

Wisconsin Sharptail Grouse Status 2008

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Abstract

The total number of dancing males on the 9 managed tracts in Wisconsin decreased slightly from 194 in 2007 to 183 this year, indicating a 6% decrease in the sharptail population since last year. The overall population has been gradually declining since 1999 (Figure 2), with cyclical increases in the late 1990s and more recently. Conversely, survey efforts on unmanaged lands, conducted by the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society and other volunteers, indicated an increase in sharptail numbers in 2008, with a total of 268 birds found this spring compared to 206 last year, an increase of 30% from 2007 to 2008.

Methods

Sharp-tailed grouse populations on managed properties were monitored by counting displaying males on dancing grounds. Dancing grounds were approached afoot or by vehicle and observations were made from blinds placed on dancing grounds. Male birds were identified with the aid of field glasses. A complete census of these displaying grounds was attempted on those properties designated as sharptail management tracts (Figure 1).

Sharp-tailed grouse surveys on unmanaged lands were concentrated within a portion of northwestern Wisconsin, primarily in deer management units 2 and 9 (Figure 1). Surveys on private lands generally involved selecting one or more blocks of the best available habitat and then conducting listening routes along roads transecting those blocks. Dancing grounds found within habitat blocks were approached and birds were flushed. The total number of birds flushed from each site was counted, with no attempt being made to distinguish sexes.

In 2008 additional survey effort was placed on non-managed lands within the North Central Forest, Northwest Sands, and Superior Coastal Plains Ecological Landscapes. This effort was designed to update the current distribution of sharp-tailed grouse dancing grounds, not necessarily to census the total number of males dancing on each ground. This expanded survey effort will continue in 2009 with additional emphasis on suitable habitat in the Central Sand Plains Ecological Landscape and the Spread Eagle Barrens State Natural Area vicinity.

Surveys are a cooperative effort between DNR, USFS, GLIFWC, Northland College, members of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, and volunteers.

Results

The 2008 dancing ground survey indicated slight decreases in sharptail numbers on nearly all managed sites including: Crex Meadows W.A., Moquah Barrens W.M.A., Namekagon Barrens W.A., Pershing W.A., Riley Lake W.M.A., and Dike Seventeen W.A. (Table 1). Douglas County W.A. observed the same number of sharptails as in 2007, and Kimberly Clark W.A. saw an increase of one dancing male. One survey, in the Wood County W.A., was not completed this year.

Replicates of these traditionally surveyed areas are the most dependable index to changes in the sharptail grouse population.

Survey efforts on unmanaged lands resulted in a count of 268 birds in deer management units 2 and 9. This count was 30% higher than obtained during 2007. However, this increase may be due, in part, to expanded survey effort in 2008. Unit 2 increased from 173 birds in 2007 to 241 birds in 2008, while unit 9 decreased by 6 birds for a total of 27.

Several new dancing grounds were located on non-managed properties in Price, Rusk and Taylor counties in 2008. Survey effort will be expanded on non-managed properties in 2009 to further assess the current sharp-tailed grouse distribution in Wisconsin.

Table 1. Sharptail Population Trends on Managed Lands from 1991-2008.

Number of Dancing Males on Sharptail Grouse Management Areas from 1991-2008																		
Property	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Crex Meadows W.A.	126	47	53	57	86	110	117	132	111	112	73	61	61	53	49	38	45	40
Douglas County W.A.	5	4	2	8	12	9	9	18	20	16	11	12	20	21	14	15	28	28
Kimberly Clark W.A.	56	32	20	20	28	20	15	25	40	39	5	9	4	n/a	0	3	9	10
Moquah Barrens W.M.A.	6	9	6	7	21	14	17	34	40	36	19	35	29	14	7	6	6	3
Namekagon Barrens W.A.	28	25	16	25	39	44	54	65	43	24	9	21	42	25	19	42	51	47
Pershing W.A.	37	34	24	16	26	30	43	34	22	**	19	13	3	16	11	16	28	27
Riley Lake W.M.A.	25	8	5	7	18	17	19	19	27	27	17	12	17	16	12	16	25	27
Wood County W.A.	54	13	11	16	19	18	10	17	18	6	0	8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dike Seventeen	16	10	9	9	8	7	3	18	3	6	0	2	2	3	2	1	2	1
Total	353	182	146	165	257	269	287	362	325	284	159	173	178	148	114	137	194	183

*Not a complete count of dancing males.

**A few dancing males were present.

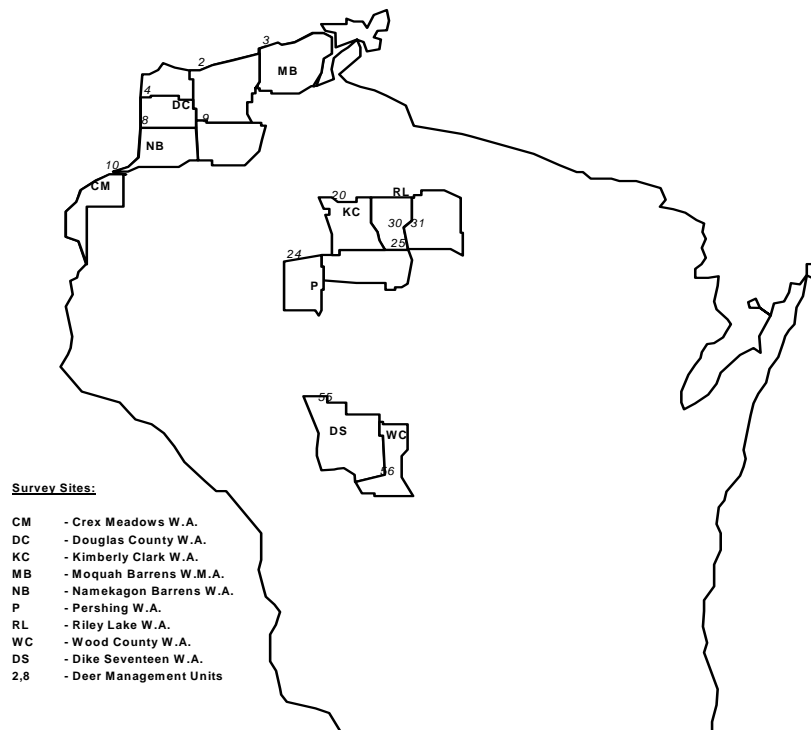


Figure 1. 2008 Sharptail survey area.

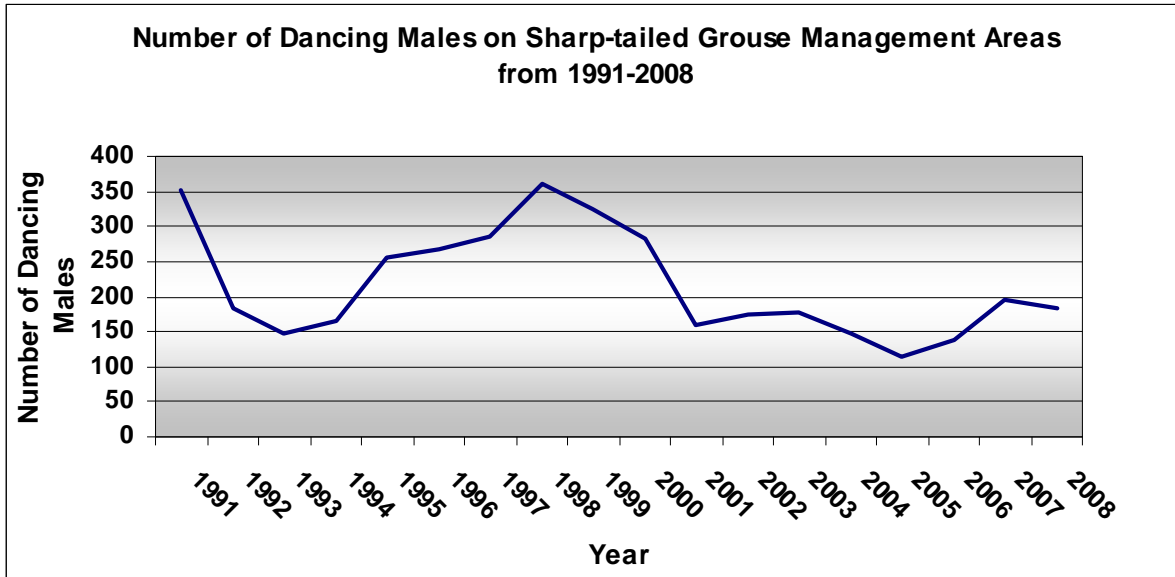


Figure 2. Number of Dancing Males on Sharptail Grouse Management Areas from 1991-2008.