource protection is a tricky one", says Hagan. "We want to encourage use of the land in a responsible fashion. Many of the tracts we manage have a decent network of roads, but allowing opened continued public access has resulted in degradation of these roads during wet periods." Concerns over illegal dumping, firewood theft, and the movement of invasive species, brought in by motorized vehicles were also noted as reasons for controlled access. These lands are currently open for walk-in hunting opportunities.

For those with smart phones, maps available on TFG's website are also downloadable and can be displayed on your phone using an App called PDF Maps, from Avenza (free) or other mapping Apps.

So before hanging that bike from the rafters for the season, consider strapping an unloaded shotgun over your back and peddle a little deeper into areas less hunted. You'll be pleasantly surprised by what you find.

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## **2nd Annual Hunt for Habitat**

**October 4, 2014**

**Join the Rib Mountain and Chain O'Lakes Chapters  
of the Ruffed Grouse Society in the Wisconsin Woods**

**Gooch's A1 Bar  
6215 County Road M  
Boulder Junction, WI 54512**

**Maps will be provided to potential hunting areas for all hunters who  
register and request that information.**

**For details, click [HERE](#).**

***All proceeds benefit Wisconsin  
Drummer Fund habitat projects!***

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## **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 decal, commemorative 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).

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## **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 <http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/201408%20Drive>.

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## **Upcoming RGS Events in the Region**

September 11 – David Uihlein Chapter Fall Banquet, Red Circle Inn, Nashota, WI. Contact Paul Seul at 414-254-1861 for info.

September 11 – Mid U.P. Chapter Banquet, American Legion Hall, Little Lakes, MI. Contact Erik Strazzinski at 906-869-4029 for info.

September 18 – Marinette County Banquet, Trillum in the Woods, Crivitz, WI. Contact Bob Zutter at 715-923-7311 for info.

September 20 – Wilderness Wings Chapter Hunt/Shoot/Banquet at Summit Lake Game Farm, Stone Lake, WI. Contact Dave Reardon at 715-634-2674 for info.

October 2 – Flambeau River Chapter Banquet, Northwoods Supper Club, Fifield, WI. Contact Tony Blattler at 715-332-5121 for info.

October 4 – Hunt for Habitat, Gooch's A1 Bar, Boulder Jct., WI. Contact Mark Zuiker at 715-892-8479 for info.

October 14 – West Central Wisconsin Chapter Banquet, Holm's River Edge Golf Course, Marshfield, WI. Contact Jamie Kuhn at 715-829-5759 for info.

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Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions and notify me of any email address changes:

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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).