



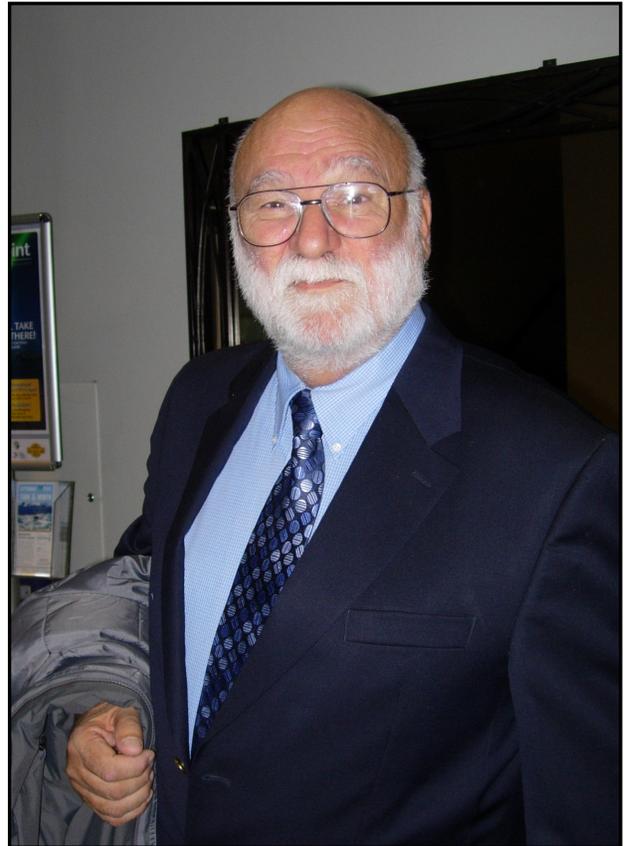
MINNESOTA PRAIRIE CHICKEN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Volume 44. No. 3, Fall, 2018

We Remember An Icon of Prairie Grouse Research, Dr. John Toepfer

John Toepfer passed away after complications from hip replacement surgery in Oklahoma on October 11th. John will be remembered by so many as a friend, mentor, a thought provoker, and a damn good biologist. To have encountered this man and his amazing passion was truly a gift, and he will be remembered among the great icons of avian research. He spent many years bouncing around in his truck along the beach ridges of northwestern Minnesota. His radio collared hens were like close friends, and he knew by intuition where to find them. Ways to honor John are currently being discussed among many groups. The Sutton Avian Research Center has begun gathering ideas to create a John Toepfer Prairie Grouse Research Scholarship which could be awarded at the Prairie Grouse Technical Committee meeting next spring.

Continued on page 4



The 2015 International Grouse Symposium

46th Annual MPCS meeting April 27th, 2019.

For the first time Detroit Lakes will be the location for the MPCS annual meeting on April 27th. Some local board members are organizing the event and are excited to host this gathering. As with every annual meeting this one will include lots of local history, stories and Prairie Chicken inspired artwork. There is also the possibility of including an overnight stay in Detroit Lakes on Saturday for some after meeting festivities and networking.

Mark your calendars and be assured that attendees will not be disappointed.



FEATHER FEATURES

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Birds, Bees, Butterflies and the Prairie Chicken? - Phil Doll

Q: What's 4,000 square feet in size and benefits birds, bees, butterflies, and prairie chickens?

A: The new prairie garden being planned for the Lake Park Audubon Elementary School.

While it's likely that a prairie chicken booming ground won't develop anytime soon in downtown Audubon, Minnesota, a new prairie garden being planned on school grounds will indeed benefit prairie chickens. First, I know what you're thinking, prairie chickens need hundreds of acres of prairie habitat before they'll nod their beak in approval. How can anyone consider 4,000 square feet of native grasses and wildflowers a benefit to the booming birds of the prairie? Let me explain.

Cue the students at Audubon Elementary - Kindergarten through 6th Grade.

The primary architects of the entire project will be the 6th grade students under the direction of their teacher, Kathrina O'Connell. Providing additional assistance will be Becker County Soil & Water Conservation District and the Detroit Lakes USFWS Wetland Management District. While the students have historically taken field trips to nearby Hamden Slough National Wildlife Refuge along with the school's nature area, a prairie garden right outside the school will allow them to examine nature at any time during the school day. Plus, they'll be in charge. They'll learn about prairie habitat, native plants, soil, ecology, watersheds, erosion, and ecological restoration. Eventually, they'll compile what they've learned and apply it by choosing the native plant species, installing the plants and seed, and caring for the new prairie garden into the future.

And, it won't stop there. These budding new 6th Grade Prairie Ecologists will take what they learn and transform that new knowledge into mini-lessons. These lessons will be taught to the younger students in Kindergarten through 5th Grade, explains Mrs. O'Connell.

The Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society has proudly pledged \$500 towards this great project. By instilling an appreciation for our cherished prairie habitat in our youth, we know that they'll continue to appreciate and conserve our prairies – home to birds, bees, butterflies, and the Prairie Chicken – long into the future



MPCS Newsletters Now Electronic

After a slow transition period from direct mailing to electronic newsletters, the board has decided to post all newsletters on the newly updated website. Beginning with this issue the newsletters will be posted as a .pdf file and be in full color. We recognize that some members may still want to receive direct mailings so please contact Travis for direct mailing. This will also allow members to read past newsletters and share them with family, colleagues, educational institutions, or other conservation partners.

Take a look. www.prairiechickens.org

Pine to Prairie Pheasants Forever Chapter Agrees to Partner with MPCs - by John Voz

After an inactive period over the past several years, the Pine to Prairie PF chapter has begun to reorganize in the Cormorant Lakes area in southwestern Becker County. This last spring they held a very successful fund raising banquet, and they are looking for habitat ideas and new partnerships to get more grass on the landscape. I took the liberty to reach out to the committee on September 12th just to say hello, and introduce the Chicken Society and share some of our success stories. The committee agreed to partner with the MPCs on projects in the southwest area of Becker County and eastern Clay County, as this is where the majority of their members reside. While we are still obligated for our part of our current match requirement with the LSOHC land acquisition grant, there still may be plenty of opportunities to join forces on other projects. A BIG thank you to them. We look forward to working together in the future.

Minnesota CREP Update

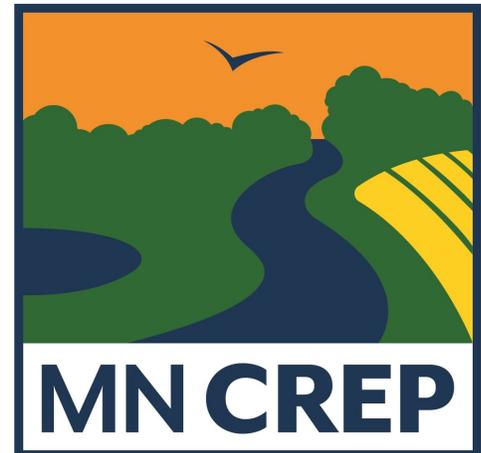
Landowner interest in the Minnesota CREP program has picked up over the summer with the last application period ending in August yielding 88 applications totaling 3,200 acres. The total amount of acres enrolled have now topped 12,400 acres. Some of the parcels are located directly in Prairie Plan Core areas within the Greater Prairie Chicken range and within 1.5 miles of established booming grounds.

CREP stands for Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. It is part of the more familiar Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The main difference between CRP and CREP is that CREP addresses high-priority conservation concerns identified by a state, and federal funds are supplemented with non-federal funds to address those concerns. In the case of Minnesota CREP, a 15-year CRP contract is supplemented by the Reinvest in Minnesota Reserve Easement program (RIM) across a priority area of 54 counties.

Landowners have been considering CREP for many reasons. Some enjoy the opportunity to add additional habitat to their property by restoring drained wetlands and planting prairie. Others have used CREP to add buffers to waterways. Still more have chosen to enroll marginal land that never yields a good crop.

If you're a landowner and wish to explore conservation options for your farm, feel free to contact me and I will help you connect with local experts that can help you. The Minnesota CREP may be an option for you, or you may find other conservation programs that fits your property better.

Phil Doll
Private Lands Biologist
Becker County Soil & Water Conservation District
Office: 218-530-3304



Glacial Ridge Refuge tree removal Project Improving GPC Habitat

Gregg Knutsen Refuge Manager for Glacial Ridge Refuge, has been working with USDA staff to write comprehensive management plans on some of the 18 individual WRP contracts within the refuge. Of the total 23,065 acres that comprise the refuge, 91% are enrolled in the USDA Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). \$450,000 will be spent over 4 WRP contracts on 2,300 acres that will remove trees and reduce woody vegetation. This will dramatically increase the open prairie landscape and benefit Greater Prairie Chickens. Audubon Minnesota is also contributing funding to the project. In 2019 approximately 1,000 acres will be chemically treated by helicopter followed by a mow/mulch in early 2020. Tree encroachment has been a continuing issue in this area and something needed to be done soon. Prescribed burning in the fall has been a tool for USFW staff to minimize trees and shrubs but is sometimes not as effective as a chemical treatment. Private vendors will be used for the spraying and mowing/mulching but through the refuges comprehensive plan more USFW prescribed burning will be integrated in the future to improve the open prairie concept. Glacial Ridge continues to be the shining example for the nation and is the largest grassland refuge in the lower 48 states.



John Toepfer, continued from p. 1

K.C. Jensen, a colleague from Montana State University wrote, "To say John was a Prairie Chicken expert is a gross understatement; this man lived and breathed Prairie Chickens for his entire adult life" John was one of the original "gaboons" that cut their teeth as field biologists under the tutelage of Fran and Frederick Hamerstrom in central Wisconsin. John took their training in intense observation and detailed record keeping to heart. He was a meticulous biologist. John lived the life of an itinerant field biologist. John never married and settled down with a family, but instead traveled and lived where there was work to be done, and the need for a prairie chicken biologist. His most recent residence was in Oklahoma working for the Sutton Avian Research Foundation on several of their projects addressing prairie chicken biology and conservation. John had a crusty exterior that belied a soft soul. Sadly, for many it was hard to get through the crust. Our mutual friend, Bill Moritz, and I often thought we should put John in a room with a chair and a video recorder, and simply say the words "Prairie Chicken", and quietly slip out for 5 or 6 hours. The result, we postulated would be a tome on Prairie Chickens to be unequalled!"

During one of the recent MPCS annual meetings in northwestern Minnesota, John spoke to members about his feelings of the importance of grass to humanity. In the King James Bible Genesis, Chapter 1:11 reads, "And God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so." Maybe it was with tongue in cheek or maybe it was John's deep inner feelings, but I think he reveled in that thought that God created grass on the first day and man on the fifth. Another poignant verse is verse 20, "And God said, let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven."

Fly on, John.

2018 Minnesota Grouse Survey Reports & Fall Hunt Seasons

Excerpts selected by Jodie Provost from MN DNR Reports written by Charlotte Roy, MN DNR Grouse Project Leader & Margaret Dexter, MN DNR Wildlife Research Specialist

This spring, for the first time ever thanks to a newly initiated spruce grouse survey, all of Minnesota's four native grouse were surveyed. Results from the spruce grouse survey, which included citizen scientists, will be available later this summer. Results for our other native grouse follow:

Sharp-tailed Grouse spring surveys resulted in 1,503 grouse counted on 161 leks, with a statewide index of 9.3 grouse/lek (9.7 in 2017). 220 grouse were counted on 30 leks in the east-central region (286 on 40 in 2017) and 1,280 on 130 leks in the northwest region (1,470 on 141 in 2017). The average grouse per lek was 9.8 in the northwest region (10.4 in 2017) and 7.3 in the east-central region (7.2 in 2017). Comparison between leks observed in both 2017 and 2018 indicate a 24% decline in the northwest region and 22% decline in the east-central region, although in the east-central region this decline was not statistically significant. In the northwest region, the number of leks counted, average lek size, and comparisons between leks surveyed in consecutive years were all lower in 2018. In the east-central region, 25% fewer leks were detected. No sharp-tailed grouse were detected during surveys in Kanabec County for the first time in recent history. In 2016, fall harvest of sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota was estimated at 8,610 by 6,214 hunters, with 1.4 birds harvested per active hunter.

Greater Prairie Chicken surveys in all 17 survey blocks of northwest Minnesota resulted in 59 booming grounds located and 630 males and birds of unknown sex counted. (Throughout the state's prairie chicken range, 148 booming grounds and 1,518 birds were located.) These counts are the lowest since the standardized survey began in 2004 when 95 booming grounds and 1,566 males were counted. This contrasts with the high count of 114 booming grounds and 1,618 males in 2007. Estimated densities of 0.09 booming grounds/sq km and 10.7 males/booming ground within survey blocks were similar to densities during recent years and during the 10 years preceding the modern hunting season. All population indices began to decline in 2008, but seem to have stabilized in recent years at a lower level. CRP enrollments in the counties containing the survey blocks were highest in the years preceding 2008. In 2017, 97 prairie chicken hunters were estimated to have gone afield and harvested 86 prairie chickens in the 11 permit areas, with hunter success of 0.55. 125 permits were available.

Ruffed Grouse drumming counts were down 29% statewide with 1.5 drums per stop statewide (2.1 in 2017). 2018 was a late spring and some of the decline may be due to lack of synchrony between survey calendar dates and peak of drumming activity, but it is unlikely to entirely explain the decrease. The averages during 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 were 0.9 and 1.1 and 1.1 and 1.3, respectively, indicating the peak of the approximate 10-year cycle occurred last year and was similar to the previous peak in 2009. In the northeast survey region, which is the core of Minnesota's grouse range, counts were 1.7 drums per stop (2.5 in 2017). Other regional survey results were 1.0 drum per stop in the northwest (1.6 in 2017), 0.9 drums per stop in the central hardwoods (0.9 in 2017), and 0.9 drums per stop in the southeast (0.8 in 2017). In 2016, harvest of ruffed grouse was estimated at 308,955 by 82,348 hunters, with 3.8 birds harvested per active hunter.

2018 Hunt Seasons

Sharp-tailed Grouse - Northwest MN Season: Sept. 15 – Nov. 30

East-central MN Season: Oct. 13 – Nov. 30

Prairie Chicken - Lottery Deadline: Aug. 17; Season: Sept. 29 – Oct. 7

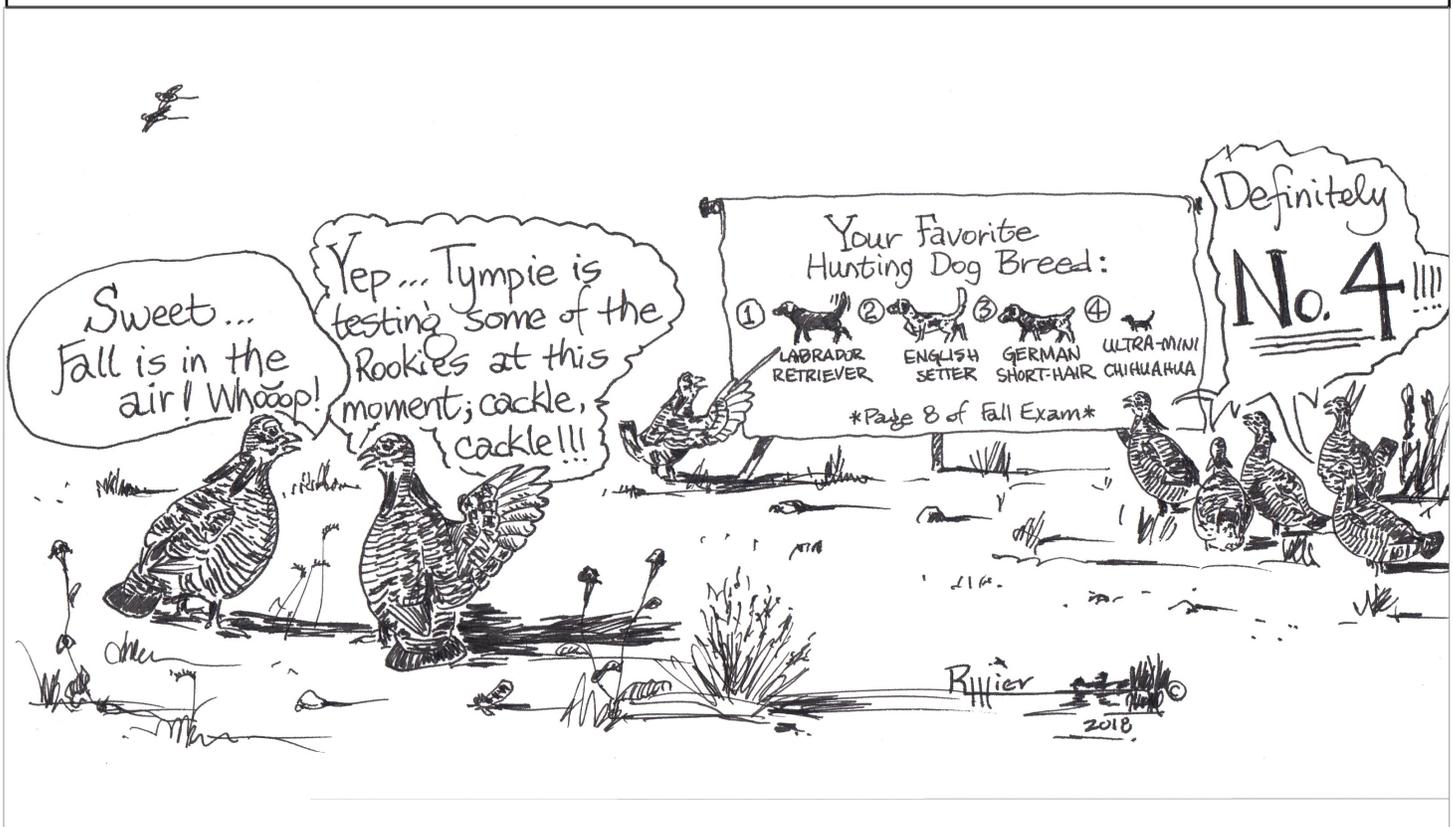
Ruffed Grouse & Spruce Grouse - Seasons: Sept. 15 – Jan. 1

DNR grouse survey reports, grouse hunting information, and research and small game hunter harvest surveys can be found on the DNR website, respectively, at mndnr.gov/hunting and mndnr.gov/wildlife/research/wildlife-research-publications.

Ruffed Grouse Sample Collection for West Nile Virus

To contribute to research on West Nile virus in ruffed grouse, you can become involved by voluntarily submitting harvested samples collected within 60 miles of Bemidji and Grand Rapids. Participation involves submitting hearts, a few feathers for sexing and aging, and blood collected on filter strips. You must also provide harvest location (GPS location preferred). The location will not be made public. Contact Ted Dick at ted.dick@state.mn.us or call 218-395-0577 for more information. Sampling kits will be available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

THE ADVENTURES OF TYMPIE NUCHUS By ROSS HIER



Phase V of the Prairie Chicken Habitat Funding - John Voz

Once again the Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the Southern Red River Valley was fortunate enough to be recommended for funding by the Lessard Sam Outdoor Heritage Council. This is Phase V of the partnership which continues to be very successful with the assistance of Pheasants Forever. The original Phase V proposal requested \$9,576,700 million, and the Council ultimately recommended \$2,558,000. In amending the original proposal based on this funding amount, it will accelerate the protection and restoration of 667 acres of strategic prairie chicken focused habitats in the GPC range. The funding needs formal approval during the 2019 legislation session and funding could become available July 1st of 2019. The Grants Committee has been meeting regularly to discuss how to spend down the remaining funds in Phase 2 thru 4. Landowner interest remains strong, and the tract list was recently updated with some new parcels. Things look good with potentially spending down all the earlier phases, and then spending the Phase V funding as soon as it becomes available. Planting high quality upland cover and restoring wetlands continues on some of the past funded projects. Drone photography was recently flown on the Prairie Dunes WMA in Norman County, and possibly could be shown at the next annual meeting. Good things are happening! Stay tuned for more good news ahead.



Dr. Bill Faber (MPCS) and Steven Burdick (PF) give testimony at the LSOHC hearings September 7th, 2018. Their testimony was among several others and a true testament of the high quality efforts, passion and dedication of the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society. After 5 years the MPCS has established itself as a regular conservation presence at the Minnesota State Capital! Note the cool swag that Bill is wearing.

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(updated 2/24/18)

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Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society Membership

Your gift membership will help! Any tax deductible contribution or donation will bring you the MPCS Newsletter and supports the Society's efforts to save Minnesota's prairie chickens and their habitats. Renew your membership today!

The Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society is a non-profit wildlife conservation organization exempt from Federal Income tax as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions made to the Society are deductible by donors as provided in Section 170 of the Code. The Society's Federal Identification number is #41-1327954.

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