

Proceedings
of the



Welcome to the Sandhills!

26th PRAIRIE GROUSE TECHNICAL COUNCIL

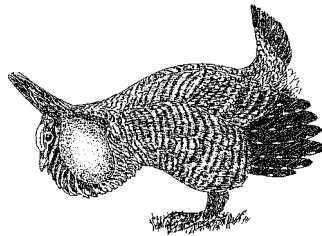
September 19-22, 2005

Host Organizations:

The Sandhills Task Force, P.O. Box 1686, Kearney, NE 68848

U.S. Forest Service, Nebraska National Forest, 125 N. Main Street, Chadron, NE 69337

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 2200 N. 33rd Street, Lincoln, NE 68503



SUPPORTERS

Valentine National Wildlife Refuge
Ft. Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge
The Sandhills Prairie Refuge Association
Nebraska Chapter of the Wildlife Society
Nebraska Partnership for All-Bird Conservation
UNL Cooperative Extension Service - Project Learning Tree

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Scott Taylor
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Omaha Steaks
North Platte NRD
Lower Niobrara NRD
Middle Niobrara NRD
Papio-Missouri NRD

Thanks to all those who worked hard to make the 26th Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting a success!

Bill Vodehnal	Planning Committee Chair
Scott Taylor	Program Committee Chair
Laurel Badura	Program Committee
Marsha Bauer	Planning Committee
Mike Croxen	Field Trip Committee
Jim Douglas	Auction Committee
Mace Hack	Merchandise Committee Chair
Mark Humpert	Auction Committee Chair
Tom Krolkowski	Planning Committee
Mark Lindvall	Field Trip Committee Co-Chair
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Bill Vodehnal	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Scott Taylor	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Executive Committee

Scott Taylor, Chair	Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Keith Warnke	Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Russ Horton	Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Agenda



Monday, September 19

5 - 7 Registration, Holiday Inn Express

7:00 Reception, Conference Room, Holiday Inn Express

Tuesday, September 20

Breakfast (on your own)

8:00 Registration, Cherry County Fairgrounds

8:40 Announcements and Welcome

8:50 Keynote address: *An Ecological Overview of the Nebraska Sandhills* - Gene Mack, Sandhills Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

9:20 J.A. Johnson, J.L. Bouzat, and J.E. Toepfer. *Genetics and prairie grouse: lessons learned and recommendations for their conservation*

9:50 J.E. Toepfer and P.O. Dunn. *Proposed translocation plan to increase genetic diversity in an isolated greater prairie-chicken population*

10:10 J.L. Provost and T.P. Soule. *Using an open landscape assessment and landscape planning to prioritize brushland and sharp-tailed grouse management in Minnesota*

10:30 Break

- 10:50 M.A. Norton, K.C. Jensen, A.P. Leif, and T. Kirschenmann. *Reproductive success of prairie grouse in central South Dakota*
- 11:10 G. Wolbrink, A.P. Leif, and M.A. Norton. *Drag net method of prairie grouse chick capture*
- 11:30 J.K. Nooker and B.K. Sandercock. *Reproductive behavior of testosterone-implanted male greater prairie-chickens*
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:30 D.H. Wolfe, M.A. Patten, and S.K. Sherrod. *Causes and patterns of mortality in lesser prairie-chickens and implications for management*
- 1:50 N.J. Silvy. *Is shinnery oak a requirement for lesser prairie-chickens?*
- 2:10 R.D. Rodgers and M.E. Houts. *Estimating Kansas lesser prairie-chicken populations by integrating lek surveys with GAP landcover data*
- 2:30 M. Schutz and D.Walker. *Loss of perennial grassland in the aspen parkland of the Canadian Prairie Provinces: impact on pastureland and wildlife habitat*
- 2:50 Break
- 3:10 R.D. Rodgers and E.C Brehm. *"The lesser prairie-chicken: echos of the prairie?" - Explaining the issues to ranchers, developers, bureaucrats, and politicians*
- 4:00 J. Haufler. *North American Grouse Partnership development of a prairie grouse conservation plan*
- 6:00 Supper, Cherry County Fairgrounds

Wednesday, September 21

- Breakfast (on your own)
- 8:30 Convene at Cherry County Fairgrounds
- 8:40 Announcements
- 8:50 B. Deeble and J. Gore. *The "Adopt-A-Lek" program for monitoring sage grouse populations*

- 9:10 T.G. Bidwell, S.D. Fuhlendorf, J.D. Kerby, and D.M. Engle. *Application of the fire-grazing interaction to restore a shifting mosaic on prairies and shrublands for prairie grouse*
- 9:30 M.A. Patten, D.H. Wolfe, E. Shochat, and S.K. Sherrod. *Lekking and nesting response of the greater prairie-chicken to burning of tallgrass prairie*
- 9:50 J.E. Toepfer. *"Anecdotal" observations of prairie chickens and wind generators in northwestern Minnesota*
- 10:10 Break
- 10:30 E.T. Gorman and M.R. Stratman. *Colorado plains sharp-tailed grouse recovery program*
- 10:50 B.E. Jamison and M.R. Alleger. *Greater prairie-chicken recovery efforts in Missouri*
- 11:10 J.E. Toepfer, D.R. Trauba, and S.C. Vacek. *Restoring greater prairie-chickens to west central Minnesota - progress report*
- 11:30 J.E. Toepfer, A. Pratt, D.A. Trauba, and S.C. Vacek. *Parasitism of prairie chicken nests by pheasants in Minnesota*
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 W.D. Svedarsky, M.A. Larson, and W. Kreuger. *Minnesota's first prairie chicken hunting season in 61 years!*
- 1:20 M.E. Morrow. *Attwater's prairie-chicken: an update*
- 1:40 R.S. Jones, A.E. Hynek, and S.C. Stratton. *Prairie chickens in the Army: a first year summary*
- 2:00 Break
- 2:20 Business meeting
- 5:00 Social hour - Jordan's Restaurant (a few blocks west of the Holiday Inn Express on the north side of Highway 20, across from the Pizza Hut)
- 6:00 Banquet, awards, and auction - Jordan's Restaurant
Banquet speaker: Dan O'Brien - South Dakota writer, biologist, and buffalo rancher "A template for private/government cooperation in grasslands restoration"

Thursday, September 22 (All-day field trip)

Breakfast (on your own)

8:00 Buses depart from Holiday Inn Express for Valentine National Wildlife Refuge

8:30 Arrive at Valentine NWR and begin tour

10:15 Depart from Valentine NWR for McKelvie National Forest

10:45 Arrive at McKelvie NF

11:45 Lunch at Merritt Reservoir (Main boat dock)

12:30 Depart for Bowring Ranch State Historical Park

2:00 Arrive at Bowring Ranch SHP; Panel discussion of private grassland management in the Sandhills - Gene Mack, Jim Van Winkle, A.B. Cox, and Bill Vodehnal

3:15 Open time for ranch tours, networking, and refreshments

4:30 Cowboy poetry by Sandhills rancher A.B. Cox

5:00 Supper

5:45 Depart for Valentine

6:45 Arrive in Valentine at Holiday Inn Express

Friday, September 23

Safe travels!

ABSTRACTS

AN ECOLOGICAL OVERVIEW OF THE NEBRASKA SANDHILLS

GENE MACK, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1686, Kearney, NE 68848

The Sandhills is 19,600 square miles of sand dune formation located almost entirely within the state of Nebraska. The region is well known for its contiguous expanse of native grassland and abundance of groundwater. The sands and dune formations vary across the region and affect the grassland plant communities. The tops of dunes support species associated with semi-arid climates while the lush lowlands support species more associated with the tallgrass prairie. An estimated one billion acre-feet of water lies under the dunes. The porous sands continually recharge the local and regional groundwater tables, creating 1.3 million acres of wetlands and discharging 2.4 million acre feet of water each year into streams. Over 90 percent of the land is in private ownership. The average ranch is several thousand acres in size in order to support enough livestock to support a ranch family. As profit margins decline, many ranchers are forced to overgraze or convert grassland into irrigated cropland. The result is low plant diversity and degraded wildlife habitat. Partnerships between landowners and conservation organizations are being done to support ranching and prevent the loss of grassland habitat.

GENETICS AND PRAIRIE GROUSE: LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THEIR CONSERVATION

JEFF A. JOHNSON*, Museum of Zoology, Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109 USA; JUAN L. BOUZAT, Dept. Biological Sciences, Bowling Green State Univ., Bowling Green, OH 43403 USA; and JOHN E. TOEPFER, Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Plover, WI 54467 USA.

Prairie grouse (*Tympanuchus* spp.) have witnessed a dramatic decline throughout their range over the past century. This decline has coincided with fragmentation of habitat and the creation of isolated populations of various sizes. As a consequence, the fragmentation of populations and subsequent reduction in population size is expected to lead to reductions in genetic variation as a result of random genetic drift and decrease in gene flow. A reduction in genetic variability may have important implications on the viability of populations. Previously, low levels of genetic diversity have been reported for small isolated populations of greater prairie-chicken (*T. cupido pinnatus*) in both Illinois and Wisconsin, while larger populations (i.e., Kansas and Nebraska) have maintained much higher levels. Here we report on the lessons learned from analyzing genetics from isolated populations of prairie grouse, including the greater prairie-chicken in Wisconsin and Illinois, the critically endangered Attwater's prairie-chicken (*T. c. attwateri*) in Texas, and the extinct heath hen (*T. c. cupido*) from Martha's Vineyard.

The ability of birds to disperse is likely a fundamental behavior for maintaining viable populations, and may be an important factor leading to the extirpation of small populations of prairie grouse over the last century.

PROPOSED TRANSLOCATION PLAN TO INCREASE GENETIC DIVERSITY IN AN ISOLATED GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN POPULATION

J. E. TOEPFER*, Society Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd., 3755 Jackson, Plover, WI 54467 USA; and P. O. DUNN, Department Biology, University Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI 53201 USA.

During January 4-5, 2005 the Wisconsin DNR held a Wisconsin Greater Prairie Chicken Conservation Genetics Workshop in Madison which created A Wisconsin Greater Prairie Chicken Conservation Genetics Advisory Committee. "The goal of the workshop was to develop a consensus position statement on the needs and methods of managing the genetic diversity of the Wisconsin Greater Prairie Chicken." This workshop was precipitated by research summarized in Prairie Chickens and Grassland 2000 and Beyond that indicated that the subpopulations in Wisconsin were no longer interconnected and genetic diversity had declined 26% since the 1950's. The Genetic Advisory Committee recommended among other things that: Translocations are necessary for the long-term persistence of greater prairie chickens in Wisconsin and given the overall reduction in genetic diversity throughout the Wisconsin range, interstate translocations should occur as soon as feasible. A copy of the Conservation Genetics Plan for the Management and Recovery of Greater Prairie Chickens in Wisconsin will be available for PGTC members to examine. A translocation proposal sponsored by STCP was prepared by Dunn and Toepfer in November 2004 to conduct an interstate translocation and evaluate the genetic changes within the Wisconsin population. This presentation will outline the release protocol and solicit input as per the translocation guidelines outlined by the Prairie Grouse Technical Council.

USING AN OPEN LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT AND LANDSCAPE PLANNING TO PRIORITIZE BRUSHLAND AND SHARP-TAILED GROUSE MANAGEMENT IN MINNESOTA

J. L. PROVOST, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Aitkin, MN 56431 USA; and T. SOULE, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Bemidji, MN 56601 USA.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Division of Fish and Wildlife completed an assessment of open landscapes in the transitional and forested zones of northern and central Minnesota in 2002. The assessment is aiding land managers in making well-informed decisions and supporting the MDNR strategic plan's target of designating 40 landtype associations in the transitional and forested zones of Minnesota as priority open landscapes through subsection forest resource management planning.

Brushland management efforts on state and private lands for wildlife species such as sharp-tailed grouse will be focused in these priority open landscapes. The MDNR Wildlife Private Lands Program is currently focusing efforts in the northeastern portion of the state on brushland management.

REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS OF PRAIRIE GROUSE IN CENTRAL SOUTH DAKOTA.

MARK A. NORTON* and KENT C. JENSEN, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD 57007 USA; ANTHONY P. LEIF and TOM KIRSCHENMANN, SD Department of Game, Fish and Parks, Huron, SD 57350 USA.

We are finishing a 3-year study on reproductive success and habitat use of sympatric populations of greater prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse on the Ft. Pierre National Grasslands in central South Dakota. Female greater prairie chickens and sharp-tail grouse were captured and radio-collared in March and April of 2003 (n= 14), 2004 (n=35), and 2005 (n=46) on display grounds within the FPNG. Radioed hens were used estimate nesting success and to locate and facilitate capture of broods. Prairie grouse chicks were captured and radio-marked in June/July of each year; marked chicks were used to estimate chick survival from approximately 14 days of age through fledging. Nesting success for 2003 was 85.7% (n= 13), with 53.5% brood survival (n = 11), 26.7% chick survival (n= 34), and 83% hen survival (n= 20). Results for 2004 showed 78.5% nest success (n=34), 83.2% hen survival (n= 35), 86.6% brood survival (n= 17), and 43.6% chick survival (n= 63). Preliminary results for 2005 indicate 69.9% nest success (n= 42). We have radio-marked 46 hens and 53 chicks in 2005 to monitor hen, chick, and brood survival.

DRAG NET METHOD OF PRAIRIE GROUSE CHICK CAPTURE

G. A. WOLBRINK*, South Dakota Game Fish and Parks, Huron, SD 57350, USA; A. P. LEIF, South Dakota Game Fish and Parks, Pierre, SD 57501, USA; and M. A. NORTON, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD 57007, USA.

Capturing prairie grouse chicks (*Tympanuchus cupido*, and *Tympanuchus phasianellus*) for research studies is difficult. We have developed a method that is an efficient and effective means of capturing young (>2 weeks) prairie grouse. From 2003 to 2005, we captured 251 prairie grouse chicks. Their age ranged from 13 days to 47 days old. The average capture was approximately 74% of the chicks in each brood. Two to three weeks following nest hatch, the hen was flushed to determine brood size. If she still had chicks with her, they were captured in the dark of night. The hen was approached using a receiver and a yagi antenna. Once the signal was strong enough, the receiver was used alone without an antenna. A glow-stick was placed at the point where the signal was first received without an antenna. The hen and broods position was then circled and marked with as many glow-sticks as needed. The average distance from

the glow-stick to the transmitter was 15m. Then a 2.4-cm mesh net (15-m x 15-m) was dragged over the marked area and dropped by 2 to 4 people, trapping the hen and her brood. The birds then jump up into the net, giving away their position. Using spotlights, researchers moved in and captured the chicks. This method has proven to be an effective means of capturing young prairie grouse.

REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR OF TESTOSTERONE-IMPLANTED MALE GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKENS

J. K. NOOKER* and B. K. SANDERCOCK, Division of Biology, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506 USA.

The problem of low genetic diversity in small isolated populations is amplified in lek-mating species due to the high skew of male mating success. In a three year study, only 9.3% of male Greater Prairie-Chickens (*Tympanuchus cupido*, $n=108$) obtained 76.3% of all copulations ($n=194$). Testosterone (hereafter, T) is thought to play a key role in enhancing male breeding success. In socially monogamous species of birds, males with higher circulating T experience advantages during both female choice and male-male aggression. The role of T in lek-mating systems is largely unknown. In 2005, two leks containing 26 males were observed from mid-March through mid-May. Each morning, copulations and male position relative to grid stakes were recorded as they occurred, and male behavior was quantified during 10 minute focal observations. In one of the first manipulations of T in a lekking bird, 12 peripheral male Greater Prairie-Chickens were given subcutaneous silastic implants containing 30 mg testosterone ($n = 6$) or left empty (sham-implants, $n = 6$). T-implanted males were more aggressive, and tended to gain more copulations and hold smaller territories than sham-implanted males. If T-implanted peripheral males obtain copulations and thereby reduce mating skew, T-implants could be developed as a novel management technique for maintaining genetic diversity in declining populations of prairie grouse.

CAUSES AND PATTERNS OF MORTALITY IN LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKENS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

D. H. WOLFE*, M. A. PATTEN, and S. K. SHERROD, G. M. Sutton Avian Research Center, University of Oklahoma, Bartlesville, OK 74005, USA.

From 1999 through 2004, over 700 Lesser Prairie-Chickens were radio-tagged in Beaver, Ellis, and Harper Counties, Oklahoma, and Roosevelt County, New Mexico. We have recovered 322 carcasses of radio-tagged Lesser Prairie-Chickens and were able to surmise the cause of death for 260 birds. For the remaining carcass recoveries, there was not enough evidence available to determine the probable cause of death. The primary causes of death were predation by raptors, predation by mammals, and collisions with fences or power lines. Whereas predation patterns were remarkably similar between study sites, significant differences existed between the two study sites

with regard to the collisions. Additionally, collision deaths were higher for hens than for cocks at both sites. We discuss the mortality causes and patterns, ways that land use can influence mortality, and possible management solutions.

IS SHINNERY OAK A REQUIREMENT FOR LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKENS?

NOVA J. SILVY, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-2258, USA.

The historic range of the lesser prairie chickens (*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*; LPCH) has decreased significantly in the past century due to numerous human-induced changes to the landscape. Today, LPCH only are found in 5 southwestern states (Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas) in areas of sand sage (*Artemisia filifolia*) and shinnery oak (*Quercus harvardii*) rangelands, with recent expansion into Conservation Reserve Program plantings, especially in western Kansas. Most researchers working with LPCH have suggested shinnery oak as preferred habitat for the birds. I have reviewed the literature and found that shinnery oak is not and probably never was the preferred habitat for LPCH. In fact, areas now dominated by shinnery oak (formally dominated by tall grasses) are probably the result of human-induced changes (overgrazing and fire suppression) in the landscape and LPCH have survived within these areas since the late 1800s or early 1900s because their preferred habitat (native prairie) have been lost due to human-induced changes in the landscape. The very fact LPCH can exist in areas now dominated by shinnery oak is testimony to their ability to adapt to these human-induced changes, for without this ability, they would have perished long ago.

ESTIMATING KANSAS LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN POPULATIONS BY INTEGRATING LEK SURVEYS WITH GAP LANDCOVER DATA

R. D. RODGERS*, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Hays, KS 67601 USA; and M. E. HOUTS, Kansas Biological Survey, Lawrence, KS 66047 USA.

The status of the lesser prairie chicken as a “Candidate” species for listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act increases the importance of obtaining documented estimates of their populations. Earlier estimates that lacked adequate population and habitat data were inherently speculative. Since it is virtually impossible to thoroughly survey the entire occupied range of the lesser prairie chicken, a systematic means of extrapolation is needed to obtain credible population estimates for the species. We have attempted to develop such a method for the state of Kansas. During the springs of 1999–2005, roadside listening surveys were conducted to determine presence-or-absence of lesser prairie chickens in areas where the species’ distribution was not well known. In 2005, we combined the results of this work with previously-known range information and land cover maps to develop an up-to-date distribution map for the species. Since 2000, 5 new 20-mi² standard survey areas were

added to the 10 previously-existing areas in Kansas to improve the coverage and quality of the annual lek survey. The landcovers (habitats) and their respective areas were determined using GAP land cover data for each of the 15 survey areas and for the recently-defined range of the species in Kansas. Combined habitat composition on the survey areas appeared to reasonably represent the diversity of the overall Kansas range, although survey areas contained more sandsage shrubland. Estimates of the relative value of these habitat types to lesser prairie chickens were combined with GAP habitat areas to derive lower and upper measures of habitat quality and abundance (habitat value units – HVU's) for both the survey areas and for the entire Kansas range. Conservative lower and upper estimates of the *usable* (close enough, large enough, unimpaired by human development, etc.) HVU's available in the Kansas range were also derived. Usable HVU's for the full Kansas range were divided by the total (usable and unusable) HVU's on the survey areas to yield lower and upper expansion constants. Survey area populations are multiplied by these constants to derive lower and upper estimates of lesser prairie chicken breeding numbers in Kansas. The lesser prairie chicken breeding population on the 14 standard areas surveyed (265 mi²) in 2005 was estimated to be 1,384, which this methodology converts to 18,400–29,100 breeding birds for the full Kansas range (11,210 mi²).

LOSS OF PERENNIAL GRASSLAND IN THE ASPEN PARKLAND OF THE CANADIAN PRAIRIE PROVINCES: IMPACT ON PASTURELAND AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

MARIANNE SCHUTZ* and DAVID WALKER, Department of Environment and Geography, University of Manitoba, MB, Canada.

Wildlife habitat on the prairies has been in decline due to the intensification of agriculture practices, woody encroachment and fire suppression. Of particular concern is the impact of woody encroachment on grassland habitat and pasture quality. The objective of this study is to quantify change in grassland and woody habitats in pastures across the aspen parkland region of Canada and possible causes. In 2005, two fields were randomly selected in each of several public pastures in Alberta (n=8), Saskatchewan (n=8) and Manitoba (n=12) encompassing a wide variety of soil types and climatic conditions. Each field was stratified into grassland, shrub, and core and edge forest components. For each sampled pasture, aerial photos from 1940s to present will be digitized to determine the historical range of variability and occurrence of grassland and woody habitat. Current ground conditions at the sites were determined by recording plant cover, and collecting soil and biomass samples. Preliminary findings indicate that the high density of shrubs on the edge of forested patches may be the primary source of woody encroachment. Clay content of the soil may also be important in determining the degree of woody invasion, but further analysis is required. In 2006 additional public and adjacent comparable private pastures will be assessed and a GIS monitoring and land management tool developed, with the goal of improving wildlife habitat conservation decisions.

VIDEO – “THE LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN: ECHOS OF THE PRAIRIE?” – EXPLAINING THE ISSUES TO RANCHERS, DEVELOPERS, BUREAUCRATS, AND POLITICIANS

R. D. RODGERS*, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Hays, KS 67601 USA; and E. C. BREHM, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Pratt, KS 67124 USA.

For wildlife conservation to be effective, it is critical for decision makers to have a common and accurate understanding of the issues surrounding the conservation need. The habitats of the lesser prairie chicken have been and continue to be influenced by a wide range of negative and positive factors. Long-standing land management problems such as fire suppression, inappropriate grazing practices, and outright conversion of grasslands to croplands have been compounded by infrastructures associated with intensive oil and gas development, wind power, and other forms of human development. On the positive side, lesser prairie chickens have increased in distribution and range in response to Conservation Reserve Program grasslands in some parts of their range. Recent research has done much to improve our understanding of lesser prairie chicken habitat needs. Growing awareness and appreciation of the unique qualities of the species has created remarkable ecotourism opportunities and strengthened many land managers' desire to conserve the species. This video was produced in an effort to instill an appreciation of the lesser prairie chicken and to improve understanding of the issues associated with their long-term conservation. The video will be reproduced in large quantities and provided through personal contacts to decision makers who are most likely to influence the future of the species — specifically ranchers, developers, bureaucrats, and politicians.

NAGP DEVELOPMENT OF A PRAIRIE GROUSE CONSERVATION PLAN

JON HAUFLER, Ecosystem Management Research Institute, P.O. Box 717, Seeley Lake, MT 59868 USA.

The North American Grouse Partnership in cooperation with other state, provincial, and federal agencies as well as universities and other organizations is developing a prairie grouse conservation plan. The plan will address greater and lesser prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse. In the Great Plains, it will be developed around a grassland ecosystem diversity assessment, using grouse as indicators of needed amounts and distributions of grassland ecosystems. Outside of the Great Plains, the plan will focus on the specific habitat or population information and needs of each species. A team of cooperators is being organized, and data and information on each of these species is being compiled. The plan will link with the on-going development of a lesser prairie chicken plan.

THE "ADOPT-A-LEK" PROGRAM FOR MONITORING SAGE-GROUSE POPULATIONS

BEN DEEBLE* and JAY GORE, National Wildlife Federation, 240 N. Higgins Avenue #2, Missoula, MT 59802, USA.

Citizens have been used for the past five years to gather population and habitat data on greater sage-grouse in Montana and Wyoming through a National Wildlife Federation (NWF) program named "Adopt-A-Lek". Citizens volunteer their time for training and field work overseen by NWF and agency staff. "Technicians" are recruited from retired agency ranks, academia, landowners, and the hunting community. They are trained to employ appropriate sage-grouse survey and data management protocols, and to professionally conduct their activities afield. The objectives of Adopt-A-Lek are to efficiently supplement the collection of population and habitat data for agencies to assist in determining grouse populations, distribution, and habitat trends. In 2004 ninety-one volunteers were recruited in Wyoming and Montana to survey known, suspected and historic leks. These technicians monitored 151 active and historic leks, and conducted replicated counts on 58% of these leks. In 2005 seventy-four volunteers were fielded in Montana monitoring eighty-three active and historic leks, and conducted replicate counts on 79% of leks. During the two seasons twelve previously unknown leks were documented. The Adopt-a-Lek project has proven to be an efficient and effective means of conducting extensive leks and broods surveys during brief activity seasons. Associated benefits are that volunteers become knowledgeable and effective advocates for sage-grouse and shrub-steppe habitats, and engage actively in the local working group planning processes for sage-grouse conservation and management across the West.

APPLICATION OF THE FIRE-GRAZING INTERACTION TO RESTORE A SHIFTING MOSAIC ON PRAIRIES AND SHRUBLANDS FOR PRAIRIE GROUSE

T. G. BIDWELL, S. D. FUHLENDORF, and J. D. KERBY, Rangeland Ecology and Management, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078 USA; and D.M. ENGLE, Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011 USA.

Management of prairies and shrublands has long operated under the paradigm of minimizing spatially discrete disturbances which were assumed to be negative for native plants and animals and domestic grazing animals. Traditional rangeland management uses agronomic practices such as rotational grazing with fences, herbicides, water location, and mineral distribution to encourage homogeneous distribution of grazing disturbance. A model of the fire-grazing interaction proposes that grazing and fire interact through a series of positive and negative feedbacks causing a shifting mosaic of vegetation pattern across the landscape. This approach has potential to serve as an ecological-based rather than an agronomic approach for management of grasslands

and shrublands with an evolutionary history of grazing and fire. We burned one-third of study landscapes each year and stocked entire landscapes at a moderate stocking rate with cattle or bison. Our data suggest that spatially discrete fires promote focal grazing and animals spent 75% of grazing time in recently burned patches. Livestock performance was the same in mosaic landscapes and in landscapes with traditional, homogeneous management. These focal disturbances cause local changes in the plant community that are unique to this management approach. These disturbances at the appropriate scale can provide basic habitat elements such as leking site, nesting cover, brood-rearing cover, year-round food, thermal cover, and predator avoidance cover. As focal disturbance is shifted to other patches over time, successional processes lead to temporary changes in local plant communities. The patchwork landscape can be described as a shifting mosaic of habitat and habitat elements for prairie grouse and other wildlife.

LEKING AND NESTING RESPONSE OF THE GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN TO BURNING OF TALLGRASS PRAIRIE

M. A. PATTEN, D. H. WOLFE*, E. SHOCHAT, and S. K. SHERROD, G. M. Sutton
Avian Research Center, University of Oklahoma, Bartlesville, OK 74005 USA.

In the southern Great Plains, the Greater Prairie-Chicken is confined to tallgrass prairie, a habitat largely converted to agriculture. The few remaining blocks of tallgrass prairie are highly fragmented and subjected to land use that greatly alters the ecosystem, including large-scale spring burns associated with intensive stocking of cattle, a practice ubiquitous in the prairie-chicken's remaining range in the southern plains. We used an extensive set of data on radiotagged Greater Prairie-Chickens to determine how these fires affect leking and nesting behavior. Our study area was centered around a 45,000-ha block in the Flint Hills of north-central Oklahoma. From 1998 to 2000, 60%–79% of our study area was burned in spring. Prairie-chickens tended to lek on unburned areas, but they did not choose unburned areas significantly differently from a random choice of available unburned habitat. By contrast, females strongly avoided nesting in areas burned in spring. The tendency for females to place nests on unburned prairie was particularly strong before ~20 May, the approximate midpoint of the prairie-chicken's nesting season. Despite strong avoidance of burns, nest success did not differ between nests on burned or unburned prairie; however, reproductive output was lower on burns and brood survival may be affected by proximity to the edge of a burn. We conclude that habitat selection of the Greater Prairie-Chicken necessitates a mosaic of burned and unburned tallgrass prairie.

“ANECDOTAL” OBSERVATIONS OF PRAIRIE CHICKENS AND WIND GENERATORS IN NORTHWESTERN MINNESOTA

J. E. TOEPFER, Society Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd., 3755 Jackson, Plover, WI 54467 USA.

In autumn 2000, three wind generators were built on the beach ridge of glacial Lake Agassiz along the eastern edge of the Red River Valley in northwestern Minnesota. This site is located 8 km (5 miles) southeast of the town of Felton. These wind generators were built in an agricultural field of soybeans and corn that has permanent grassland cover and booming grounds in all directions. The grasslands surrounding this complex support one of the highest densities of prairie chickens in the region. From 1997-2004, the prairie chicken population in northwestern Minnesota has increased 75% and numbers around this complex have paralleled these trends. In April 2005 there were two active booming grounds within a mile of the complex, one with 27 cocks, 1 km (0.61 miles) to the north and one with 9 cocks between the towers 0.3 km (0.18 miles) from the nearest tower. Movements of radio-marked birds within the vicinity of the complex will be discussed. Results indicate that prairie chickens are not avoiding this small, isolated 3 tower wind generator complex and their presence and maintenance activities are not negatively impacting prairie chicken numbers. The effects of wind generators on prairie grouse can be minimized through the proper placement of the complex. The locations of some other booming grounds associated with human structures will also be discussed.

COLORADO PLAINS SHARP-TAILED GROUSE RECOVERY PROGRAM

E.T. GORMAN, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Sterling, CO, 80751 USA; and M.R. STRATMAN, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Brush, CO, 80723 USA.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife classified the plains sharp-tailed grouse as endangered in Colorado in 1976 and a recovery plan was completed in 1992. At present, a single population exceeding 100 birds is known to occur in eastern Colorado, near the northern border, adjacent to Wyoming and Nebraska. Remnant populations may exist elsewhere in eastern Colorado. In 2003, the Division of Wildlife initiated a transplant program to recover sharp-tailed grouse, beginning in historically occupied habitat in Boulder County, Colorado. 2004 and 2005 transplant programs have been initiated in mid-grass CRP habitat in eastern Colorado. Birds were trapped with walk-in lek traps, outfitted with Holohil radio transmitters with necklace attachments, disease tested, and released into suitable habitat in eastern Colorado. Transmitters were monitored through the nesting season each year, and periodically after the primary nesting season. Early survival, lek establishment and nesting success data is encouraging for establishment of a new population of plains sharp-tailed grouse in this

area of Colorado and may indicate that several other mid-grass CRP complexes may be suitable for prairie grouse establishment.

GREATER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN RECOVERY EFFORTS IN MISSOURI

B.E. JAMISON* and M.R. ALLEGER*, Missouri Department of Conservation, Clinton, MO 64735 USA.

In response to a continued and rapid decline, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) placed Greater Prairie-Chickens on the state endangered species list in 1999. Despite improvements in public land management strategies and increased funding for habitat on private lands, as few as 500 birds remain in isolated flocks associated with the prairie remnants of southwestern Missouri. Aggressive recovery efforts are required to conserve the species in Missouri. To that end, MDC formed a multi-division prairie-chicken recovery team in July of 2005, including members of management staff, private lands conservationists, and research biologists. Proposed recovery actions include increased land protection to create landscapes that meet criteria established by the Partners in Flight Grassland Bird Conservation Area Model. Key to this undertaking is habitat management on private land and innovative approaches to habitat manipulation including the use of plantings of various plant species mixtures, grazing, and mechanical disturbances. Translocations of birds into adequately prepared landscapes also are recommended as part of the long-term recovery effort. Monitoring of habitat utilization by translocated birds and population responses to changing landscape conditions will accompany recovery efforts. Monitoring results will drive the overall adaptive approach to habitat management and protection on public and private lands. The approach will allow prioritization of Grassland Focus Areas based on initial successes and shortcomings. We present conceptual components of the recovery plan and invite questions and comment from the Technical Council as a group.

RESTORING GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKENS TO WEST CENTRAL MINNESOTA – PROGRESS REPORT

J. E. TOEPFER, Society Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Plover, WI 54467 USA; D. R. TRAUBA*, Minnesota Dept. Natural Resources, Watson, MN 56295 USA; and S. C. VACEK, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Morris, MN 56267 USA.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are serious threats to prairie grouse throughout North America. As managers work toward re-connecting isolated greater prairie chicken (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*) populations, a better understanding of the techniques to re-establish populations is needed. From 1999-2005, 521 wild greater prairie chickens were released at 15 different sites within a 2,757-km² (1,064 mi²) project area. Overall, 16 booming grounds were established with 11 still active in 2005. Initial summer releases, 1999-2002 (188 birds), established 6 booming grounds. Past research indicates dispersal away from release sites is the main reason why many

prairie chicken translocation projects have failed. Movement data from April released prairie chickens indicated an establishment rate at their release sites of 52.4% (45-55% cocks, 50-57% hens). Of 24 cocks released within 0.8 km of 4 permanent booming grounds in late November, 79.1% established at their release site or on an adjacent booming ground. These high localization rates indicate translocated prairie chickens are attracted to resident birds. One approach to reestablishing greater prairie chickens is to first establish booming grounds 3-5 miles apart via a summer release. Second, simulate recruitment and limit dispersal by supplementing the existing booming grounds with birds released over 2-3 years during the breeding season or fall/winter.

PARASITISM OF PRAIRIE CHICKEN NESTS BY PHEASANTS IN MINNESOTA

J. E. TOEPFER*, and A. PRATT, Society Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd., 3755 Jackson, Plover, WI 54467 USA; D. A. TRAUBA, Minnesota Dept. Natural Resources, Watson, MN 56295 USA; and S. C. VACEK, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Morris, MN 56267 USA.

It was thought the problem of nest parasitism by ring-necked pheasants was unique to Illinois prairie chickens because their small amount of grassland habitat did not permit the two species to spread out during nesting. This paper presents information on nest parasitism by pheasants on radio-marked prairie chickens in a grassland complex with over 16,187 ha (40,000 acres) of grassland habitat. Between 2003-05, 86 prairie chicken nests have been located and 30.2% have been parasitized with at least one pheasant egg (1-15 eggs). The incidence of pheasant eggs in prairie chicken nests increased with the "density" of crowing pheasants. The parasitism rate ranged from zero with < 25 crows per 3 minutes to 66.7% with 100 crows per 3 minutes. Nest success of 9 parasitized nests was 44.4% in 2005 with 3 of these nests hatching at least one pheasant egg. Parasitized nests contained 67 prairie chicken eggs of which 46 (68.6%) did not hatch. No prairie chicken renests have been parasitized even in areas of high pheasant density. In over 200 hours of observing booming grounds we have documented two interactions between pheasants and prairie chickens and in both cock prairie chickens chased cock pheasants off the booming ground.

MINNESOTA'S FIRST PRAIRIE CHICKEN HUNTING SEASON IN 61 YEARS!

W. D. SVEDARSKY, NW Research and Outreach Center, U of MN, Crookston, 56716; M. A. LARSON, Forest Wildlife Populations and Research Group, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Grand Rapids, MN, 55744; and W. KREUGER, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Slayton, MN 56172.

A marker in history happened in October of 2003 when the Greater Prairie Chicken was hunted in northwest Minnesota for the first time since 1942. It was a celebration of a

conservation success story resulting from partnership efforts by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society. Habitat availability and management were key to populations responding to a level that allowed a limited harvest; especially additional grassland resulting from the Conservation Reserve Program. In 2003, there were 853 applications for 100 hunting permits and 93 were issued with a limit of 2 birds per hunter in a 5-day season from 18-22 October. Landowners having at least 40 acres within the permit area were allocated 20% of the licenses. A total of 129 birds were taken for an average of 1.2 per licensee who spent an average of 2.2 days afield. The 2003 season was unseasonably warm. In 2004, there were 759 applicants for 100 licenses and 90 hunters purchased a permit. The 2004 season (23-27 October) was quite windy and rainy and only 55 birds were retrieved. The number of hunters, time spent hunting, and hunting methods were similar between years. The average satisfaction rating (scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being excellent) was 8.7 in 2003 and 6.8 in 2004. Differences were likely weather related. A grand hunting tradition has been restored in Minnesota and the overall profile of an exciting and colorful upland game bird has been elevated.

ATTWATER'S PRAIRIE-CHICKEN – AN UPDATE

M. E. MORROW, Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge, Eagle Lake, TX 77434 USA.

The Attwater's prairie-chicken (APC) is endemic to Gulf Coast prairies of Texas and Louisiana. As of spring 2005, fewer than 50 remained in free-ranging populations. Habitat management is currently underway at the Attwater Prairie-Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (APCNWR) (10,528 acres), the Texas City Prairie Preserve (TCPP) (2,395 acres), and on more than 76,000 acres of privately owned lands. A captive breeding program involving 7 partner institutions has produced 848 birds for release at APCNWR and TCPP. Adaptive modification of release methods since 1995 resulted in 37% survival for 2004. Since 2001, nesting success at APCNWR has averaged 61% through the use of predator deterrent fences, compared to the historic average of 32% reported by Peterson and Silvy (1996). Currently, extremely poor brood survival from pen-reared hens is the factor most limiting recovery of free-ranging APC populations. Factors hypothesized as contributing to poor brood survival include genetics, hen condition, red imported fire ants, and habitat quality. Research is currently underway to evaluate these factors. Recovery is also being impeded by insufficient production of birds from captive breeding facilities for release into the wild. Disease (especially reticuloendotheliosis virus), nutrition, genetics, and inadequate facilities are all likely contributing to this issue.

PRAIRIE-CHICKENS IN THE ARMY: A FIRST YEAR SUMMARY

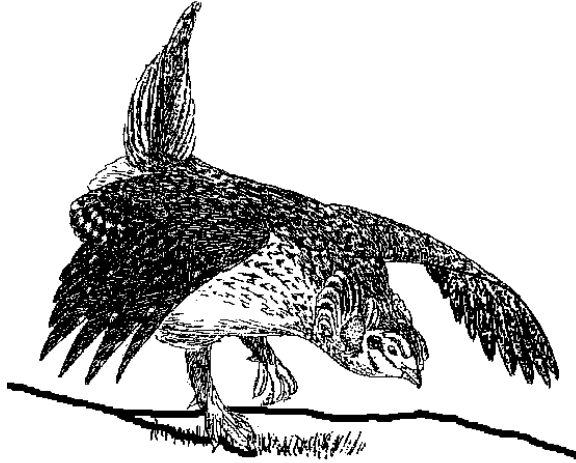
R. S. JONES*, Environmental Division, Fort Riley Military Reservation, Fort Riley, KS 66442, USA; A. E. HYNEK and S. C. STRATTON, Environmental Division, Fort Riley Military Reservation, Fort Riley, KS 66442, USA.

The plight of prairie grouse in North America is well known. The Fort Riley Military Reservation provides a unique opportunity to study the direct effects habitat manipulation and human disturbance at a large scale have on a population of greater prairie-chickens (*Tympanuchus cupido pinnatus*). The main objectives of the study were to use radiotelemetry to determine what effects our prairie restoration project and military training was having on a prairie-chicken population. Walk-in funnel traps were used capturing 16 hens and 22 males. Survival to date is 64% for females and 58% for males. No successful reproduction of collared females was observed. Males appeared to have less lek site fidelity. Further study is underway.



Mark Lindvall (right) explains grassland management practices on the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge.

Business Meeting Minutes



Scott Taylor called the business meeting to order at 2:20, September 21, 2005. Scott and Bill Vodehnal kept the notes on which these minutes are based.

Approval of previous conference minutes -

Jerry Kobriger moved and K.C. Jensen seconded that we approve the minutes of the 25th conference as published. Motion carried.

Treasurer's report-

Scott Taylor reported Wisconsin forwarded \$2,000 in start-up funds for this meeting, and \$1,068 remained in an account with the Sutton Avian Research Center in Oklahoma. Total meeting income and expenses are as follows:

INCOME:

Funds forwarded from WI meeting	\$2,000.00
Registrations	\$11,335.00
Donations and miscellaneous income	\$884.00
Auction proceeds	\$2,125.50
Total income	\$16,344.50

EXPENSES:

Fairgrounds building rental	\$475.00
Banquet speaker expenses and honorarium	\$757.00
Subway (field trip lunch)	\$276.02
D&M (field trip dinner)	\$498.00
Jordan's (banquet dinner)	\$3,201.40
Registration folios	\$2,320.36
Field trip bus driver and fuel	\$225.75
Sound system rental	\$150.00
Name tags and program printing	\$209.71
Hotel meeting room and break refreshments	\$1,098.62
Mixer beverages and supplies	\$107.30
Plaque engraving	\$10.00

Lois Beel (2 catered meals)	\$4,220.05
Seven Springs (bottled water)	\$140.00
Auctioneer travel expenses	\$270.00
Total expenses	\$13,959.21
BALANCE	\$2,385.29

Bill Vodehnal will forward the entirety of this balance to the Chair of the next meeting (see below).

Next meeting-

Clait Braun relayed a message from Christian Hagen (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife) regarding the possibility of a joint meeting with the Western States Sage and Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse Working Group in 2007; their meeting usually occurs in June or July. The next state in the PGTC rotation is South Dakota, which is hosting the Western States Working Group meeting in June of 2006. This brings up the possibility that the Working Group might be asked to meet twice in a row in South Dakota if we have a joint meeting. K.C. Jensen, on behalf of South Dakota, volunteered to host the 27th PGTC meeting, presumably in September but potentially earlier. This was unanimously accepted by the group. Nova Silvy and others suggested if possible, the meeting should not be scheduled the week before or after either the IAFWA or TWS meetings to avoid travel overlap. South Dakota will be in contact with Western States Working Group representatives to work out the details of a potential joint meeting, and will advise the group via the PGTC listserver if alternate plans need to be made.

Carry-over of excess meeting funds-

At the Wisconsin meeting, Rick Baydack and Stephanie Harmon volunteered to draft a bylaw amendment regarding the general use and disposition of funds carried over following each meeting. Their draft amendment follows:

For any PGTC conference revenues that remain after all expenses have been paid, the PGTC conference host committee should follow the order of priority listed below for surplus revenue allocation:

- 1. if required, purchase additional PGTC award plaques, engraving, conference pins, and/or other required conference materials, and stockpile a supply for future PGTC conferences.*
- 2. if available, transfer up to \$500 to the next PGTC conference host committee. Retain any remaining funds within the host committee's state/province as an endowment to be used to assist future participants, especially student presenters, to attend PGTC conferences.*

Steve Sherrod suggested making those funds available to all students, not just the host state's. Steve DeMaso suggested additional money could be set aside for travel expenses if the group wanted to provide input at congressional hearings, IAFWA meetings, etc. Don Wolfe said \$500 was probably not enough to transfer to the next

meeting site for start-up funds; \$2,000 would be better. Jerry Kobriger noted the PGTC bylaws (Article XI, Section 1) do not allow amendments unless they have been submitted to the membership 30 days prior to the meeting, so we will not be able to take final action until the next meeting. Bill Vodehnal suggested a further amendment to relax the 30-day requirement and allow voting via email. Scott Taylor said under the current bylaws we can't take action on these issues, but can reach agreement on the amendments via the listserver and act in accordance with them until the next meeting when they can be officially become bylaws. Scott agreed to post the draft amendments on the listserver to start this process.

Position statement on wind energy development-

Clait Braun reported The Wildlife Society is in the process of preparing a technical review of wind energy development impacts on wildlife. Stephanie Harmon has been asked to serve on the committee preparing the review. It was proposed that the PGTC work on a resolution in support of site-specific data collection before and after wind farms are erected, and perhaps on the broader issue of wind energy siting. The target audiences would be state agencies, the National Wind Coordinating Committee, and other decision-makers. Volunteers to work on this resolution were Randy Rodgers, Don Wolfe, Russ Horton, and John Toepfer; Stephanie Harmon was also "volunteered." The committee will work on a draft and submit it for suggestions via the listserver.

PGTC website-

Jim Moser graciously volunteered space on the North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) server to house a PGTC website if the group could produce the content. Dan Svedarsky volunteered to head up a committee (yet to be determined) to plan and produce content.

Grouse bibliography-

Don Wolfe has produced a bibliography with over 3,500 grouse-related citations; this is available on the Sutton Center's website (www.suttoncenter.org).

North American Grouse Management Plan-

Jim Moser reported that a draft of the plan is available on the NAGP website (www.grousepartners.org).

Nova Silvy thanked the Nebraska contingent for organizing the 26th PGTC, which was applauded by the group. The group also thanked the caterers for their fine service. The meeting was adjourned without a motion.

The Hamerstrom Award



The Hamerstrom Award was established in honor of Fred and Fran Hamerstrom, pioneers of prairie grouse research and management. It will be awarded at the meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council. The award will consist of a plaque with the engraved name of the recipient.

Award Criteria:

1. To recognize individual(s) and organization(s) who have made significant contributions in prairie grouse research, management or other support programs which have enhanced the welfare of one or more species of prairie grouse in a particular state or region.
2. The contribution should be evidenced by a sustained effort over at least 10 years.
3. The contribution may be related to research, management activity, promotion of an integrated program, or some combination thereof. The relative importance given to these three categories of contributions is the prerogative of the Awards Committee but it should be based on how it has helped the overall welfare and survival of prairie grouse.

Selection Procedure:

1. The selection of award recipients will be made by the three-member Executive Board and two additional members appointed by the Chairman.
2. Nominations will be accepted at large as well as from members of the Awards Committee.
3. Nominations will be submitted to the designated Awards Committee Chairman at least one month before (deadline for the 26th meeting is August 19, 2005) the biennial meeting of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council.
4. Nominations should include the following information:
 - A. Name, address, and phone number of nominee.
 - B. Biographic sketch of individual or brief history of an organization.
 - C. Overview of contributions indicating the nature of the contributions, duration, how it has contributed to the welfare of one or more species of prairie grouse, and the geographic area influenced by the contributions.
5. A maximum of two individual awards and two organization awards may be presented at a biennial meeting. No awards will be given if the Awards Committee feels that no deserving individuals or organization are available at the time.

The first recipient was Fran Hamerstrom, in 1991, and it has been since awarded at the biennial meetings of the Prairie Grouse Technical Council.

When the awards program was in the concept stage, Fran wanted to ensure that the Hamerstrom name not be associated with any interpretation of the word “conservation” that would include any relationship to the anti-hunting mentality. To make that clear, the awards presentation is to include the following recommendation from Fran’s *Wild Foods Cookbook* on yet another way to enjoy prairie grouse.

Prairie Grouse

Adapted from:
Hamerstrom, Frances. 1989. *Wild Foods Cookbook*.
Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa.

Prairie grouse are outstanding table birds. Unlike most gallinaceous birds such as pheasant and ruffed grouse, they retain their juices well and do not tend to dry out while cooking.

Very young birds, still in juvenal plumage, have light breast meat and delicate texture, but the flavor is still undeveloped. By October, almost all the birds are in prime condition, with breast meat dark, almost like the legs, and very delicious.

Chickens and sharptails should be served rare or at most well-done.

Roast:

Pluck dry, dress and clean. Do not stuff. Roast in a hot oven (450 degrees) 25 minutes for medium-rare sharptails or chickens.

Fried Prairie Grouse:

Pluck, dress, and clean. Cut in pieces for frying. The breasts of these birds are so plump that it is often simpler to cut them away from the bone: then cut or divide each side of the breast into two pieces. If this is not done, the legs and back will be overdone while the breast still requires more cooking. Flour each piece lightly before placing it in the hot fat. Salt just before serving.

If you want to take the wild taste out of your grouse, pay no attention to anything I’ve written.

2005 Recipients of the Hamerstrom Award

Presented at the
26th Prairie Grouse Technical Council Meeting
Valentine, Nebraska
21 September 2005

Dr. Nova J. Silvy
2005 Individual Award



Nova Silvy (right) accepts the Hamerstrom Award from a meditative Russ Horton (sorry, Russ!).

The Prairie Grouse Technical Council had its first official meeting in Grand Island, Nebraska in 1957. Now that our organization is meeting in Nebraska for only the third time, it is useful to examine this organization's history and the individuals that have helped make important research and management contributions.

It is an honor to recognize an individual for the Hamerstrom Award who has been an integral part of that history; including the willingness to organize a past meeting. His

name has been closely associated with research and management on prairie grouse for most of 4 decades. This candidate is so well known to our membership that it will likely take only one clue to reveal his identity.

Nova Silvy was born in Missouri, received his B.S. and M.S. degrees from Kansas State University, and his Ph.D. from Southern Illinois. His 40-year (and counting) career relating to Prairie chickens began in 1965 as a master's student working on Greater Prairie Chickens in the Flint Hills of Kansas. Although there have been brief periods when his attention was focused on other issues, prairie chickens have never been far from his heart or attention.

In 1974 he began teaching at Texas A&M University, where he remains today as a Regents Professor in the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Science. For those unfamiliar with this designation, the Regents Professor Award Program was initiated to recognize faculty members who have made exemplary contributions to their university and to the people of Texas.

Soon after arriving at Texas A&M, Dr. Silvy initiated research on the Endangered Attwater's Prairie-Chicken which is still ongoing. He and his students have addressed a myriad of information needs related to Attwater's ecology and management including those related to movements and habitat use, food habits, predator management, impacts of petroleum development, genetics, behavior, diseases and parasites, population dynamics, captive rearing, and release of captively-reared birds into the wild. He served as leader of the Attwater's prairie-chicken recovery team for 17 years and is still a recovery team member. In recent years, he has expanded his research efforts to include lesser prairie-chickens, and has been active in the interstate working group that is working diligently to reverse the alarming decline of this species.

His dedication for grouse is so strong, many of us are willing to forgive his dalliances with the Florida key deer, which we know he studies as a hobby. His research interests have also included white-tailed deer, mourning doves, white-winged doves, northern bobwhites, scaled quail, wild turkeys, wood ducks, feral hogs, elk, lower keys marsh rabbits and Key Largo woodrats to name a few.

Nova has also been extremely active in professional organizations throughout his career. He has served as president of The Wildlife Society, at both the national and Texas chapter levels, and he has been active in the prairie Grouse Technical council for 40 years. He is currently a board member for the North American Grouse Partnership and serves on the editorial board for the Wildlife Society Bulletin. Additionally, he has authored more than 125 scientific publications.

He is well respected in the classroom, as evidenced by the numerous awards and accolades he has received from both graduate and undergraduate organizations during his tenure at Texas A&M. He has won several teaching awards, including the Vice Chancellor's Award and TWS Texas Chapter Educator of the Year Award, and has

been named professor of the year seven times. He also won The Wildlife Society's highest honor, the Aldo Leopold Award, in 2003.

These awards partly have been the result of his willingness to accept enormous responsibilities. Over 1,500 undergraduate students have been instructed by him during his teaching career.

The following are quotes from two of those students:

"...Despite his enormous schedule, and the fact that he was not my official faculty counselor, I can honestly say that he had an enormous impact on my career. He helped students realize the combined importance of education, professionalism, and drive...." --Michael A. Schroeder

"....as an advisor and mentor, he is second to none. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have had Dr. Silvy as an advisor, and I can say without reservation that he truly cares about his students, and has their best interests at heart. He is actively involved with their research at all stages, including field work, but is not over-bearing. He displays the confidence to allow his students to learn for themselves, but is always there if help or advice is needed...." --Michael E. Morrow

Similar recommendations would come from some of his 70 graduate students. The research of 8 of his M.S. students and 8 of his Ph.D. students has or is focused on Prairie chickens. Additionally, 4 of his graduate students eventually became professors at Texas A&M University.

In short, Dr. Silvy is the type of consummate researcher, educator and professional that is indeed worthy of the esteem bestowed by the Hamerstrom award.

It is a privilege and an honor to present the 2005 Hamerstrom award to Dr. Nova J. Silvy.

Submitted by Michael Schroeder, Michael Morrow, Jim Keir, Len McDaniel, Jim Mosher (NAGP), Randy Rodgers, and John Toepfer

(A special thank you to Michael Schroeder and Michael Morrow, whose nomination letters made this task simple. --Russ Horton)

**Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd.
2005 Organization Award**



Bernard Westfahl (left) of the Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd. accepts the Hamerstrom Award from Russ Horton.

The STCP is a volunteer conservation group that has a history of prairie chicken conservation that spans over 45 years of service and dedication to the resource dating back to the Hamerstrom's time in the early 1960's. Its mission is simple and to the point "to save the prairie chicken from extinction". It should go without saying that this group's contributions are long over due for recognition by the Prairie Grouse Technical Council.

The following is a brief history of STCP role, primarily in Wisconsin. This has been modified/updated with permission from an article written by Greg Septon that appeared in the last North American Grouse Partnership News.

"The Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd. (STCP) was founded in 1961 by a

small handful of conservation minded Milwaukeeans. Led by the dedication and energies of Dory Vallier and Willis Sullivan, Sr., STCP was quickly formed as a non-profit organization and went to work. STCP's goal was simple and straightforward: to save the Prairie-chicken from extinction. At the time concern had been expressed by noted wildlife biologists Drs. Frederick & Frances Hamerstrom about the amount of grassland habitat that needed to be protected to ensure the survival of the species in Wisconsin. Once found in every county of the state, the population had decreased dramatically and was holding on only in the savannahs and failed farming regions of Central Wisconsin.

Once organized, direct action by STCP soon followed. Critical properties were surveyed and identified by the Hamerstroms and Os Matson of the Wisconsin Conservation Department now the Wisconsin DNR. And, in a timely and efficient manner, STCP set out to raise private funds and purchase these grassland reserves. These parcels of land varying in size from 80 acres on up were purchased in a scatter pattern approach developed by the Hamerstroms and Matson called "ecological patterning." The concept protected suitable blocks of Prairie-chicken habitat interspersed throughout the landscape. Humans and human activities are part of this landscape and ecological patterning looks at the big picture addressing the needs of humans and wildlife so that both can co-exist.

During the ensuing years, STCP purchased over 7,100 acres. At the same time, the Prairie Chicken Foundation, which was an affiliate of and is today survived by the Dane County Conservation League, was purchasing lands as well. As a result of these actions, combined with additional lands purchased by the State, today, there are over 22,000 acres of protected grassland & sedge reserves in Central Wisconsin. Because of compatible land uses on adjoining lands, it was believed at the time that this amount of land would secure a future for the Prairie-chicken in Wisconsin.

Over the years STCP continued to oversee management and monitor the status of Prairie-chickens on their lands. But as taxes increased, it seemed more beneficial for everyone involved to put the lands into State ownership and preserve them for future generations. And so, in 1989, under a special agreement, STCP sold its properties to the State of Wisconsin for \$1 million (over \$1 million under appraised value). The agreement stated that 90% of former STCP lands must be managed by the State for the purpose of preserving, creating, and improving nesting, brood rearing, and winter habitat for Prairie-chickens and that the remaining 10% be used in a manner consistent with Prairie-chicken management. STCP must also review and approve/disapprove the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) annual management plans for its' former lands to ensure that management practices are always in the best interests of Wisconsin's Prairie-chickens. And as a final safeguard, if the State does not manage STCP's former properties in the agreed upon manner, the lands revert to STCP ownership.

With the Prairie-chicken situation felt to be secure in Wisconsin, STCP decided that in addition to maintaining a primary focus on Prairie-chickens, it would expand its' mission to assist additional threatened or endangered species in the state. To this end, STCP

also pledged to WDNR, to fund \$500,000 in grants over a 20-year period to help support Wisconsin's threatened and endangered species research & recovery projects. These grants were awarded by the STCP Council of Chiefs after review by its Projects & Research Committee. STCP fulfilled its pledge to WDNR ahead of schedule funding numerous projects ranging from Prairie-chickens and Peregrine falcons (\$108,000) and Trumpeter swans (\$35,000) restoration, song birds and even rattlesnakes.

As STCP entered the early 1990's however the Council of Chiefs took serious note of what was happening to other Prairie-chicken populations in the Midwest. The species had disappeared from Michigan and Indiana, was close to extirpation in Illinois and their numbers were seriously declining in Texas, Missouri and Oklahoma. Would Wisconsin's Prairie-chickens follow in this wake? In spite of the fact that STCP and partners, (WIDNR, Dane Conservation League) had preserved what was believed to be enough land, other factors including adjoining land use changes seemed to be working against the long-term survival of this state listed threatened species. It was time to refocus once more and take the straightforward approach STCP is known for to find answers.

In order to get to the heart of the problem and find out what factors were adversely affecting Prairie-chickens in Wisconsin and scientifically evaluate their status, STCP embarked on an extensive research project titled: **Prairie Chickens & Grasslands: 2000 and Beyond** (PCG2B). Included in the research were studies on dispersal, diseases, nesting success, survival, food, open space, pesticides, parasites, urban sprawl, recruitment & brood rearing, translocation methods and genetics.

Although focused here in Wisconsin, research was conducted throughout the national range of the species so accurate comparisons and especially genetic samples could be collected and analyzed. During the ensuing seven years, over 4,600 Prairie-chickens were trapped in seven states.

The project came to completion in 2003 and a final report was published and distributed to the STCP Council of Chiefs, STCP members, and to wildlife professionals across the country. The findings were stark. Prairie-chickens in Wisconsin had lost half of their range and sub-populations had formed separated by fragmented habitat. Even worse, genetic comparisons with Prairie-chicken populations in the Great Plains and historical samples indicated that Wisconsin's Prairie-chickens had lost genetic diversity and were similar in genetic makeup to the Heath hen, thirty years before this sub-species became extinct. The final chapter in this report made recommendations to the WDNR on what needed to be done immediately to turn the tide and save the Prairie-chicken in Wisconsin.

In the end, PCG2B cost nearly a \$1.5 million. But, the information gathered through the intensive research (if implemented now) may indeed save the Prairie-chicken in Wisconsin and could have lasting influences on the species across its' range.

So what has STCP done since? PCG2B was distributed to members of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board as well as to all related WIDNR area managers and researchers. This resulted in a Wisconsin Greater Prairie Chicken Recovery

Management Plan that was approved by the State's Natural Resources Board in 2004. However, STCP did not give its full support to this plan because they did not feel that based on available habitat and genetic data that an additional 15,000 acres was enough additional habitat to sustain a viable prairie chicken population in Wisconsin. STCP was fearful that the Wisconsin population would become a "zoo" population always in need of a periodic genetic infusion from birds from larger populations.

STCP has now embarked on Phase II of PCG2B that will find the organization in the midst of one of the most ambitious species recovery and habitat preservation efforts ever undertaken in Wisconsin. Plans are currently underway for the State to acquire 15,000 acres of additional grasslands over the next 10 years. Discussions have been underway since 2004 to initiate translocations of Prairie-chickens into Wisconsin in an attempt to infuse new genes into the state's population to increase genetic diversity. The first translocation will likely take place in 2006 and continue annually until 2008 and possibly beyond.

In adhering to their mission, STCP will once again attempt to play a leading role in efforts to save Wisconsin's Prairie-chickens by offering to finance and conduct the translocations.

STCP has always been known as the small organization that cuts through politics and bureaucracy and gets things done."

The above relates primarily to STCP's accomplishments and goals just in Wisconsin. STCP has also been involved in assisting in the recovery of the Attwater's Prairie Chicken, the successful reintroduction of prairie chickens in North Dakota that resulted in the first hunting season in that state in over 60 years, a translocation in Minnesota to extend the range, a long-term (14 year) evaluation of prairie chicken nesting in CRP in Minnesota and a nationwide survey of prairie chicken genetics.

Nominated by John Toepfer, Michael Morrow, and Jim Mosher (NAGP).

Recipients of the Hamerstrom Award

1991 Fran Hamerstrom
1993 Ron Westemeier
1995 Dan Svedarsky and
Jerry Kobriger
1998 Bob Robel
1999 Bill Berg
2001 Len McDaniel
2003 John Toepfer
2005 Nova Silvy and
The Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd.

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Sandhills rancher A. B. Cox shares some insights and poetry at the Bowring Ranch State Historical Park.

Past Conferences

1 st	Grand Island, Nebraska	September 1957
2 nd	Emporia, Kansas	March 1959
3 rd	Stevens Point, Wisconsin	September 1960
4 th	Pierre, South Dakota	September 1961
5 th	Nevada, Missouri	September 1963
6 th	Warroad, Minnesota	September 1965
7 th	Effingham, Illinois	September 1967
8 th	Woodward, Oklahoma	September 1969
9 th	Dickinson, North Dakota	September 1971
10 th	Lamar, Colorado	September 1973
11 th	Victoria, Texas	September 1975
12 th	Pierre, South Dakota	September 1977
13 th	Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin	September 1979
14 th	Halsey, Nebraska	September 1981
15 th	Emporia, Kansas	September 1983
16 th	Sedalia, Missouri	September 1985
17 th	Crookston, Minnesota	September 1987
18 th	Escanaba, Michigan	September 1989
19 th	Billings, Montana	September 1991
20 th	Fort Collins, Colorado	July 1993
21 st	Medora, North Dakota	August 1995
22 nd	College Station, Texas	February 1998
23 rd	Gimli, Manitoba	September 1999
24 th	Woodward, Oklahoma	November 2001
25 th	Siren, Wisconsin	September 2003
26 th	Valentine, Nebraska	September 2005