July 1 means there are fewer than 90 days until the Minnesota grouse and woodcock openers (remember ruffed grouse and woodcock seasons both open on September 19 this year). Weather conditions in June were favorable for young grouse here in northern Minnesota and hopefully that will mean better survival than last year. You can read summaries of the MNDNR Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey Report and the USFWS 2015 Woodcock Status Report in this newsletter or go to the links provided to read the full reports.

Just because it’s not hunting season doesn’t mean there isn’t a lot going on. RGS started the summer with an all-employee meeting at RGS headquarters in June. I met new Regional Director Nick Larson there, you can meet him if you’re in the Grand Marais area on July 15 (6:30pm at the Arrowhead Center for the Arts) when we’ll be having a Meet and Greet with the North Shore Chapter to discuss projects in the Arrowhead portion of Minnesota. While in Pennsylvania, we also heard more about Mark Fouts’ new role as Director of Member Relations and Outreach. His work will include coordination of a new education and mentoring program that I’m excited about. I know many of you have participated in mentored grouse hunts in the past and I’m hopeful that Mark’s new
program will make RGS a leader in educating future conservationists in Minnesota and across North America. We also heard more about the RGS Petition for Rulemaking with the US Forest Service, you can read more about this in the Summer Ruffed Grouse Society magazine.

A particularly valuable part of the RGS meeting was the field tour. We traveled to some hunting areas near Pittsburgh and had a chance to share concerns and see first hand some of the issues facing grouse hunters in the East. On my way back to northern Minnesota, I picked up my new grouse hunting partner, Ace. He is an English setter (that’s his picture above at 2.5 months). While all avid hunters like to hear how the surveys turned out, there are many other RGS programs and projects to tell you about including major forest preservation partnership proposals, a private land forest initiative and others.

One item I would like to bring to your attention is the opportunity for more chapter/committee involvement in spending the Drummer Funds. I appreciate any input you may have and we know it’s important that the chapters have a chance to vote on how their money is spent. I’ve spoken with several chapters and if you have a representative of your chapter who would like to be included in this process, have them contact me. Or feel free to call any time if you have questions, comments, or ideas for a habitat project or just want to talk bird hunting. Hope you have a great summer. Ted

Minnesota Drumming Survey Results Out

The 2015 Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey Report was released on June 29 and results indicate the number of detected drumming males was unchanged from 2014.

Although the number didn’t increase from 2014 to 2015, hunting was considered by many to have improved last year and there may be other reasons for optimism. As we often mention when discussing drumming surveys, the fall’s hunter success can be influenced by both the drumming index and also the suitability of weather conditions during the critical post-hatching period. Last year was a very late spring with cold wet conditions well into June. Recruitment ratios (# of juveniles per adult female) at the RGS National Hunt were down. This year in contrast, we’ve had relatively good June weather with less precipitation than we received last June across much of the prime ruffed grouse range. Winter weather was relatively poor for ruffed grouse with mild temperatures and below average snowfall.
Anecdotal reports never mean too much but I’ve heard some managers talking about seeing good size broods that were fairly well-developed for this time of year. I was biking on a forest road in Cass County on June 26 when I flushed a brood of 8+ juveniles and the female. The young birds were strong fliers and seemed quite large and well-developed for June. So there you have it—my little bit of nonscientific anecdotal speculation on this year’s recruitment—the lot can happen between now and September 19th, but seeing these large broods that survived so far gives us a little reason for optimism as we look forward to the fall.

The scientific report by MNDNR Grouse Research Biologist Charlotte Roy can be found online at:

Woodcock Status Report Out

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released their American Woodcock: Population Status, 2015 report in late June. The report details data collected through the spring Singing Ground Survey, the annual woodcock Wing Collection Survey and the Hunter Information Program. Woodcock populations are divided into an Eastern and a Central Region (Central survey region includes Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and Ohio).

Central Region 2015 Singing Ground Survey showed no significant change from 2014 following a decline in 2014. Looking at the 10-year trend, the Central Region showed no significant trend this year after a decline last year. All Division of Migratory Bird Management reports are available at:

Recruitment in the Central Region was off nearly 10% last year (no surprise given the late spring). Hunters in the Central Region spent 227,600 days afield and harvested 141,500 woodcock. Minnesota continues to be a bright spot in the woodcock habitat outlook with ongoing young forest projects but more needs to be done. Photo above is a pair of day-old woodcock chicks banded by Tony Snyder and Ted Dick (and Tony’s setter Buzz) in Cass County May 2015.
RGS Partners in Historic Forest Preservation Proposal

The Ruffed Grouse Society is working in partnership with The Minnesota Deer Hunters Association on a proposal to acquire timber company lands in Cass, Hubbard and Wadena Counties of Minnesota. The $19,000,000 Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal would acquire available Potlatch Corporation parcels and, where feasible, turn them over to the county land management departments. The counties would then continue to actively manage the timber on those lands and would also allow public use including hunting. Recently, forest acres have been undergoing rapid conversion to agricultural lands in this zone of transition between the open country and the northern forests. Approximately 10,000 acres would be preserved under this proposal. Dan Dessecker, Director of Conservation Policy for the Ruffed Grouse Society said: “We are excited to be partnering with MDHA on this project. Improving habitat and hunting opportunities is what we do and this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity not only to maintain forest on these parcels, but also to continue to provide access to thousands of additional acres adjacent to these tracts”. Look for more details on this and other Minnesota RGS projects in future communications.

RGS Purchases Mower for Trail and Habitat Work in Northern Minnesota

Warroad area RGS chapter committee members Chuck Lindner and Jared Olafson have been working with the Area DNR Office at Red Lake Wildlife Management Area on establishing new trails and maintaining old ones. Their plans include a phased project to create a 50-mile grouse hunter Super Trail in the Beltrami Island State Forest. “We really appreciate the work that the Warroad volunteers do to help establish and maintain new trails” said Red Lake Wildlife Manager Gretchen Mehmel. Assistant Manager Charlie Tucker adds that DNR did not have the money for a new mower and the equipment will be stored at Red Lake but available for the
Chapter to use as they like on habitat projects. Thanks to the hard-working Lake of the Woods Chapter for all their efforts.


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**Thanks to Gary Zimmer**

First of all for those of you who haven’t heard, Gary Zimmer has retired from the Ruffed Grouse Society. As the Sally B. Searle Coordinating Biologist for RGS, Gary covered territories in the Western Great Lakes states for 15 years in addition to supervising the other RGS Biologists. He served on several advisory boards in WI as well as being active in his local RGS chapter. He has a passion for grouse and the years he gave to the RGS cause are much appreciated. Thank you Gary. And on a personal note, thank you for all of your assistance as my main liaison with the Ruffed Grouse Society.

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*Gary Zimmer, Coordinating Biologist for RGS*
RGS Policy Efforts in Minnesota

In addition to directly funding habitat work, the Ruffed Grouse Society works hard to improve your grouse hunting by advocating for policies that benefit grouse hunters. Influencing wildlife and forest management policy at every level is the most effective way to maintain healthy forests and abundant wildlife populations on a large scale.

This spring RGS sent out two email notifications detailing ways members can get involved in the decision-making process. The first notice was in regard to trapping legislation before both the State House and Senate that would have changed trap-setting requirements to make them safer for dogs. Unfortunately these bills did not make it through the process by the end of the session but we received considerable feedback indicating hunters appreciated the effort. While RGS supports trapping and trappers, the proposals would have made it much less likely that dogs would be killed by either raising traps off the ground or requiring they be placed underwater.

The second was a notification to a DNR online request for public input. This year Minnesota DNR was asking hunters how they felt about some potential changes to small game hunting regulations. One proposed change would increase the grouse (Ruffed Grouse, Spruce Grouse, Sharp-tailed Grouse) possession limits to a number three times the daily limit (so Ruffed Grouse limit would be five daily and 15 in possession instead of the current five and 10). Thank you to all who participated in the input process and look for future announcements from RGS concerning opportunities to have your say in policy-making.

Your RGS contributions also go toward advocacy in the forest planning process in several ways to make sure grouse hunters concerns are fully addressed.

RGS Works in Washington

Dan Dessecker, Director of Conservation and Policy for RGS presented at a recent House congressional briefing re: HR 2647. The proposed legislation includes language that would establish a Categorical Exclusion (CE) for projects where the sum of the harvest units does not exceed 5,000 acres if the purpose of the project is to establish early successional wildlife habitat. Currently a CE can be used if the project is less than 3,000 acres and similar projects have been done in the past without objection from public user groups. The key in this section 104 of HR 2647 of the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015 is in explicitly naming the creation of Early Successional Wildlife Habitat within the project. CEs can be
considered a ‘fast track’ and may not require NEPA, and environmental assessment, or an environmental impact statement and therefore decreases all the public comment periods prior to implementation of the project. This would enable the USFS to more efficiently plan and implement the projects designed to provide the necessary habitat for sustaining viable populations within this ephemeral habitat.

Habitat Project Updates

In the previous issue of the Minnesota Grouse Newsletter (available online at http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/UserFiles/File/FANs/MN%202015%20Grouse%20Newsletter-Winter%20EditionRev.pdf) we reported extensively on the many RGS habitat/access projects currently being funded in Minnesota. Several of those have been completed, and several new ones are being planned. In the interest of time and space, I encourage you to refer to the earlier newsletter for descriptions of those ongoing projects and I’ll briefly outline some of the other ideas we are currently working on. Counties where we have projects planned, completed this year, or currently underway include: Pine, Aitkin Itasca, Cass, Beltrami, Lake of the Woods, Lake, Carlton, Roseau, St. Louis, Cook, Todd, Koochiching, Isanti, Mille Lacs, and Chisago in addition to the major proposals (discussed elsewhere in this issue) in Hubbard, Wadena and others. We are always looking for new project sites and ideas, so feel free to call if you wish to discuss. I’ve done Meet and Greet presentations or met with committees for a number of chapters. If your chapter would like to hear from me directly about what we are working on or if you have ideas on things you would like to see, let’s talk and I’ll come to your town and we can discuss. As I mentioned on the first page, I and some of the chapters would like to work on an annual process where all the chapters have a better opportunity to discuss upcoming projects for funding.

Itasca County Cooperative CPL Project

RGS was the successful recipient last month of another Conservation Partners Legacy grant for habitat work in the Grand Rapids area. With a 10% match from your Minnesota Drummer Funds, this grant will pay a private contractor to mow vegetation on old fields that are frequently used as roosting areas by woodcock, the edges are also used by ruffed grouse and other species. The sites are located on state, county and federal land and a project like this is a great way to generate more discussions with County and Federal land managers about other possibilities for cooperative projects. We have meeting scheduled in July to discuss a larger project with the Chippewa National Forest in this area.
Member-Get-A-Member Campaign Update.

I reported this winter that RGS conducted a “Member-Get-A-Member” Campaign and Ed Zieroth from Grand Marais was a winner in Minnesota. Winners were allowed to direct a $2,500.00 payment in their name toward the Drummer Fund of their choice. I haven’t spoken to Mr. Zieroth yet, but he indicated to RGS staff that he would like his money to go to the Minnesota Drummer Fund and that it be spent on a project in the Grand Marais area. We are developing a Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) grant proposal to use these funds as a match and turn the $2500 into $25,000. Working with the local DNR office we’ve located acres that could use some alder/brush/openings work and we are looking for more. I’ve been talking to the U.S. Forest Service offices in the area and we hope to expand this proposal to Federal land. The work needs to be conducted on frozen ground so we will get it done this winter. I’ll be discussing this and other North Shore projects in Grand Marais on July 15.

Other Legacy Amendment Projects

Wildlife habitat funding in Minnesota is most effective when conservation group funds are used as matching dollars through the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Amendment. Larger projects (in excess of $450,000, are the standard Lessard-Sams projects while smaller projects (less than $450,000, are handled through a separate fund called the Conservation Partners Legacy fund (CPL). As outlined here and in previous newsletters, we try to take advantage of partnerships and proposals that use this matching opportunity whenever possible. Unfortunately, trail projects are not eligible for funding and that is often what is requested by chapters or land managers. RGS has been successful at creating proposals and receiving funding (thanks to RGS’ Dan Dessecker, John Eichinger and Kim Swisher for handling this additional project management and accounting obligations). The Dalbo/Mille Lacs CPL will be completed shortly, the Upper Mississippi Woodcock Habitat Improvement Project was finished last year and the Cloquet project is entering a second phase. Several other CPL’s are also underway in various parts of the state and we are starting another in Itasca County and working on the Grand Marais CPL (see details in this newsletter). We are working with groups on other large Lessard projects including the MDHA Potlatch project. Your RGS Drummer Fund dollars have a great impact when used in this way.

Private Lands Initiatives

As I mentioned in the winter issue, private land habitat management is important and a priority. RGS has been working with other groups (like the American Bird
Conservancy) to encourage and assist landowners to manage their land for early successional species. In late June I attended an organizational meeting for a private lands initiative. While some of the agencies have been continuing the pace of their timber harvests, private landowners have cut back in the past five years. The organizations attending this meeting (timber industry, loggers, conservation groups and resource managers who work with these groups like Soil and Water Conservation Districts) hope to reach out to private landowners through education, advertising, consulting and other outreach means to let them know that there are many benefits to harvesting their timber and there are ways to get help navigating the process. RGS plans to stay heavily involved. Representatives of Louisiana Pacific in particular, were very familiar with the RGS Coverts program in Wisconsin and would like to work with us to create a Coverts effort in MN.

Working with Loggers and Managers on the North Shore

Also in late June, University of Minnesota’s Sustainable Forestry Education Cooperative (SFEC) put on a Minnesota Logger Education Program (MLEP) field day in Two Harbors, MN. Approximately 30 logging professionals joined ten or so presenters in a day of presentations and discussions of "Timber Sale Design from a Wildlife Habitat Perspective". RGS and DNR participate frequently in these presentations as they are a great way to get the word directly to the people administering timber sales about why we ask for the things we do when coordinating on timber sales. This information can then be used by the professionals when they assist with private land timber harvests. A particularly effective part of the discussion was held on site of recent or
upcoming sales where the participants broke into groups and designed timber sales according to various landowner goals (grouse habitat, songbird habitat, maximizing income, etc.) thus allowing opportunities for discussing options and ways to make a sale profitable while creating healthy habitat for a variety of species. We will continue to hold several of these meeting each year in various locations.

**Online Grouse Hunter Information**

RGS and DNR have been compiling Ruffed Grouse Management Area (RGMA) information in Minnesota and we are in the process of creating digital maps and making them available online. We have approximately 50 RGMAs mapped and by the end of the project, we hope to have downloadable boundaries, cover types etc., that can be used in a variety of formats including on a GPS or your home computer or phone. The slowest part of the process is getting the space on the website but we have work agreements in place to get that done. While most of us realize that there is an abundance of good habitat outside of RGMAs, these sites are popular with hunters and offer a fantastic entry-point for new hunters looking for an easy place to try grouse hunting, thus encouraging more participation which is great for all grouse hunters.

**Rum River Fun Shoot**

The Rum River Chapter will be having a Fun Shoot on Saturday, August 8, at Wings North (19379 Homestead Rd., Pine City, MN 55063). I attended this event last year and it was a lot of fun—I'm going again this year. Registration is at 10am and you can find directions at [Wingsnorth.org](http://Wingsnorth.org). See you there. Also look for an article on Dick and Judi Huempfner from the Rum River Chapter in the Fall issue of *Ruffed Grouse Society* magazine.

**Banquet Announcement—Drumming Log Chapter, Brainerd, MN**

The Drumming Log Chapter of RGS will be holding their 27th Conservation and Sportsmen's Banquet on Tuesday, August 18th. Location will be The Woods, 19624 County Road 3, Brainerd. Social Hour at 5:30, Dinner at 7:30.
Thank You

So that’s all the time we have for now. As you can see, RGS is working on many levels to improve our forests and hunting. By the time you read this, RGS will be making some major announcements concerning staffing in Minnesota and the Midwest. We are working on private land, State land, Federal land, County land habitat and in St. Paul and across the state on policy, education and recruitment. Thank you for your support of grouse and grouse hunting in Minnesota. Be watching in the future for more news concerning other projects we’ve been developing to maintain/improve grouse habitat and hunting traditions. Be sure to check out the RGS website for more information about additional efforts RGS is making to improve our young forests and your grouse hunting. And if there is anything I can help with, let me know. It’s a good time to be a grouse hunter in Minnesota, you should encourage others to try our sport and become members of the group.

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The Ruffed Grouse Society is North America’s foremost conservation organization dedicated to preserving our sporting traditions by creating healthy forest habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and other wildlife. For information on the Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society, please call 888-564-6747 or check out the RGS website at www.ruffedgrousesociety.org.