

## **MSGs Receives Esteemed Hamerstrom Award at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Prairie Grouse Technical Council Meeting October 19, 2017**

The Prairie Grouse Technical Council (PGTC) meets in odd numbered years in the prairie and Great Lakes states where prairie grouse are found. It consists of grouse advocates, enthusiasts, scientists, managers and others who appreciate grouse and their habitats. Their gathering culminates with a banquet and bestowing of Hamerstrom Award.

The Hamerstrom Award was established in honor of Fred and Fran Hamerstrom, pioneers of prairie grouse research and management (as well as students of Aldo Leopold, the father of wildlife ecology). It is presented to individuals and/or groups to recognize those that have made significant contributions in prairie grouse research, management or other support programs which have enhanced the welfare of one or more species of prairie grouse in a particular state or region. Their contribution should be evidenced by a sustained effort over at least 10 years, and may be related to research, management activity, promotion of an integrated program, or some combination thereof.



The Hamerstrom Award is received by MSGS, via first Life Member, Thom Soule, from Jodie Provost.

At the recent 32<sup>nd</sup> PGTC gathering in Dickinson, ND, Oct. 17-19, the MSGS had the great honor of receiving a Hamerstrom Award. Just two other organizations have received the award since its inception in 1991.

### Award Recipients have included:

- 1991 Fran Hamerstrom
- 1993 Ron Westemeier
- 1995 Dan Svedarsky and Jerry Kobriger
- 1998 Bob Robel
- 1999 Bill Berg
- 2001 Len McDaniel
- 2003 John Toepfer
- 2005 Nova Silvy and the Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus, Ltd.
- 2007 Rick Baydack and Kerry Reese
- 2009 Randy Rodgers and Bill Vodehnal
- 2011 Mike Morrow, Jack Connelly, and the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society
- 2013 Mike Schroeder and The Sutton Center
- 2015 Tish McDaniel and Dave Haukos
- 2017 Don Wolfe, Kent Jensen, and the Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society

The following nomination of MSGS by Jodie Provost was read at the PGTC banquet:

MSGS founded in 1985, recently celebrated 32 years of conservation, and much amazing success from a small, dedicated, passionate organization. It is dedicated to the management and restoration of sharptails in Minnesota for hunters and non-hunters”. Membership currently stands at 261 and has consisted of up to 300+ hunters, birders, students, outdoor enthusiasts, conservationists, landowners, and natural resource professionals.

MSGS was hatched when Roche Lally, engineer and avid prairie grouse hunter, became concerned with the decline of sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota. He was instrumental in founding MSGS and leading it through the decades. He and Bill Berg, DNR research biologist, fellow MSGS founder and 1999 Hamerstrom Award recipient, first met in the early 1970s during sharptail bag checks. Roche called Bill in 1984, and sent him a letter in 1985, getting MSGS up and running. He called Fran Hamerstrom a couple times - she told him that the key to success was getting observation blinds out and getting the public inside them. He stuck with the cause for 33 years and is still with it – 32 years as President and now as an Honorary Director.

Over the years, many people have kept the organization productive, and a some deserve a special shout out, such as founding fathers Roche Lally, Mark Chandler (first Vice President), Bill Berg, Wayne Hoshal, Dave Pauly, Keith Bergstedt, Jon Coil, Brent Curtek, Tom Engel, Norm Moody, Rob Naplin, Don Pierce, Con Christiansen, Clay Sederberg and Jay Johnson, plus later leaders Dave Dickey, Bill Faber, Ward Julien, Gregg Nelson, Matt Breuer and more. Forgive me if I’ve missed someone. They have all brought and still bring passion and skills to the MSGS team.

Since 1986, MSGS has secured more than \$9 million to protect, restore, and enhance over 22,000 acres of brushland habitat for sharp-tailed grouse, many other wildlife, and the people who use, enjoy and benefit from them. In 2010, MSGS coordinated its first land acquisition, with the help of several partners, protecting a lek and adding 80 acres to the state Wildlife Management Area (WMAs) system. With the aid of Outdoor Heritage grants and key partner, Pheasants Forever, MSGS then went on to acquire ten other tracts to add roughly 7000 acres to several other WMAs in east central Minnesota. During times when MN DNR has had tight project budgets or no funds for brushland protection and management, MSGS has been able to secure state grants (Heritage Enhancement, Outdoor Heritage, and Conservation Partners Legacy grants) to aid MN DNR and public brushland conservation.

Over the decades, MSGS has also financially supported research, viewing blinds, promotional materials, demonstrations and workshops, hosted a hunt and bi-annual Spring Fling gatherings for members, technical days for wildlife managers and one hunt, met jointly with Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society once and Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society twice, sent nearly 100 newsletters to members, shared information at event and fair booths, created a private land sharptail management brochure, supported a PF Farm Bill biologist position to focus on brushlands, held 25 Brush Cuts with hardy volunteers to enhance habitat and engage youth and members, honored its devoted members and conservationists, developed a website and Facebook, and more. MSGS's was also influential in “hatching” the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Association, and Sharptails Plus in Manitoba.

It is safe to say that MSGS is the voice for sharptail and brushland habitat in Minnesota. Much work remains to sustain this unique prairie grouse in Minnesota and elsewhere, but because of MSGS, this unique bird, its habitat and fellow critters are far better off, and we have greater hope for their future.

In my humble opinion, MSGS is incredibly deserving of the Hamerstrom Award. Now here to accept the Award for Roche Lally is Thom Soule, first Life Member of MSGS along with his wife Janet Boe.

The following acceptance was then read by Thom for Roche, Bill Berg and all MSGS members:

First I want to say thank you to all those who have volunteered countless hours over the past 30+ years helping MSGS achieve many successes.

Thanks to my wife Kathy for supporting my efforts, if it weren't for her I would not have been able to keep going.

Thanks most importantly to God for creating such a beautiful resource for mankind to enjoy and appreciate.

I am deeply humbled and greatly appreciative of receiving such an award. To this day I can't quite put into words what it is about this bird that fascinates I am sure all of us. What keeps that fire burning in us to protect this bird.

When I went on that first of many "Bill Berg sharptail tours" in the spring of 1986 with you, Mark Chandler & myself, I had no idea of the extent of the long journey I would be on. I had no idea of what lied ahead as far as all the great people I would meet over the years.

I look back over the years and marvel at the tireless devotion of so many that have been with us since the early years. MSGS would not be here today if it were not for those efforts.

This journey has been like a typical sharptail hunt, you just keep walking and walking, seems like there just aren't any birds and then you get a flush and you get your reward. There is no finer sound on this earth than the sound of cackling sharptails in flight.

Bill Berg, it goes with saying, this award would not be awarded today without your efforts also. Thanks for all the great years. Thanks for accepting this award on my behalf.

Roche