WDNR Ruffed Grouse Management Plan Team
Meeting Minutes
9am-4pm
October 31, 2018
DNR Wausau Service Center
5301 Rib Mt. Dr.
Wausau, WI 54401

Attendance:
• Brandon Stefanski, DNR
• Brain Dhuey, DNR
• John Kubisiak, WI Green Fire
• Dan Eklund, USDA -FS
• Gary Zimmer, WI County Forest Assn.
• Mike Riggle, WI Cons. Congress
• Kevyn Quamme, WW Federation
• Mark Witecha, DNR
• Wade Romberg, DNR
• Jaqi Christopher, DNR
• Janet Brehm, DNR
• Brad Hutnik, DNR
• Chris Pollentier, DNR
• Jon Steigerwaldt, RGS

Communication:
How are we communicating plan to the public?
• Webpage: Regular updates will be available on the DNR’s ruffed grouse management webpage
• GovDelivery: Customers can sign up for updates from the DNR on various topics through GovDelivery. The ruffed grouse distribution list has just under 20K people
• Partners: Our habitat partners such as ruffed grouse society have been sending updates to their memberships
• Press Releases: The DNR will be sending out a press releases on plan updates including the public review period and when the plan is complete.
  o Could send out abstract before the whole report is ready.

Publications that we may find helpful:
• 1989 Ruffed grouse, Stockwell books
• 1985 Ruffed Grouse Symposium
• Ruffed Grouse Management Guidelines – written by John when he was in the DNR
Timeline: Should we put a timeline on the plan? Objectives should be measurable, but also broad enough that is relevant over a long period of time. Revisiting the plan may depend on how often IS forest inventory updated. The committee agrees that revisit the plan to update time-based objectives on a regular basis as variables change, without rewriting whole plan.

Outline:

- **Potential product**
  - Create lesson plans for grouse
  - Data base of grouse hunting areas – similar to Michigan’s GEMS program
  - Organize events – for hunters and non hunters
  - Weather index to assess winter survival and spring survival

- **Potential objectives**
  - Promote recreational opportunities – consumptive and non-consumptive
  - Create stand diversity – don’t create aspen at the expense of old growth
  - Promote young forest habitat on state lands through their master plans?
  - Promote young forest habitat on private land
  - Create management based on different geographical areas – should not promote aspen in southern WI, historically, grouse were win shrub, young oak habitat

- **Partnership Objectives**
  - Partner with non-consumptive groups – can contribute to reviewing plan
    - Bird conservancy, WI woodland owners, breeding bird atlas
  - Maintain and strengthen current partnerships and seek opportunities to create new partnerships
  - How can various partnerships be used to connect landowners to the best program that fits their needs. Various Farm bill biologists with different entities (PF, RGS, YFI)
  - Forest wildlife specialists Spooner and Lena – RGS, DNR, NRCS to promote young forest management on private lands. Enroll landowners in programs and connect them with funding to create habitat. Potential for expansion in WI and out of WI.
  - Maintain current private lands partnerships and expand in focal areas
  - Continue states support and involvement in Young Forest Partnership – Continue and expand DNR employees who have young forest in PD
  - How to incorporate industrial forests?
    - Good Neighbor Authority – Forest service works with state to log and sell timber on forest service that the state can spend. FS has restrictions on what the funding can be used for. Managed differently in each state.
  - County forests are the biggest forest landowners in the state but have limited staff.
  - Expand partnerships on county and national forests. Potential product – create positions, create funding sources.

- **Habitat Objectives**
  - Define Focal Areas – Mark will send out draft map for committee approval
  - Maintain or increase suitable grouse habitat.
    - FIA data updated every 5 years. State and county lands have detailed inventory. What is the projected timber management based on scheduled cuts. FIA only measures timber, does not measure adjacent habitat (alder, brush etc.)
FIA Data – forestry has a team that manages data. Request data needs from them. FIA is at county level, but we need a larger focal areas – already done for woodcock, can adapt to our needs.

- Maintain or increase habitat based on market projections? It is not always great idea to base species management objectives on market, convenient but should not be driver.
- Maintain and increase suitable forest types to promote viable ruffed grouse population in defined focal areas. Increase in driftless area, maintain in northern. Increase diversity of stands – it is not young vs old forest.
- Promote young forest management on private lands through DNR forestry.
- Prioritize efforts on highly sustainable habitats
- BMPs - tool to assist managers (resource professionals) to create ruffed grouse habitat. Specific subscriptions, silviculture handbook covers techniques for cutting but want to get away from cookie cutter subscriptions. Create a single technical document as guideline for Grouse habitat. YFI has similar guidelines for woodcock. A lot of information is out there for private landowners but create technical resources for professionals. Create separate guidance for different landscapes northern vs southern
- Diversify age class of suitable forest types (aspen) – configuration, size and distribution are important to have optimal grouse numbers.
- How to utilize unexpected weather events that create habitat opportunities. Example: in event of a natural event, maintain 10% as grouse habitat, min of 15ac – add to BMPs
- How to incorporate non-productive areas into goals. Wildlife starting to inventory non-forestry areas on state land.

Population Objectives
- Keep drumming counts above the long term population low in the northern forest
- Educate public on current survey methodology and assess new survey needs.
- Current research methodologies are most cost effective.
- Investigate cost efficient and labor efficient ways to collect accurate recruitment and survival analysis:
  - Create hunter harvest diary survey
  - Collect feathers to create age and sex ratio as recruitment index
  - Brood survey – create easier methods for data reporting. Continue to publicize brood results?
- Maintain current tools
- Evaluate threats to grouse health as they arise

Research Objectives
- Sensitivity Analysis – model to help focus on what factors are driving population (winter survival, disease impacts).
- Population Density
- Create weather index – Winter Severity and spring severity for grouse – winter survival and brood survival. Will this be used to gather data or as a tool for adjusting management? Seen as a tool to monitor population index. Can use to measure “viability” variable of goal.
• Hunter satisfaction Objectives
  o Assess hunter satisfaction with the season, harvest, regulations, etc.
  o Hunter Survey – we are creating one for the management plan process, but should it be continued ever year? Every couple of years?
  o Maintain diverse access opportunities
    ▪ Hunting trails – WM has limited resources to maintain these trials, opportunity for partnerships?
  o Highlight WI as destination state – maintain WI status as top 3 grouse hunting state in the country.

• Marketing/ Info & Education Objectives
  o Wait to produce marketing goals until after economic impact analysis
  o Dept of Tourism or local chambers could be good resource for information

Landscape management plan for state lands – the plan will set boundaries for state properties and forest management. How do we work ruffed grouse habitat management into these sorts of plans? Advocate for grouse habitat while these plans are being written. Create natural diversity in stand age on a property.

Next meeting: Will be after new year. Draft survey will be sent via email. Committee should email Mark with any other ideas for objectives.