

RGS  AWS

RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY | AMERICAN WOODCOCK SOCIETY

CONSERVATION IMPACT REPORT

— 2021 —

A Message from THE CHAIR OF THE BOARD

The stakes have never been higher

BY BRIAN SMITH

For 60 years, our members, partners, staff and supporters have beat the drum of a dynamic forest message. Ruffed grouse, American woodcock and forest wildlife populations go hand-in-hand with forest health, and we've been doing incredible work all along. Over the years, chapters pushed forward knowing that managing forests in a science-based, thoughtful manner is the only way to ensure the biodiversity of our most beloved species.

Despite all that hard work and dedication, we've seen bird populations dip and decline like never before. Places like Indiana, Ohio and the Southern Appalachians show clear signs of a warning. If the progression continues up the mountains and northward, we face the loss of birds that once thrived throughout our woodlands. We know from research that we could lose ruffed grouse across much of their range in the Lower 48.

We're fighting the steady decline of these bellwethers. Forests no longer have the right mix of age classes to keep them active with new life.

That's why we're charging forward with landscape-scale conservation and leaning into meaningful, new partnerships. This is urgent, critical work. We're leading the discussion around forest management and how to ensure generational impact.



Photo by Timothy C. Flanigan

We're also leveraging grant funding like never before by using donations and chapter-raised funds as matching dollars, which often multiplies the on-the-ground impact tenfold.

We're up against significant challenges, but there's also a big appetite for our approach. The need has never been greater for solutions that make healthy habitat, create jobs, support local communities, sustain ecosystem services and increase biodiversity. Our approach helps wildlife and people.

Forest management is now a top priority for almost anyone who owns land: individuals, private companies and county, state and federal agencies. RGS & AWS have acted as

a catalyst for action and implementation. We're creating plans around Dynamic Forest Restoration Blocks – which takes a landscape view of both public and private habitat over thousands of acres – that boost our impact and focus on collaborative efforts. The work made possible by RGS & AWS chapters and members, who laid a foundation for decades, is now expanding exponentially in response to investments from our partners and funders. This science-based management plan is also being put into play by multiple partners in the conservation space.

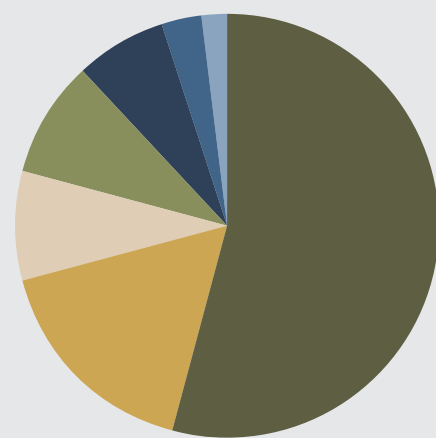
We've had to expand; we've had to scale up. We've had to get the right people in the right positions. We've spent the last several years building a strategy to develop new skills and talent and acquire resources to implement our mission on a broad scale.

In 2021 we entered into dozens of agreements that will impact tens of thousands of acres of grouse habitat and engaged thousands of people in raising funds and awareness for grouse, woodcock and forest wildlife.

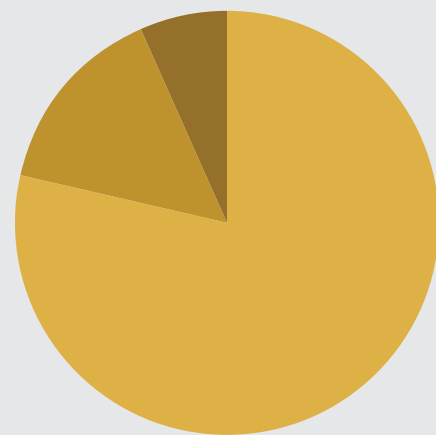
In short, we're seeing clear evidence the strategy is working and clear evidence of our success.

As always, thank you for your support. We couldn't do this without you! 🙌

FINANCIALS



REVENUE SOURCES		PERCENTAGE
● Contributions	3,305,198	54.2%
● Banquets & Events	1,022,394	16.8%
● Membership Dues	502,762	8.2%
● Grants	540,156	8.9%
● Other	420,852	6.9%
● Timber Sales	201,814	3.3%
● Merchandise Sales	104,810	1.7%
	<u>6,097,986</u>	



EXPENSES		PERCENTAGE
● Conservation Programs	3,104,726	78.6%
● Fundraising	590,131	14.9%
● Administration	253,725	6.4%
	<u>3,948,582</u>	

CONSERVATION IMPACT REPORT

Northeast Region Update

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE PARTNERSHIP

In April 2021, RGS & AWS reached out to our agency partners at Massachusetts Wildlife and Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation to establish an outreach and engagement collaboration that supports their science-based conservation and forest habitat work across the Commonwealth. By late summer 2021, this partnership expanded to include Mount Grace Land Trust and the National Wild Turkey Federation, resulting in the establishment of the Massachusetts Dynamic Forest Restoration Initiative. This collaboration will coordinate, prioritize and enable dynamic forest management across public and private land ownerships on priority landscapes within central and western Massachusetts. RGS & AWS and our partners were awarded funding from the U.S. Forest Service's Landscape Scale Restoration grant in April 2022, and the project rollout is anticipated to occur in July 2022.

This initiative will coordinate and promote forest habitat diversity across public, private and conservation easement ownerships, as well as produce new monitoring and mapping capacity to analyze forest age and diversity at a landscape scale. These tools can then be used to inform future habitat work with the



Photo by Courtney Perry

goal of achieving a mosaic of forest age and types. It will complement existing programs and efforts and take a regional perspective on forest habitat.

What does this mean in terms of conservation impact on the ground? With our partners' help, RGS & AWS aim to reach the following targets by 2025:

- 1,600 acres of forest habitat improvements that enhance landscape diversity and help ruffed grouse, American woodcock, wild turkey and dozens of other key species.
- 400+ acres of invasive species treatments that will pave the way for future forest habitat work.
- A coordinated public outreach campaign targeting over 100,000 area residents and stakeholders.

There are four goals associated with this initiative, which include the following:

1. **Forest habitat restoration** – Identify, plan and deliver sustainable forest management on public, private and conservation easement properties in a coordinated manner that accounts for landscape-level conditions and property-level planning considerations.
2. **Forest habitat resiliency** – Plan and execute invasive species mitigation measures to restore habitat integrity and adaptability.
3. **Engagement and outreach** – Develop an outreach tool kit for landowners about the climate benefits of forest habitat restoration work. Develop and test outreach best practices and strategies as part of the project deliverables.
4. **Long-term landscape planning and technology transfer** – a landscape-level mapping model that can be used for long-term planning to inform priority areas for future public and private lands habitat projects and to be coordinated with partners like the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service and others.

MORE ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

This initiative connects a diverse set of conservation partners with a demonstrated commitment to im-

proving forest health on both public and private land. Since 1961, RGS has promoted forest stewardship and worked to improve forest health for the benefit of wildlife and recreational users. Similarly, the National Wild Turkey Federation was the principal conservation organization working with state wildlife managers to restore the wild turkey to the landscape through partnership and habitat improvement. These non-governmental organizations bring extensive technical expertise regarding forest and habitat management for a broad suite of upland wildlife.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (Mass. DCR) manages healthy, working forests and provides technical assistance to private landowners on the 3.2 million acres of forest in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Similarly, the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (Mass. Wildlife) is responsible for protecting and managing a broad suite of fish and wildlife species, including 570 Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Together, Mass. DCR and Mass. Wildlife manage over 525,000 acres of public forestland.

Finally, the Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust has been a critical steward of nearly 35,000 acres of vital habitat within the Route 2 Central Corridor landscape and has been a conservation leader with its efforts to advance forest management and land protection among small woodlot owners. This project will accelerate the delivery of public benefits from forest management by focusing activities on critical landscapes within Massachusetts.

The project will leverage \$250,000 of match that will be applied to the \$215,000 Landscape Scale Restoration grant request, resulting in a total budget of \$465,000 and a leverage ratio of 1.16X. Match dollars are being contributed by all participating partners, including NWTF, Mount Grace, Mass. Wildlife, Mass. DCR and RGS & AWS. The RGS & AWS contribution will be leveraged by 7X and will help us reach the deliverable targets

that have been established for on-the-ground habitat work, planning, coordination and public outreach.

*Todd Waldron
Forest Conservation Director
Northeast Region*

Mid-Atlantic Region Update

LANDOWNER OUTREACH AND SUPPORT PROGRAM

In Pennsylvania, we're developing a new and exciting way of assisting private landowners in RGS & AWS priority areas to manage their forests.

Our new approach complements the wildlife forester and joint Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Working Lands For Wildlife (WLFW) positions RGS has in many states. With wildlife foresters/WLFW foresters, an RGS staff forester works directly with private landowners, writing forest management plans, accessing available NRCS and other cost-share funds and helping implement management.

In the new model we've developed, RGS staff aren't working as field foresters with landowners but are coordinating with consulting foresters who have landowner clients in priority areas. RGS also recruits private landowners and connects them with consulting foresters. In this new way of supporting good forest management on private lands, it's the consulting foresters who work with the



Photo by Courtney Perry

landowners – but the impact is the same: implementing more forest management and creating more habitat.

This new approach is another way we're implementing RGS' model of working forests, where sales of pulpwood and sawtimber support all or part of the costs of managing forests and creating habitat.

We're pleased to partner with Domtar, the nation's leading manufacturer of "free sheet" paper (the kind we use in printers and copiers). They have a paper plant in Johnsonburg, Pennsylvania. Not only is Domtar financially supporting our collaboration with American Bird Conservancy, Indiana University of PA and Audubon Mid-Atlantic, but they're preferentially purchasing pulpwood from the habitat-oriented forest management projects that come out of our collaboration, which helps get the work done commercially by loggers.

Strategically, we prioritize areas in Domtar's sourcing regions and have landscape-scale habitat mosaics already established on public lands, usually on the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) State Game Lands (SGLs) and the Erie National Wildlife Refuge. We've identified seven such public "anchor" properties where landscape-scale habitat mosaics have been established or are being established (technically, these landscape-scale mosaics are called "dynamic forest restoration blocks" or DFRBs).

Then, to expand on the landscape-scale habitat work done on the SGLs or Erie NWR, we're engaging nearby private landowners, starting

with cooperators in the PGC's Hunter Access Program.

Here are the specifics. With the PGC and other partners, RGS sent a joint letter to Hunter Access cooperators whose land is within 10 miles of the "anchor" SGLs or Erie NWR. Around the DFRBs on the SGLs and the Erie NWR, the PGC has more than 600 landowner cooperators who own more than 100,000 acres (see chart). The first few weeks after the letter, we received a 3% response rate, which sounds low, but is a relatively good initial response rate from a letter. Two weeks after the joint letter, we're sending a follow-up postcard, which includes a tear-off panel that landowners can mail in to indicate interest if they don't want to call or email.

When landowners respond, I have a brief call to learn more about their interest in the program and describe working with a consulting forester.

If they're interested, I send their name and contact info to one of the consulting foresters we're working with, who then reaches out to the landowners. Landowners are under no obligation to work with the consulting foresters or sell any pulpwood to Domtar, but so far, most landowners appreciate the opportunity to talk with a forester.

As we pilot our new landowner outreach and support program, we'll improve it as we seek to apply the approach in other areas of Pennsylvania and other states.

And as we create more habitat, RGS is excited to help private landowners and support rural economic development.

*Ben Larson
Forest Conservation Director
& Director of Forest Market Strategy
Mid-Atlantic Region*

Southern Appalachian Region Update

PETER'S BRANCH STEWARDSHIP AGREEMENT

On June 24, 2021, RGS & AWS



entered into the Peter's Branch Stewardship Agreement with the Daniel Boone National Forest (DBNF) to promote forest health and improve wildlife habitat conditions on DBNF's lands within the Pine Creek Forest Restoration Project. The Pine Creek Forest Restoration Project area covers 45,700 acres of National Forest System lands in the London Ranger District. The Peter's Branch Stewardship Agreement is part of the broader Pine Creek project and includes 136 acres of commercial timber harvest to create young and open forest habitat. In addition, the forest product revenue generated from the timber sale will be utilized to pay service work contractors to complete a suite of noncommercial forestry and wildlife treatments, including 69 acres of mechanical site preparation, 302 acres of timber stand improvement, 100 acres of midstory removals, 151 acres of crop tree release, 63 acres of nonnative invasive plant control, 22 days of timber marking to prepare a new timber sale area, road maintenance and rare plant propagation and planting. RGS & AWS staff will lead the administration and inspection of the timber sale and all service work activities on behalf of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS).

By taking on this role, RGS &

RGS & AWS was awarded the 2022 Conservation Organization of the Year from the Tennessee Wildlife Federation. In Tennessee, the RGS & AWS partners with other like-minded organizations to improve habitat, including with the Federation, to enhance more than 6,800 acres of wildlife habitat.

AWS can increase capacity for the USFS in a truly additive way. RGS & AWS staff can implement the work that USFS staff would otherwise be doing to free up their time developing and implementing other projects. As a result, we can get more acres treated and put more habitat on-the-ground together than the USFS can on their own.

The Peter's Branch Stewardship Project is being implemented in two timber sales. On February 22, 2022, RGS & AWS officially sold the first timber sale to Kentucky Hardwood Lumber Co. for \$247,420. This is the first Stewardship timber sale that we've sold in the Southern Appalachians, marking a significant milestone in our conservation program

and new model! The logging contractor moved in and started cutting trees on April 4, 2022, so the project is currently underway.

In addition to Peter's Branch, RGS & AWS recently sold the Double G Stewardship Timber Sale on the Tellico Ranger District of the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee, recently released the bid prospectus for the Timberdoodle Stewardship Timber Sale on the Clinch Ranger District of the Jefferson National Forest and is developing the bid prospectus for the Little Flat Creek Stewardship Timber Sale on the Redbird Ranger District of DBNF. Combined, these projects will impact thousands of acres over the next two to three years on National Forest lands and leverage hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Nick Biemiller

*Forest Conservation Director
Southern Appalachians*



Photo by Courtney Perry

Great Lakes/Upper Midwest Region Update

MOOSE HABITAT COLLABORATIVE PROJECT

October 20, 2021, marked an important date for the Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society (RGS & AWS) and our vision of a Working Forest Model of Wildlife Conservation. On that day, RGS & AWS President Ben Jones signed RGS & AWS's largest grant contract. The \$1.8 million Moose Habitat Collaborative Grant is the 4th phase of a grant funded by Minnesota's Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC). The legislature established the LSOHC to provide annual funding recommendations to the legislature from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. The Outdoor Heritage Fund, one of four funds created by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment, receives 1/3 of the money raised by a state tax increase.

Moose have an iconic status in Minnesota and are a critical component of the cultural identity, hunting

heritage and recreational economy of the northern part of the state. During the past two decades, Minnesota's moose population has dramatically fallen from an estimated 8,840 in 2006 to 3,150 in 2020. This project builds on the Collaborative's Phase I-III efforts to improve degraded forest habitats by increasing stand complexity through mixed density/cover type planting methods, prescribed burning and planned non-grant timber harvests, which enhance and increase the occurrence of early successional/forage for moose habitat across the landscape. All things great for grouse and woodcock.

RGS & AWS and Collaborative partners have already identified multiple project areas for management in 2022. Since the grant was signed in October, 2,059 acres of treatments were completed in 2021. These treatments included tree planting prep work, release and bud-capping for deer browse protection. In total, the Moose Habitat Collaborative will seek to complete approximately 38,000 acres of habitat treatments over the three-year lifespan of the grant. Most being prescribed burning treatments on the Superior National Forest. Other partners on this grant include the Superior National Forest, the Minnesota Department

of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy and several county and Native American partners.

This grant is an important one for forest wildlife habitat in Minnesota, as well as for growth of RGS & AWS. Built into this grant, RGS & AWS were able to hire a state Conservation Coordinator with minimal cost to the organization. Doing so has allowed RGS & AWS to grow state-level capacity to manage this and other grants/project opportunities. Pioneering this State Coordinator model for the Great Lakes/Upper Midwest, our Minnesota State Coordinator position has become the template for planned Coordinators in Wisconsin and Michigan. In fact, the Moose Habitat Collaborative Grant was the exact model for a \$242k Pere-Marquette Forest Habitat Collaborative grant submitted to the Michigan Wildlife Habitat Grant program in the spring of 2022, that if successful, would allow RGS & AWS to hire a Michigan Conservation Coordinator. RGS & AWS's first Minnesota Conservation Coordinator, Scott Johnson, started in March of 2022. 🐾

*Jon Steigerwaldt
Forest Conservation Director
Great Lakes/Upper Midwest*

RECOGNIZING OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

Our work wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our Corporate Partners. Thank you!



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