

# Sharp-tailed Grouse Harvest & Hunter Survey 2015

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## **Permit Application**

Spring survey results in 2014 showed that Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse made it through the winter of 2013-14 in favorable condition, and the department Sharp-tailed Grouse Advisory Committee made the decision to offer a limited number of harvest permits in one management unit (Unit 8) after two years with zero permit availability. Though the population has not yet recovered to historic levels, wildlife managers believe a limited harvest to be sustainable, and are quite hopeful that the population will continue to respond positively to ongoing focused habitat management efforts. Recent disturbance events, such as the 2013 Germann Road Fire and the 2011 blow-down, may also prove beneficial to sharptails over time. Biologists will continue to assess the status of our sharp-tailed grouse population on an annual basis and look forward to increasing permit availability in future years when indices to population health suggest it appropriate to do so.

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 wish to apply for a sharp-tailed grouse harvest permit are required to pay a \$3 application fee. All permits are 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 (DMU) of kill on the registration stub, and mail it back to the DNR in Madison. In 2015, permit levels were set by the DNR based on the results of spring sharp-tailed grouse dancing ground surveys with game management unit boundaries. In addition, all permit holders were mailed a separate, voluntary survey.

## **Results**

### **Harvest**

One hundred and fifty-four (154) hunters applied for sharp-tailed grouse harvest permits in the single open game management unit, Unit 8, in the northwestern part of Wisconsin (Figure 1). One hundred (100) of the 154 applicants were successful in drawing a permit. No second permits were issued. In total, one hundred (100) permits were available and issued in 2015 (Table 1).

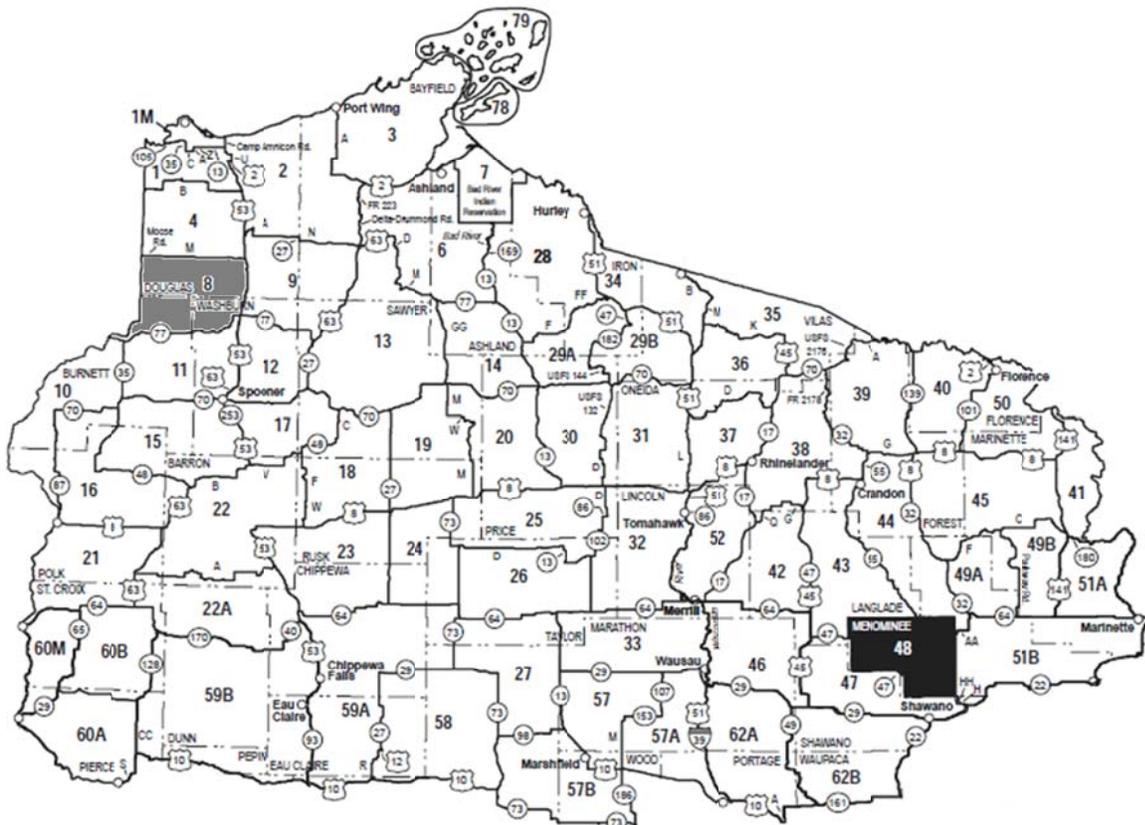
The 2015 sharp-tailed grouse season was held from 17 October through 8 November. The reported harvest, as recorded on returned hunter registration stubs, was 22 birds (however, two additional hunters reported harvesting a bird when filling out their survey, but no registration stub was received from either hunter – therefore, these two birds are not included in calculations). This is a 144% increase from 2012, the last time sharp-tailed grouse permits were issued (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 could be higher than reported. One game management unit (GMU #8) was open to sharp-tailed grouse hunting in 2015. Permit success was 22%. This success rate is not corrected for permit holders who did not hunt, or for those who didn't return a survey.

## Hunter Survey

Each of the 100 permit holders was mailed a survey asking them a series of questions related to their 2015 hunting experience. Hunters were asked to submit their survey even if they didn't hunt in 2015. Of the 100 permit holders surveyed, 65 responded (65% response rate, compared to 27.7% in 2011). Of the 65 respondents, 39 (60%) indicated that they hunted sharp-tailed grouse in 2015, down from 67.8% in 2012 (Table 2).

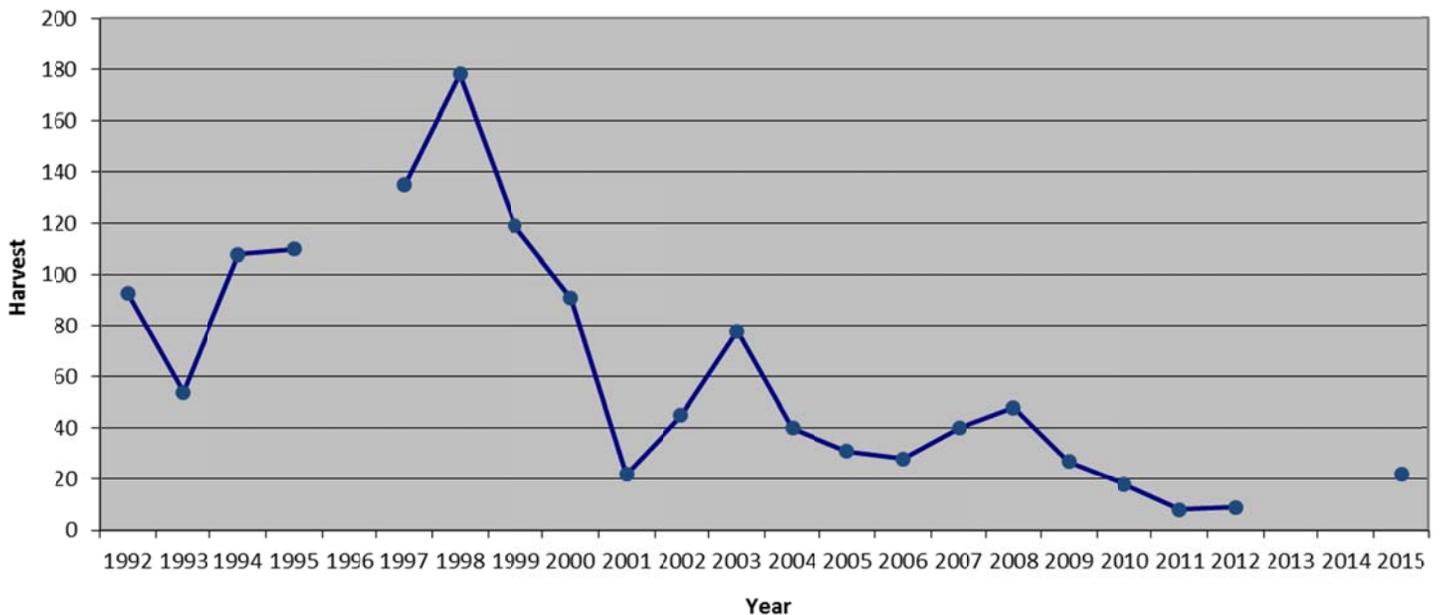
**Table 1.** Sharp-tailed grouse permit distribution, harvest, and permit success, 2015.

Unit	Permits Available & Issued	Harvest	% Permit Success
8	100	22	22%



**Figure 1.** Game Management Unit #8 (shaded in grey) was open to sharptail hunting in 2015.

**Figure 2: Sharp-tailed Grouse Harvest, 1992-2015**



**Figure 2.** Sharp-tailed Grouse Harvest, 1999-2015.

**Table 2.** 2009-2015 Sharp-tailed Grouse Reported Harvest & Hunter Survey Results (results for the 2013 and 2014 seasons are not shown as no permits were issued).

Category	2009	2010	2011	2012	2015
Permits available & issued	635	330	250	235	100
Number of individual permit holders	306	231	123	213	100
Reported harvest <sup>a</sup>	27	18	8	9	22
Number of individuals harvesting multiple birds	3	2	2	0	0
Hunter surveys returned	228 (74.5%)	160 (69.3%)	90 (73.2%)	59 (27.7%)	65 (65.0%)
Surveyed permit holders who hunted <sup>b</sup>	139 (61.0%)	89 (55.6%)	48 (53.3%)	40 (67.8%)	39 (60.0%)
Total trips in the field	290	159	97	77	57
Total hours in the field	1243	784	417	305	213.5
Mean trip length (hours)	4.3	4.9	4.3	4.0	6.1
Hunters making only 1 trip <sup>c</sup>	50 (36%)	50 (56.2%)	18 (37.5%)	15 (39.5%)	19 (54.3%)
Hunters making 2 trips	55 (39.6%)	21 (23.6%)	17 (35.4%)	14 (36.8%)	11 (31.4%)
Hunters making 3 trips	19 (13.7%)	11 (12.4%)	9 (18.8%)	6 (15.8%)	4 (11.4%)
Hunters making 4 or more trips	15 (10.8%)	7 (7.9%)	4 (8.3%)	3 (7.9%)	1 (2.9%)

<sup>a</sup>Based on returned harvest registration stubs, not on hunter surveys

<sup>b</sup>Percentages are based on total number of returned surveys

<sup>c</sup>Permit holders who hunted in each year were placed into one of four categories (1, 2, 3, 4+ trips) based on how many separate days they went into the field to pursue sharp-tailed grouse. Of the 19 hunters who made only one trip in 2015, nine harvested a bird on that trip.