

Sharp-tailed Grouse Harvest & Hunter Survey 2007

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Permit application

A change to the sharp-tailed grouse harvest permit application took effect in 2003, when the sharp-tailed grouse permit application was no longer included in the Patron License Package. Currently, all hunters who want to apply for a sharp-tailed grouse harvest permit are required to pay a \$3 application fee. All permits were mailed to hunters prior to the start of the hunting season. After harvesting a sharp-tailed grouse, hunters are required to record the date of kill and the deer management unit of kill on the registration stub, and mail it back to the DNR in Madison. In 2007, permit levels were set by the DNR based on spring sharp-tailed grouse dancing ground surveys within deer management unit boundaries. In addition, in 2007 all permit holders were mailed a separate, voluntary survey along with a voluntary request to submit wings from harvested birds for genetic and demographic evaluation.

Results

Harvest

Four hundred and seventeen (417) hunters applied for sharp-tailed grouse harvest permits in four deer management units across the northwestern part of Wisconsin (Figure 1). Three hundred and seventy-six (376) were successful in drawing at least one permit. Six hundred and ninety-five (695) permits were available and issued in 2007, a 10.3% decrease from 2006 (Table 1). Forty-one (41) hunters did not receive a permit because they requested a unit that was oversubscribed or because they applied for a unit that was not open to sharp-tailed grouse hunting.

The 2007 sharp-tailed grouse season was held from 20 October through 11 November. Reported harvest, as recorded on returned hunter registration stubs, was 40 birds, a 42.9% increase from 2006 (Figure 2). No estimate of hunter compliance has been attempted since the harvest permit and harvest reporting system was implemented; therefore, actual harvest of sharp-tailed grouse is probably higher than reported. The deer management unit with the highest sharp-tailed grouse harvest was unit 2, with 25 birds registered (Table 1). Permit success was highest in units 8 and 10 at 20%. No birds were reportedly harvested from unit 9 for the 2nd consecutive year. Fifty percent (20) of the harvest occurred during the first 2 days of the season while harvest during the first 7 days of the season accounted for 70% (28) of the total harvest. This was similar to 2006 when 53.5% (15) and 64.2% (18) of the birds were harvested during the opening weekend and first week of the season, respectively. Success rates are not corrected for non-hunters, or non-reporting.

Hunter survey & wing collection

This year a hunter survey was sent to each of the 376 permit holders asking them a series of questions related to their 2007 hunting experience. Hunters were asked to submit their survey in a business reply envelope, even if they didn't hunt in 2007. Of the 376 permit holders surveyed, 159 responded (42.3% response rate). This is similar to other upland game hunter surveys administered by Wisconsin DNR. Of the 159 respondents, 92 (57.9%) indicated that they hunted sharp-tailed grouse in 2007. Twenty-six (16.4%) of the 159 respondents harvested

31 birds as reported through the hunter survey. This is lower than the 40 birds actually registered through the mandatory registration system. However, only 1 individual who completed the hunter survey did not submit a harvest registration stub. This is an improvement over 2006 when a hunter survey specific for DMU 8 found a 70% harvest registration compliance rate.

Sharp-tailed grouse hunters made 226 trips in the field and hunted 944 hours during the 2007 season. Of the 92 respondents who hunted in 2007, 35.9% hunted 1 day, 27.2% hunted 2 days, 18.5% hunted 3 days and 18.5% hunted 4 or more days. Survey respondents rated their hunting experience as 3.55 out of 5 (1 – poor, 5 – excellent). A similar survey commissioned by the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society sent to all 316 permit holders in 1997 resulted in a 27% survey response rate. Of the 85 respondents in the 1997 survey, 77.6% indicated that they made at least 1 trip in the field. Sixty-six (66) respondents rated their hunting experience in 1997. Of those, 63.6% rated their level of satisfaction as excellent.

Hunters were also asked to submit a wing from the birds they harvested this year as part of an ongoing genetic and demographic investigation of Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse populations. At least 1 wing from 22 of the 40 birds harvested was submitted. Of those wings submitted, 13 (59%) were classified as adults, 6 as juveniles (27%) and 3 (14%) as unknown age due to poor condition of the wing.

Table 1. *Sharp-tailed grouse permit distribution, harvest and permit success, 2007.*

Unit	Permits Available & Issued	Harvest	% Success
2	520*	25	4.8%
8	50	10	20.0%
9	100*	0	0.0%
10	25	5	20.0%

*Includes 1st, and 2nd tags

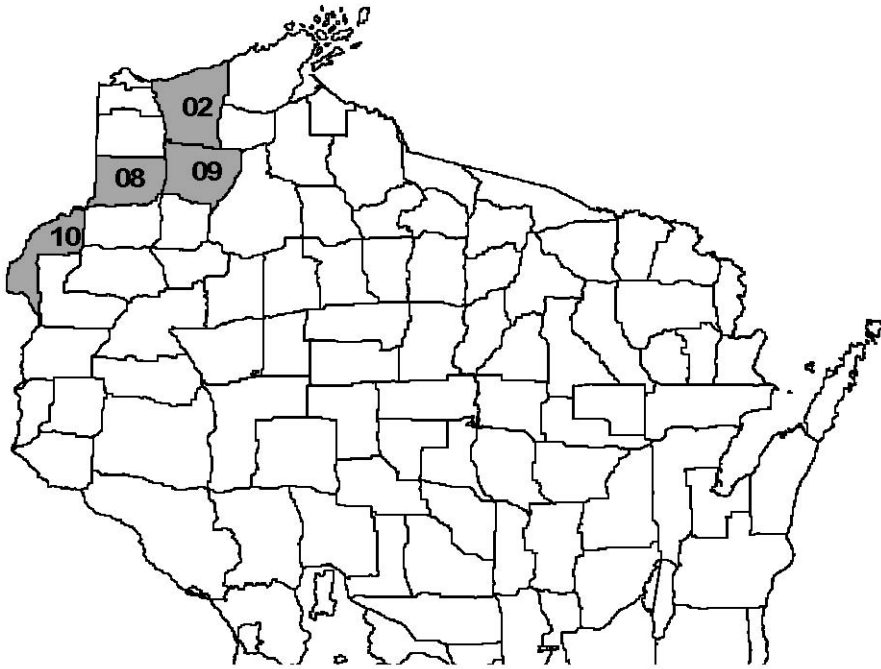


Figure 1. Shaded deer management units were open to sharp-tail hunting in 2007.

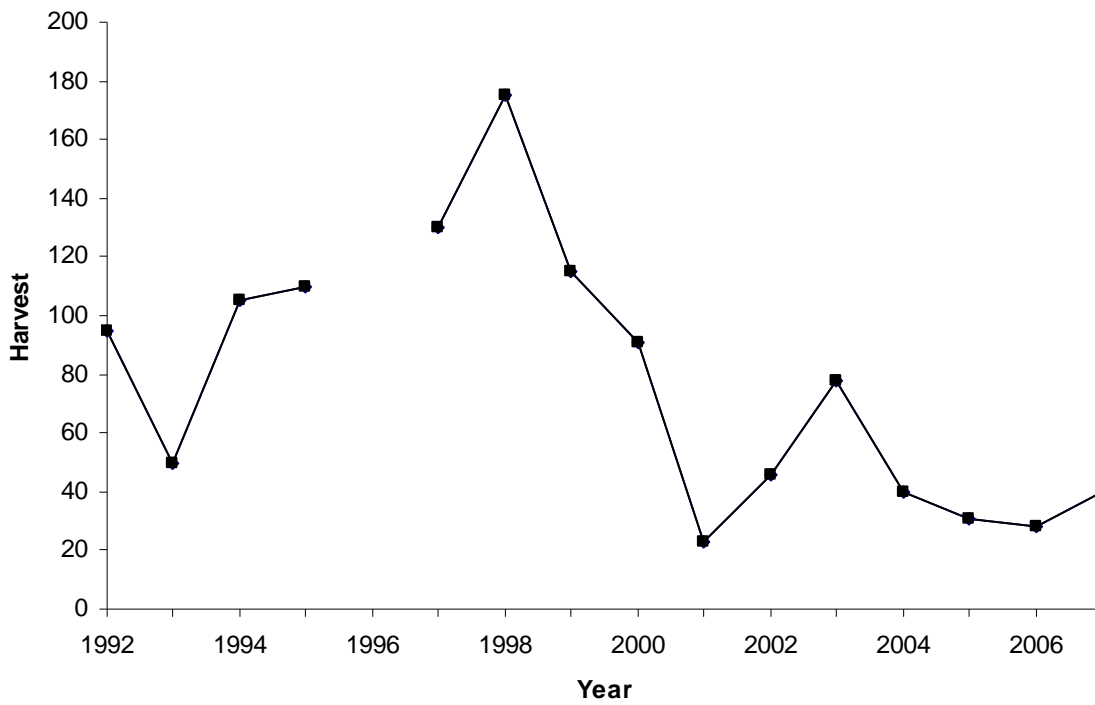


Figure 2. Sharp-tailed grouse harvest, 1992-2007.