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Western Great Lakes Region

FAN UPDATE

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Happy Holidays

As 2008 winds down it sure is time to say thanks for the continued support of the many dedicated RGS members who help make all of this possible. As you will see below there has been alot happening with the Society and in this region. Thank you again to all the RGS members for all you do for the Society and for making my job easier. Your enthusiasm and encouragement has kept me going even through the rough days. Your response to Calls for Action (see Medford Aspen Project writeup) have helped make a difference. May the holidays be special to you and your families and may the New Year bode well for all of us.

2008 SENIOR REGIONAL BIOLOGIST REPORT

Here's a summary of the 2008 Regional accomplishments:

- Attended 27 meetings with resource agency staff/legislators and provided RGS input to 35 public land management projects.
- Involved in 25 media contacts (includes press releases/television and radio interviews).
- Conducted 5 reviews of existing or proposed Management Area Projects.
- Conducted 6 on-site habitat consultations on approximately 10,175 acres.
- Participated in 12 chapter meetings, 1 youth event, and 6 field events.
- Attended 13 chapter banquets.
- Participated in 29 external outreach events that included about 1500 individuals as well as four youth educational events with 50 participants.
- Responded to approximately 1,500 individual requests for information.
- Produced four FAN Update newsletters and one e-posting to nearly 700 members.
- Prepared six grant applications for habitat and educational projects. Grants generated \$75,609 for habitat projects.
- Represented RGS on Michigan and Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative Councils, Lake States Resource Alliance and Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association.

2008 REGIONAL HABITAT RELATED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Illinois -

Work is progressing to establish a Wisconsin Coverts Project private landowner workshop for Wisconsin absentee landowners who live in Illinois. Members of the T. Stanton Armour Chicagoland RGS Chapter are heavily involved in this workshop to reach landowners that we have not been able to make contact with with our existing programs. Information on this workshop is available later in this Update.

Iowa –

The Iowa Chapter sponsored a well attended Private Landowner Workshop this April that was coordinated by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in the heart of NE Iowa's ruffed grouse range. The success of that workshop prompted the DNR to put on a second workshop in September in a nearby community. RGS Senior Biologist Gary Zimmer spoke to attendees on ruffed grouse management at both of these events.

Northeast Iowa Wildlife Areas - \$2,000 in RGS funds were used for the regeneration of 11 acres of mixed aspen/hardwood on Waterloo Creek Wildlife Management Area in Allamakee County and South Pine Wildlife Management Area in Winneshiek County.

Stephens State Forest – \$2,500 in RGS fund were used to create additional edge and early successional habitat on the Whitebreast Unit of the Stephens State Forest in Lucas County. Habitat improvements are expected to benefit migrating woodcock as well as a remnant population of ruffed grouse.

Michigan –

Hiawatha National Forest – Continued moving forward with the five year Challenge Cost Share Project with the Hiawatha National Forest that will benefit wildlife species dependent on young forest habitats. A second \$5,000 contribution was provided by RGS that is being matched with a similar amount from the US Forest Service. These funds allowed work to continue on the new Little Bear Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Management Area near Rudyard and initiate a new stage of project work on the Birch Farm Area near Rapid River.

Huron/Manistee National Forest – This project is a continuation of work that was initiated in 2007. In 2008, RGS donated \$3,000 in funds that are being matched by the Forest Service to regenerate approximately 10 acres of non-commercial aspen habitat on sites inaccessible for commercial harvests. This important habitat management activity would not occur without outside funding support.

LeGrande Management Area Project – Continuation of a project that began in 2006 to support work on a state wildlife area near Afton, Michigan in the northern Lower Peninsula. Funds would be used to support ongoing ruffed grouse habitat work being conducted on the Pigeon River Wildlife Area. Work for 2008 included the rehabilitation of approximately 12 acres of wildlife openings.

Michigan Private Landowner Education - RGS funds were used to support an early successional forest educational workshop at the second annual Michigan Ornithological Conference to increase the awareness of this important habitat component to local and migratory songbirds. Funds were also used to support two regional workshops for Michigan RGS Chapter representatives that included wildlife managers and researchers.

Michigan Technological University Research Project- RGS provided \$6,000 for a two year research project entitled; "*Optimizing Both Habitat Quality for Conservation-Concern Bird Species and Tree Productivity in Aspen Forests in the Great Lakes Region*". With future prospects of using forest resources for cellulosic ethanol production, additional pressure most likely will fall on this regionally declining forest resource. This research is timely and will evaluate potential tradeoffs between biomass production and wildlife habitat management objectives in aspen stands and develop recommendations for managing aspen forests to meet quality-oriented standards.

Missouri –

River Hills Project – RGS, through the dedicated efforts of its Mid-Missouri Chapter, has been involved in this project since 2002 to improve young oak/hickory forest habitat across a three county area in east central Missouri. Project activities in 2008 have resulted in an additional 254 acres of additional timber stand improvement to promote the regeneration of important oak/hickory forest habitat. In 2008, RGS contributed \$5,000 to the project that was matched by a similar amount from the Missouri Department of Conservation. Grants for the project were also received from the Missouri Department of Conservation (\$15,000), Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative (\$20,000), National Wild Turkey Federation (\$5,000) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (\$4,909). To date over 2,400 acres of habitat improvements have been completed.

Wisconsin –

Coverts Project - The Wisconsin Coverts Project, a woodland wildlife management program for private landowners, completed its 15th workshop and now has 370 cooperators that have gone through the program. They collectively have influenced an nearly 600,000 acres of private forest lands.

NE Wisconsin Habitat Work Days – Coordinated by David Bartz of the NE Wisconsin Chapter of RGS, groups of RGS volunteers conducted management activities on the Chequamegon/Nicolet National Forest (two sites) and on the Oconto County Forest. Working with agency personnel, hearty volunteers from a variety of Wisconsin chapters conducted three days of important habitat improvement projects.

Chequamegon/Nicolet National Forest – Work continued on a five year Challenge Cost Share Partnership to facilitate ruffed grouse and woodcock habitat management activities on the Chequamegon/Nicolet National Forest. Under this partnership, all funds provided by RGS will be matched by the US Forest Service, therefore doubling the investment. In 2008, funds were used to purchase a new mower to maintain hunter walking trail systems on the Lakewood/Laona Ranger District.

Marathon and Langlade County Forests – This ongoing project, having just completed its fourth year, has regenerated approximately 45 acres of upland alder habitat in historic woodcock use areas west of Antigo in north central Wisconsin. In 2008, RGS contributed \$500 to the project.

Mead Wildlife Area - Work continued on the development of a 1,000 plus acre ruffed grouse habitat demonstration area on the Mead Wildlife Area near Stevens Point that will be used to educate private landowners and public land managers. During 2008, an access road to be utilized as part of a proposed auto tour in the area was improved for motor vehicle use.

Wood County - Provided \$3,000 in funding to conduct 40 acres of non-commercial aspen regeneration on the Kubisiak Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Habitat Management Area and Sandhill Wildlife Area near Babcock in Central Wisconsin. This is part of a long term program to re-establish a favorable age class distribution of ruffed grouse and woodcock habitat in the area.

New RGS Regional Director

Please welcome David "Swede" Johnson, a lifelong resident of Michigan's Upper Peninsula,

who has been hired as a Regional Director for the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) to replace Steve Gadow. Johnson will be responsible for coordinating RGS' on-the-ground conservation efforts and fundraising activities with chapters across Illinois, Iowa, parts of Minnesota, the Far Western UP of MI, and Wisconsin. In addition, he will be working with other conservation organizations and public agencies on regional habitat restoration projects.

A former restaurateur with a thirty year career in the hospitality industry, Johnson is an avid outdoorsman with more than 30 years of volunteer service to various wildlife organizations. For the past ten years he has also worked as a grouse/woodcock guide, as well as volunteering as a huntsman at the RGS National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt in Minnesota. An active member of the Superior Chapter in Ironwood, MI for over twenty years, Johnson specializes in grassroots fundraising, special events and committee development. He has been the Superior Chapter's banquet chairman for the past fifteen years.

"Dave is the newest addition to the Ruffed Grouse Society's team of regional directors, and we're very excited and proud to have him aboard. He is a Michigan native with a real passion for upland bird hunting and understands the relationship between the birds we enjoy hunting and the restoration of habitat grouse and woodcock, as well as other young-forest wildlife, need for survival. As a longtime Ruffed Grouse Society volunteer he brings invaluable experience to our organization," said RGS Executive Director and CEO Mike Zagata. Dave can be reached at uptrek@gmail.com.

Wisconsin Hunter Participates in Under Broken Wings Program

From the moment it was proposed, the Ruffed Grouse Society's (RGS) Under Broken Wings (UBW) outreach program was destined to become a huge success, inasmuch as its mission was aimed at helping youngsters through difficult times. Now in its third year, the UBW program selects a young hunter with physical challenges and provides them with an all-expense paid trip to the RGS' annual National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt, in Grand Rapids, Minnesota.

Conceived to put disadvantaged young people in hunting situations that often challenge veteran sportsmen and women, the program's objective is to provide as much support as necessary, while making sure the youngster is instrumental in the success of the hunt.

This year's participant was Brittany Zebrasky, 13, of Hartland, Wisconsin (in photo above along with her mother Tiffany). At age 5 Brittany was diagnosed with a brain tumor, but because of the location the tumor could only be partially removed. Despite several more surgeries and combative chemotherapy and radiation treatments the tumors have never completely gone away. But neither has her zest for life, or her ability to accomplish what she sets out to do -- especially when it comes to hunting. An eighth-grader at Northshore Middle School in Hartland, Brittany, shot her first grouse during the UBW hunt.

"She is an inspiration to us all," said UBW board member Jim Hayett, who along with board member Dr. Joe Chandler of Anchorage, Alaska, and Hayett's 10-year-old German short-hair pointer "Knotty", accompanied Brittany on her hunt. "Not only has she been

back in the hospital three times since the hunt, but she found time to shoot a nice buck during the Wisconsin bow season," Hayett said.

"The Under Broken Wings program should serve as an inspiration to other RGS chapters that would like to start a similar program of their own. It has a proven track record in Grand Rapids, and even though not all chapters can make such an extensive commitment, a lot of good can be accomplished with some effort and forethought, and a desire to give challenged youngsters the chance to experience shooting and hunting, activities many of us take for granted," Zagata said.

Michigan Early Season Grouse and Woodcock Hunting Report

Early season reports from ruffed grouse and American woodcock cooperators allow biologists to quickly assess hunter success and local field conditions across the state of Michigan at the beginning of the grouse season. This report compiled by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is a summary of their responses for September 15-18, 2008.

Cooperators returned 95 useable surveys. They hunted 493 hours in 43 counties during the survey period. Respondents hunted most in Zone 2 (Northern Lower Michigan), followed by Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula), and Zone 3 (Southern Lower Michigan). Hunters reported the highest average flush rates for grouse and woodcock in Zones 2 and 3, respectively. Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for grouse were Marquette, Gladwin, Ontonagon, Grand Traverse, and Crawford. About 44% of the respondents thought grouse populations were up or slightly up from last year in the areas they hunted, with 32% reporting populations about the same as the previous year.

Although the woodcock season was not open during the survey period, cooperators were asked to also count woodcock flushes. Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for woodcock were Wexford, Allegan, Gladwin, Kalkaska, and Mackinac. About 29% of the respondents thought woodcock populations were up or slightly up from last year. However, 32% thought woodcock numbers were the same and 38% thought that the numbers were down. More information is available on the Michigan DNR website at http://www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/RG_early_coop_2008_251858_7.pdf.

Forest Service Projects Highlighting Aspen Concerns

As many of you know RGS has been working hard with the National Forests across the region to promote the regeneration of young forest habitats on these important public lands with special concern for the many acres of overmature aspen that is in need of management. Due in part to our persistence we are starting to see positive movement from the Forest Service in several recent projects.

A Record of Decision was issued in late October on the Medford Aspen Project that will regenerate 1755 acres of aspen on the Medford District of the Chequamegon/Nicolet National Forest in north central Wisconsin. RGS members really responded to the Call for

Action for this project posted in the August FAN Update with over 75% of the comment letters coming from RGS members. In fact, only one letter was written in opposition of the project. Unfortunately it was from the lawyer representing the group out of Madison that has been constantly appealing and litigating the vast majority of Forest Service management projects. So most likely an appeal will again be posted by this group in the next week or so. We'll keep you posted on this and thanks to all the members who sent in comments.

A Draft Environmental Impact Statement was recently released by the Medford/Park Falls Ranger District on the Camp Four Project located just east of Park Falls, Wisconsin. Due in part to RGS's earlier comments the Forest Service has crafted an Alternative that addresses our concern regarding the high amount of aspen previously proposed for conversion to hardwoods. This additional alternative includes the regeneration of 562 acres of more aspen than the original Forest Service proposal. The Forest Service is open to comments at this time and will be issuing a final decision sometime in 2009.

The Chequamegon/Nicolet National Forest is in the process of evaluating the management activities on the 15 cooperative Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Habitat Management Areas on the Forest and anticipates putting together a project proposal this winter. RGS is working with the Forest Service staff on this project and will once again request that members provide comments when this comes out for review.

First proposed in 2001, a second Record of Decision was recently issued for the Cayuga Project on the Great Divide Ranger District of the Chequamegon/Nicolet National Forest. A previous decision on this project in 2003 was appealed and litigated by the Madison folks and a court decision remanded the project back to the Forest Service for further work. The most recent Decision includes the regeneration of 770 acres of aspen along with other harvests in hardwoods and pine.

An Environmental Assessment has been issued for the Dutch Mill Project on the Rapid River District of the Hiawatha National Forest in the central Upper Peninsula of Michigan. This project includes the regeneration of 969 acres of overmature aspen and 79 acres of paper birch. RGS has provided comments in support of these actions and also has included several other recommendations to benefit ruffed grouse and woodcock habitat within the project area.

Don't Miss Out! Buy Your Ticket Before its too Late! Enter the 2008/2009 RGS Upland Bird Dream Hunt Raffle Today

Thanks to all who have purchased a national raffle ticket so far. If you haven't, please enter today, you don't want to miss out as sales are going well.

First Place Prize - All Expense Paid Trip for Two to hunt from October 3-5, 2009 for sharptail grouse and Hungarian partridge at Bear paw Mountain Outfitters in Havre, Montana followed by participation in the National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt in grand Rapids, Minnesota from October 6-9. Both hunters also receive an SKB model 1785 o/u shotgun. Approximate value of package: \$18,000.

Second Place Prize - \$1,000 Cabela's Gift Certificate

Third Place Prize - Custom fitted Pair of upland hunting boots from Russell Moccasin Co.

Approximate value of boots: \$400.

Donation for Tickets is \$50 each with winners drawn on June 30, 2009.

To Purchase Raffle Tickets Contact: Gary Zimmer

at 715-674-7505 or rgszimm@newnorth.net or mail the following to:

RGS P.O. Box 116 Laona, WI 54541

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Number _____

_____ Tickets @ \$50.00 Each = \$_____ Total Enclosed

CHECK (Payable to RGS) CASH CREDIT CARD

CC # _____ Exp. Date _____

Billing Address _____ Billing Zip _____

Signature _____

Shop the RGS Online Store for your Christmas Gifts

Visit the RGS online store at http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/index.php?env=-news_article:m8-1-4-s:n-207--&article_id=207&event=&n_event= on the RGS website for that special holiday gift for grouse and woodcock hunters on your Christmas list. Many new products have been added to this site including the popular RGS under armour as well as some closeout discounted items. Special RGS members-only discounts are available through these sites from some popular retailers. Gift memberships for Christmas can also be ordered through this site. Just included are special prices on recently discontinued models of Guerini shotguns.

Two Wisconsin COVERTS Workshops Planned for 2009

Building on its success, the Wisconsin Coverts Project will be expanding to two workshops in 2009. The traditional Wisconsin workshop for private forest landowners will be held August 13 - 16 at Kemp Natural Resources Station near Woodruff, WI. A second workshop targeting absentee landowners who own land in Wisconsin, but reside in Illinois is being

supported by the T. Stanton Armour Chicagoland RGS Chapter. This workshop will be held at the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation in Dundee, IL from August 27 - 30. These 3-day sessions have had rave reviews from past attendees that have become Covert Cooperators through past workshops.

Now starting its 16th year, 374 cooperators have attended these workshops. Sharing with others what they have learned these Coverts Cooperators have influenced the management of over 434,000 acres of land in Wisconsin. This workshop is highly recommended for those landowners interested in better understanding their role as stewards of their property. For additional information on the workshop contact Jamie Nack at 608-265-8264 or by email at jlneck@wisc.edu. Attendance is limited. More information is available on the Coverts Project website at http://forestandwildlifeecology.wisc.edu/wl_extension/wicovertsproject.html. Deadline for applications is June 15th.

Upcoming RGS “Habitat” Events in the Region

February 21 - UP Chapter Workshop, Site yet to be Determined, Contact Doug Doherty at 231-549-5063 for info.

April 25 - Habitat Work Day on the Oconto Co. Forest near Breed, WI. Contact Dave Bartz at 920-743-6004 for info.

May 16 - Habitat Work Day on the Eagle River/Florence District of the Cheq/Nicolet National Forest. Contact Dave Bartz at 920-743-6004 for info.

June 20 - Habitat Work Day on the Cheq/Nicolet National Forest near Laona, WI. Contact Dave Bartz at 920-743-6004 for info.

August 13 to 16 - WI Coverts Workshop, Contact Jamie Nack at 608-265-8264 or email at jlneck@wisc.edu.

August 27 to 30 - WI Coverts Workshop in Illinois, Contact Jamie Nack at 608-265-8264 or email at jlneck@wisc.edu.

Reminder

To insure that you continue to receive timely FAN updates please notify me of changes in your email address.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions:

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The Ruffed Grouse Society is the one international wildlife conservation organization dedicated to promoting conditions suitable for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and related wildlife to sustain our sport hunting tradition and outdoor heritage. For information on the Ruffed Grouse Society, please call 888-564-6747 or check out the RGS website at www.ruffedgrousesociety.org.