



## Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian Ruff-Country News Spring 2016

*This region experienced a rather mild winter and enjoyed a warm beginning to spring 2016. That was until April arrived. Many of us experienced below normal temperatures and even snowfall for several days. We had grouse and woodcock on eggs and in some of our more southern states the doodles were approaching hatching or hatched. Birds are resilient given the abundant blossoms and wildflowers I have seen in my travels, it seems the birds should be fine.*

*The early spring was a wonderful opportunity to get the dogs out for field work and photos. I believe there were more woodcock (and grouse) photos and talk this year on social media and at RGS / AWS spring events than I remember in past years. What an opportunity to share the experience with others, young and old, hunters and non-hunters.*

*Keep sharing the photos of doodle and grouse chicks. It might be a very good 2016. I am still hearing the Peent in the evening here in McKean Co., PA.*

*Get out and enjoy new places, new groups and new friends!*

*Linda*



Early spring red ruff in VA during the welcomed warm spell before the April snow set us all back a bit.

Photo by Al Bourgeois

View the 2015 RGS / AWS Annual Report from the below link.

<http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/PDF/2015-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>

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**Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian**  
**Ruff-Country News**  
**Spring 2016**

## **Dan Dessecker Co-Chairs Special Session at Wildlife Managers Conference**

A Special Session at the 81<sup>st</sup> North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference this March in Pittsburgh explored the potential future direction of our federal public forestlands. Co-chaired by the Ruffed Grouse Society's Dan Dessecker and Tom Franklin with the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, *2020 Vision: Federal Forest Management into the Next Decade* included speakers with vast expertise and a broad breadth of perspectives, including Robert Bonnie, Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

**The speakers agreed that there is clear scientific evidence indicating that the ecological integrity of our nation's public forest lands and the social fabric of nearby rural communities are imperiled.** It is essential to make federal forest land management policy relevant to all interests so that the necessary statutory, regulatory, and fiscal fixes can be applied.

There was much discussion about the need to move beyond the rhetoric ("mandated timber harvest targets", "benign neglect", "stripping environmental regulation", "analysis paralysis", "unnecessary litigation") and address this reality. **Balanced, common sense legislation and administrative processes that allow for science-based active management of our public forestlands to conserve wildlife, enhance forest health and protect water quality while meeting society's needs and interests is a lofty but achievable goal.**

In his opening remarks, Dessecker read the following quote from a youth counselor as relayed in Richard Louv's seminal book; *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. "In my first counseling job, with another organization, I took children with AIDS to the mountains who had never been out of their urban neighborhoods. One night, a nine-year-old woke me up. She had to go to the bathroom. We stepped outside of the tent and she looked up. She gasped and grabbed my leg. She had never seen the stars before." Dessecker underscored the imperative of making our federal public lands relevant to those who have never seen the stars if we are to successfully meet the challenges sure to be posed in the future by an increasingly urban society.

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# Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian Ruff-Country News Spring 2016

## RGS / AWS Provides Forestry Habitat Machine...Times 2

This past winter RGS / AWS purchased two CAT 299D steel track skid steers equipped with the forestry package mulcher head, custom fitted winches and one new hauling trailer with a grant awarded through the R.K. Mellon Foundation. Both these machines currently are in the Mid-Atlantic Southern Appalachian Region. We have entered into long-term cooperative agreements with the US Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Habitat Unit in PA (USFWS Partners) and the WV Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Section (WV DNR). The WV DNR has provide a new truck and a dedicated seasonal operator and USFWS is providing a cost share agreement with RGS for equipment maintenance. To date this machine is approaching over 150 acres of creation of habitat in a very short time all on public lands.



The PA machine will work both on public and private lands which is the foundation of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife program (Partners). Visit their website at <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/pafo/partners.html> for more information on the Partners program. The implementation arm of Partners is Habitat Forever. Roughly 70% of PA's forested land is privately owned. Landowners enrolled in Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) Working Lands for Wildlife receive compensation for managing their lands for particular habitat qualities beneficial to grouse and woodcock. This compensation is used to offset the cost of management. To find your local PA NRCS county contact <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/pa/contact/local/>. This machine will also continue work on state and federal land in riparian restoration, invasive control, and alder and aspen regeneration among other activities. A full press release will be forthcoming.



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## Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian Ruff-Country News Spring 2016

### RGS Update On US Forest Service

On April 30, 2015, the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) filed a Petition for Rulemaking with the United States Forest Service (Forest Service) due to the Agency's consistent failure to provide the young forest habitats required by the ruffed grouse, American woodcock, golden-winged warbler and other game and nongame wildlife on national forests throughout the eastern United States.

A Petition for Rulemaking is not a lawsuit. It is, however, a legal challenge to which the Forest Service is legally compelled to respond.

Each national forest operates under a forest plan that is developed with substantial public involvement. These forest plans are, in essence, contracts with the public.

Unfortunately, over the past several decades, individual national forests throughout the eastern United States have met, on average, only 24 percent of forest plan **minimum** acreage goals for these important young forest habitats. Not surprisingly, wildlife dependent upon young forest habitats are experiencing substantial population declines on many of our national forests.

Clearly, the Forest Service has broken its contract with the public.

The Forest Service and RGS met in November 2015, to try and find a path forward to resolve the issue raised in the Petition and to secure the future for wildlife of young forests on our national forests. To its credit, the Forest Service acknowledged that the picture painted by the data provided by RGS is indeed accurate. On our part, RGS recognized that the Forest Service faces multiple challenges that affect what the Agency can and can't accomplish on a daily basis. However, RGS reiterated that despite these challenges, the Forest Service has the personnel and financial resources to pay far more attention to the habitat needs of ruffed grouse, American woodcock and the many other game and nongame species that require young forest habitats.

The Forest Service and RGS met again in March 2016 at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, to discuss steps that the Agency had taken to address the compelling need for additional emphasis on the conservation of wildlife of young forests since our Petition was filed. The Forest Service identified several recently proposed habitat management projects on national forests in the eastern United States that, if fully implemented, will help move the ball forward. In addition, the Forest



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**Healthy Forests - Abundant Wildlife - Sporting Traditions**



## Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian Ruff-Country News Spring 2016

Service set aside a big chunk of time during its regularly scheduled meeting at the Conference with wildlife conservation organizations from across the nation to specifically address the status and trends of wildlife of young forests. It was gratifying to note that these organizations were unanimous in their support for additional attention to the needs of these species.

RGS will continue to be patient with what appear to be sincere efforts on the part of the Forest Service to substantively address the compelling needs of wildlife of young forests – after all, the Agency is a bit like a super tanker – it can't be turned on a dime. However, this patience is limited, and we will need to see consistent progress in turning around the ship.

One measure of progress will be the goal for young forest habitats that is set by the Nantahala/Pisgah National Forest in western North Carolina when it completes its ongoing forest plan revision. The public spoke up loud and clear at the numerous public forums sponsored by the Forest to identify issues of concern. A primary issue, if not THE primary issue, raised by the public was the need to dramatically increase sustainable timber harvests to dramatically increase the availability of these habitats on the Forest. RGS hopes that the Nantahala/Pisgah is indeed listening to the public and will act accordingly.

Thank you to all of our members that have been actively involved in all the national forest comments, project tours and meetings throughout this region. Without your assistance and communication I would not be able to stay as informed of the issues and concerns within the Mid-Atlantic Southern Appalachian Region.



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## Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian Ruff-Country News Spring 2016

### 2016 State Drummer Fund Regional Update

*As 2015 ends and I reflect back on the work and efforts of members, partners and myself to put our mission both on the ground and carrying our message to the public, I have chosen a few highlights that accentuate all our efforts. Believe me there is much more happening in this region and I am proud to be a part of each and every one of the projects and programs. These truly are the efforts of all, with members being the most critical. Some projects will be periodically reviewed in upcoming newsletters and magazine articles. We have gone beyond spreading a little seed on log landings to starting at the developmental phase and thinking about size and location to benefit existing management and contribute to population recruitment. You as members get it, and the relationships with state and federal agencies that you have developed to accomplish quality habitat work on the ground continues to keep RGS / AWS among the leaders in conservation.*

**Georgia** – This state may not be the destination for many grouse hunters but work continues on the Flat Branch area within the Chattahoochee National Forest supplementing forest management that has occurred there. With proper care to soil preparation, clover planting and matching the shrubs with the region this chapter-supported project has had success in maintaining a grouse population.

**Pennsylvania** – Three projects were funded this year. State Game Lands (SGL) 211, 217 and Hancock Forest Management Private Forest Industry. SGL 217 located near New Tripoli, PA is a 100 acre planting of crab apple trees to supplement timber management throughout a larger landscape. SGL 211 is located in Schuylkill, PA and the project is called the Goldmine Grouse Project. The project has a known grouse population and will focus on 170 acres. Work will include creating five age classes of aspen, 80 acres of aspen cutting this year, and small group plantings of conifers. This project was initiated in 2000. This is the final year for implementing the management plan for Hancock Forest Group near Clermont, PA. Hancock has contributed yearly towards funding this project for the past five years. Work has included supplemental plantings of shrubs to provide food and cover for both grouse and woodcock. This area is well known and heavily used by hunters and RGS/AWS members.



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**Healthy Forests - Abundant Wildlife - Sporting Traditions**



## Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian Ruff-Country News Spring 2016

**Maryland** – One project was funded with multiple partners; Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service (MD DNR FS) and Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI). The project is located at Jennings Randolph Lake near Swanton MD and was 24 acres of surface mine reclamation. Work included ripping using a bulldozer and deep hook to loosen the compacted ground making it more conducive to root growth, followed by contract planting and deer fencing. Trees and shrubs chosen were conducive to grouse and woodcock, both present in the area. Trees and shrubs also had to be chosen to rehabilitate the heavily compacted and compromised soils.



**Virginia** – Three chapters were involved in two very large projects this year. Both projects worked cooperatively with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), US Forest Service (USFS) and the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf). The first is a mulching project to provide roosting and singing grounds for breeding, migrating and wintering American woodcock on the Chickahominy WMA located in Charles City County, VA. Total mulched area of 20 acres will enhance the 335 acres of even-aged management methods used in creating young regenerating forest habitat within the landscape. The methods included thinnings and clearcut with reserves. This area is the only public land within the county and has the potential to support a high density of woodcock.

The second project is a stewardship project on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest with the NWTf. RGS State Drummer Fund (SDF) supported the contract planting of roughly three acres of constructing hedgerows of tag alder, elderberry, blackhaw, button bush, and grey dogwood. Roughly 2,500 shrubs were planted. This area has been monitored for woodcock singing grounds and this work should increase the quality of the habitat currently present.

**West Virginia** – The WV SDF continues to assist the Canaan Valley National Wildlife Refuge with their aspen management. This project is ongoing and RGS/AWS works cooperatively with NWTf on funding and providing technical assistance as needed.

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**Healthy Forests - Abundant Wildlife - Sporting Traditions**



**Mid-Atlantic / S. Appalachian**  
**Ruff-Country News**  
**Spring 2016**

Make plans to attend a RGS / AWS event near you  
Visit [www.ruffedgrousesociety.org](http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org) click events

**2016 Drummer School is FULL! Thank you to all who nominated a student.**



To take a virtual tour visit [www.picweb.org/drummers-tour/](http://www.picweb.org/drummers-tour/)

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).*

