

2011 THE WISCONSIN COVERTS PROJECT REUNION AND ADVANCED TRAINING

August 26-28, 2011
Heartwood Conference Center and Retreat – Trego, WI



2011 WI Coverts Project Reunion and Advanced Training Attendees

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|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Kellen Anderson | Don Johnson (06) | Arlene Roehl (06) |
| Bob Asproth (10) | Angie Kamba (96) | Gordy Ruesch and Cathy Mauer (00 and 99) |
| Dave Baumann (09) | Jim Kissinger (02) | Mike Ryan (10) |
| Merlin Becker (99) | Jim (05) and Sandi La Luzerne | Jim (02) and Nancy Schmitt |
| Greg and Mary Beirne (09) | Dennis Lampi (10) | Steve Schwartz (10) |
| Rick Braun (06) | Chad Lampi (10) | Mark Schwengel (03) |
| John (96) and Timmie Clemetsen | Byron and Janet Lange (06) | Stefan and Jane Shoup (03) |
| Bill and Peg Connelly (08) | Gene Lasch (99) | Greg Solberg (05) |
| Paul (95) and Ann Drzewiecki | Roy Lindeman (97) | Stacey Steers (05) |
| Tim Eisele (94) | Jim Marquardt (10) | Jack Swelstad (06) |
| Ken and Doris Eisner (08) | Jim and Pat McSweeny (09) | Roy and Lucy Valitchka (09) |
| Mark and Roxanne Erickson (10) | Rich Miller (09) | Clarence Viegut (07) |
| Lloyd Franz (94) | Dale and Doris Moody (09) | Joe Vosberg (01) |
| Bill and Lolly Fucik (06) | Jim Morgan (07) | Dennis Waterman (10) |
| Dick and Bonnie Grossenbach (10) | John Muir (07) | Karen Wedde (10) |
| Jim Heerey (04) | Mark Nammacher (10) | Roger Williams (10) |
| Bill Helm (03) | Richard Netzinger (08) | Ted Zabel (10) |
| John Hess (99) and Sandra Shane-DuBow | Ron and Judy Peters (09) | Jim Zelinske (00) |
| Bill (05) and Tana Johnson | Chuck Pogorelnik (96) | |
| David (10) and Sonja Johnson | Steven Raether (09) | |
| | Ray (06) and Holly Rausch | |

2011 Wisconsin Coverts Project Reunion and Advanced Training

By Tim Eisle, 1994 Coverts Cooperator and freelance outdoor writer and
Jamie Nack, Wisconsin Coverts Project Coordinator,
UW – Madison Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology

Minong---The Wisconsin Coverts Project Reunion and Advanced Training, held August 26-28, 2011 at the Heartwood Conference Center near Minong, attracted 80 landowners who had attended workshops from 1994 through 2010.

Coverts is co-sponsored by the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS), Louisiana-Pacific Corporation, UW-Extension, UW-Madison Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology, and Sustainable Forestry Initiative, Inc. In addition, the Anne and Jason Spaeth family, Braun Woodlands, and Howard and Nancy Mead were sponsors of the reunion. **Jamie Nack**, Wisconsin Coverts Project Coordinator for the UW-Madison Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology, said that since 1994, 505 cooperators have been trained. They own 440 different properties totaling over 180,000 acres. “This is an important group to reach,” Nack said, “because 67% of woodlands are owned by non-industrial private forest landowners.”

Scott Craven, UW-Madison emeritus wildlife specialist and originator of the Wisconsin Coverts Project, gave an overview of the wildlife landscape in Wisconsin. “In many ways, the wildlife resource is in pretty darn good shape,” Craven said. “Most species are doing very well, and species such as bald eagles, loons, trumpeter swans and sandhill cranes, that we were worried about for many years, are doing better than anybody hoped for.” Craven said that professional wildlife managers know what to do, if the public provides the mandate and financial resources to get it done. Many problems today are related to people, politics and money, more so than biology. The serious problems today (such as Canada geese, wolves and deer) involve over-abundance rather than scarcity. “Human society makes decisions for other species, and people need to come to grip with how many is enough and how many is too many, and then allow managers to manipulate the populations toward that goal,” Craven said.

On specific species, Craven noted:

- Bats - landowners should keep alert for white-nosed syndrome if they happen to have a hibernaculum on their property.
- Bears - the DNR is doing a second tetracycline study of bears to confirm estimates of higher bear populations.
- Deer – new research should help to show the collective impact of wolves, coyotes and bears on fawn mortality.

He alerted landowners that prices of bird feed are up substantially and some people may decide to not feed birds because of the increased costs. He also expressed concern over the future of hunting, because hunters have traditionally funded the conservation efforts and politically supported conservation legislation. He reminded landowners that there are plenty of opportunities for them to participate in surveys conducted by the DNR that gives the agency information on the presence and abundance of wildlife species.

Craven referred to “what I call the power of deer. They are simply a very powerful force,” Craven said. “With 650,000 hunters in the state of 5 million people, with family members almost everybody is affected by deer.” Too many deer cause problems with vehicle collisions, damage to shrubbery, and a loss of some species in the woodlands. Too few deer causes problems with hunters, chambers of commerce, and politicians.

Gary Zimmer, western great lakes regional biologist for RGS in Laona, Wisconsin, said that RGS is emphasizing getting young people interested in hunting, in order to have more support for conservation and wildlife habitat. RGS is also encouraging the National Forests to meet their tree harvesting quotas in order to regenerate young forest species that are necessary for many wildlife species.

“It’s really all about habitat,” Zimmer said, as he summarized a study of ruffed grouse populations in southwestern Wisconsin. “Grouse and woodcock need dense cover, which is hard to walk through for us humans, and for predators.” The study, conducted by Scott Walter of UW-Richland Center, found that the sex ratio of live trapped ruffed grouse was biased toward males, suggesting that something was happening to females. He also found few juvenile grouse. What was happening was that the birds sought early successional forest, but only pockets existed. Mature forest dominated the area and males, which hung close to drumming logs, tended to survive (43% survival) while females were doing a lot of moving and because the forest was open they succumbed to predators (only 16% survived). “The females are probably looking for nest sites across the landscape and the forest is not dense enough to offer protection,” Zimmer said. “We have to look for ways to connect important pockets of habitat so these birds can move from point A to point B.”

He showed photos of the same patches of land from the 1930s to late 1900s. The forests are getting older, and less than 15% of the habitat is considered early successional habitat. In addition, aspen forests are declining with more than 600,000 acres of aspen or oak/hickory converting to other species in recent times, which does not benefit grouse and woodcock. “Even back in 1948 people were aware that the continued abundance of ruffed grouse depends on maintaining large acreages of cut-overs, which is not easy when competing interests change the landscape,” Zimmer said.

The National Forests in Wisconsin planned to harvest 4,500 acres of aspen management but only 2,000 acres were harvested. The national forest has not achieved its stated aspen management goal since 1989. Yet there are opportunities to harvest trees due to interest in biomass for fuel, thanks to the Upper Great Lakes Young Forest Initiative, State Wildlife Action Plans, and interest in Kirtland and Golden-winged warblers. An emphasis on creating more jobs includes for loggers, which could mean more harvesting on forests. “We can’t wait much longer,” Zimmer said.

Amy Morales, DNR forester at Spooner, updated participants about a huge storm that ripped through northwest Wisconsin on July 1. The winds, up to 100 miles per hour, downed timber in 6 Counties totaling 130,000 acres. Morales said that stumpage market conditions have been relatively stable but housing starts are still down from previous years. She also informed

landowners that Senate Bill 161 is proposing changes to the state's Managed Forest Law, including allowing landowners in MFL to lease land (currently prohibited) but then increasing rates that landowners would pay in taxes. Currently MFL owners with land open to the public pay \$1.67 per acre, and \$8.34 if land is not open for public recreation. Morales encouraged landowners to be aware of signs of the Emerald Ash Borer and to not trim oak trees in the spring in order to avoid oak wilt.

David MacFarland, DNR big game researcher for the DNR, provided an overview of the status of bears, wolves and cougars in Wisconsin. These native carnivores have re-established in the state following their over-exploitation in the 1800s and 1900s. "It's been remarkable to see how these animals have recovered, and then moved out of the northern forest into southern Wisconsin," MacFarland said.

- Gray wolves – Were extirpated in Wisconsin in the 1960s but returned from Minnesota and Upper Michigan in the 1970s. The population began to increase in the 1990s and the population estimate is now 790 animals. The most important determinant on whether wolves can survive is road density, which indicates human habitation. But they have moved further south. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed delisting the species from the Endangered Species list as of January, 2012.
- Bobcats – Traditionally restricted to the northern counties, these cats are now seen farther south. Some trail camera photos have documented bobcats in LaFayette, Grant, Iowa and Racine Counties. New research is being completed to determine the population of bobcats south of Highway 64. Some genetic studies suggest the bobcats are coming up from southern states.
- Black bears – In 1985 the state had a closed season due to concern over populations, but then a quota-based harvest began and populations have grown considerably. A study, using tetracycline, allowed biologists to estimate the state bear population at 33,600 in 2006. A new estimate will be available in another year. Bears seem to be moving south along the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers corridors, using many small woodlots.
- Cougars – Were extirpated in the 1800s but people reported seeing cougars in the state the past decade. Finally an animal was confirmed and eventually went south to Chicago where it was shot. In the last 5 years, a half-dozen animals have been confirmed in the state. One animal that was seen in Wisconsin in December, 2009 was seen in New York in 2010 and was hit by a car and killed in Connecticut June 11, 2011.

Tim Eisele, freelance outdoor writer who attended Coverts in 1994, entertained the group with a colorful powerpoint entitled "From Weeds to Wildflowers on Gobbler Ridge." He showed photos of when he and his wife first bought their land in southwest Wisconsin in 1990, how the vegetation changed, and steps they went through to install a prairie for biodiversity and to benefit wildlife. Eisele showed the process to a successful prairie, the upkeep that is required and then the birds, insects and wildlife that benefit from the prairie. "Our goal is to leave the land a little better than the way we got it," he said.

Mike Meyer, DNR researcher, described what climate change will mean to Wisconsin forests, wildlife and fisheries. Woodland owners should be aware of the changes and think about it when managing property. The earth's atmosphere traps in some of the energy reflected from the earth

along with greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane. “Scientists are predicting that more of the sun’s energy will be trapped in the atmosphere and there is strong evidence that the gasses are getting greater,” he said. He showed an upward trend of carbon dioxide trapped in the atmosphere from 1960 to 2005. The proportion of gas contributed by fossil fuel burning has gone up and evidence predicts that the earth’s temperature will warm by 3 to 10-degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the Century.

Some of the impacts that Wisconsin is more likely to see include: Shorter snow seasons and more freezing rain events, a change in the plant hardiness zone to be more similar to central Illinois, and an increase of several weeks in the growing season. These will have good and bad impacts on different species of wildlife and trees, and could disrupt phenological events. For more information see www.wicci.wisc.edu or www.earththeoperatorsmanual.com.

Rick Schulte, Crop Production Services in DeForest, said that he helps landowners find the best herbicide to use at the lowest rates to control invasive species. Rather than wiping out lots of plants, he targets specific species. Schulte provided a handout that had percentages of herbicide to control various invasive plants. If a person uses the wrong amount and the plant comes back next year, they haven’t gained anything.

He reminded landowners that they don’t need to treat the center of a cut tree, which is dead wood, but instead put the herbicide on the cambium layer just inside of the bark. He also suggested treating cut trees within 30 minutes of cutting when using water soluble herbicides. Schulte suggested using a dye in with the herbicide which helps tell where you have sprayed. He also encouraged people to get a good sprayer with a metal tip and washers that won’t be corroded by herbicides. Some suggestions included using Oust or Garlon 4 for garlic mustard, Escort XP for autumn olive, and Garlon 4 Ultra for buckthorn. The good thing, and the bad thing, about glyphosate, Schulte said, is that there is no soil activity.

Jeff Groeschl, private consulting forester from Hayward, talked about incorporating wildlife considerations into forest management plans. He said that years ago general comments such as leaving snag trees were put into Managed Forest Law (MFL) plans, but today landowners now must hire a Certified Plan Writer (CPW) to write the plan. Groeschl said that while most landowners want to manage for wildlife, recreation and aesthetics, the MFL program is forest products-based. Private landowners must go to the CPW list and find someone they are comfortable with. The landowner and CPW submit the plan to the DNR where it is reviewed for completeness. Other foresters can be used for things like management activities.

“When I meet with the landowner to ask what is important to them, and they say wildlife habitat, the question is for what?” Groeschel said. “What is critical for you to get built into your plan is clarity. Think through what is important to you and your family and do everything to pre-research it and articulate that to your forester.” It is critical that the landowner is the driving force in providing the forester with the framework to look at different treatments to meet wildlife and timber goals. He said the back page of the new MFL application includes boilerplate items, giving the landowner the freedom to do things such as mowing trails, creating openings, planting shrubs, etc.

The only time landowners need to be very specific in their MFL plan is when the forest treatment they want to modify is different from the state's normal practices. So if a normal stand would be rotated at age 15 and the owner wanted something different, they must justify the modification based on the soils or site conditions. Plans have mandatory sections, that must be followed, but then there is a category of non-mandatory practices. Having more of these in may help receive some cost assistance. "Have a clear idea of what you want to do to benefit wildlife, otherwise you leave it up to the forester and DNR to interpret," Groeschl said.

Landowners need someone on their team, who knows the science and biology, to justify that modifications to the plan are consistent with the property and good forest management. Planting fruit bearing trees are often good for wildlife. "Remember to look at neighboring lands and see that your efforts are compatible with what is going on around you," he said.

Kris Tiles, UW-Extension basin educator, provided ideas for planning succession for land ownership. "It's a difficult conversation to have to talk about our own mortality, but it is necessary if you want your passion for your property carried on," Tiles said. She discussed the Ties to the Land program that was produced at Oregon State University and the Tree Farm System brought to Wisconsin by several organizations. It involves communication with family members and verbalizing values and goals for the property. "The decision will last long beyond your passing. You have an opportunity to ensure that your legacy is a positive one by actually planning for the future of your land," she said.

Lars Loberg, attorney, gave people something to think about with estate planning for woodland owners. Loberg said that forest land can be passed on when someone dies with a will. In Wisconsin and Minnesota, the estate goes through probate, a proceeding that divides up the assets. Some people want to avoid probate because they have to pay about 2% of the estate to the court. Others don't want it public where their assets are going, and probate proceedings are public.

Another concern is long-term care, and a person's property might have to be sold if a person is in a nursing home. Assets can be put in a trust and not have to sell the land in order to pay for nursing home costs. A trust will protect the property, will avoid probate, and is private. Trusts are not for everybody, but they are something landowners should be aware of. He also mentioned the option of a transfer on death deed to avoid probate. This takes effect upon the death of a person, and avoids probate. It can be changed many times during a person's life.

Another consideration is a Limited Family Partnership, which needs a business purpose such as growing timber. It has limited partners and general partners, and protects from liability. A Life Estate has benefits of an irrevocable trust and allows the owner to live on the property for the rest of his/her life. After 3 years it can be exempted from consideration for medical assistance.

Bryan Pierce, executive director of the Northwoods Land Trust, said that land trusts allow permanent protection of land, so that it stays much like it is into the future. "This is entirely voluntary and it is about how you leave your legacy," Pierce said. "The biggest reason to work with a land trust is for future generations, and whether there will be wildlife lands and hunting

areas in the future.” Land trusts are located throughout the state. Pierce’s work started with protecting natural shorelines for future generations, and now the organization works to protect critical natural areas.

Land trusts use conservation easements, a permanent land protection agreement between the landowner and the land trust to voluntarily permanently protect the property. It restricts present and potential future uses of the property. “It protects the property forever, which is a long time,” he said. “It allows the land to remain in private ownership and it can be sold or passed along to heirs, but whoever owns it must abide by the conservation limits in the easement.” The land trust that holds the easement is responsible for monitoring the property every year. An easement can change the fair market value of the property, and it does not necessarily allow public access.

Because the land trust is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, the donation of the development rights on the land can have significant income tax advantages to the landowner. The landowner gets an appraisal of the value of the easement donation for income tax purposes and can use that value over five years. The federal income tax laws also allow an enhanced tax benefit for people who have donated easements. In the end, it permanently protects property for conservation minded landowners and there can be income tax benefits to the landowner. The land can still be in the Managed Forest Law or Wetland Reserve program. He quoted an attorney who was instrumental in setting up conservation easements who said that people participate for one reason: they love their land. They want to leave a legacy of the land.

John Olson, furbearer ecologist for the DNR, said that furbearers “are the epitome of wild.” “They keep the wild in wild,” he said. “Predation is not pretty but it keeps wildlife on its toes, weeding out some of the less healthy animals, and helping to control populations.” They are beautiful animals, have adaptability and interesting ways of travel, they feed and clothe humans, and Native Americans considered them as their “brothers.” The fur trade was the first industry in North America, and the Hudson Bay Fur Company still exists in Wisconsin. Today they act as the canary in the coal mine for humans, warning of dangers in the environment.

Populations have changed dramatically. Beavers were estimated to have only three colonies in the mid-1900s in Wisconsin but by the 1980s populations were very high and they caused much damage to roads and trout streams. Populations have come down and the DNR is working on changes to its management plan. A helicopter survey of beavers will be conducted in October to estimate beaver populations. Both the beaver and wolf are a “love/hate” species, and people see them differently.

Something is occurring with fishers and they are declining in the far north, while the central counties are seeing more of them. The DNR web site has asked people to submit trail camera photos of furbearers, and this is giving the DNR a better idea of distribution of animals. They are trying to develop a systematic science-based survey using trail cameras to involve citizens in all counties and keep record of wildlife observations. “Our world would be much less exciting without furbearers,” he said.

Nuisance trappers help landowners remove furbearers that are causing damage to land. Muskrats can have two to three litters a year and can damage dikes. Trap can be a four-letter word to

some, but studies have developed Best Management Practices for trapping to provide humane methods to trap. Raccoons carry many diseases and people should be careful handling them or their excrement. Opossums are the only marsupial in Wisconsin, and they are moving north as weather is warmer. Coyotes are highly adaptable, and eat scraps left out by humans to feed wildlife. They usually move out red foxes, the same as wolves move out coyotes.

Andy Paulios, DNR bird ecologist and coordinator of the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, gave landowners tips on improving their land for birds. “Think of yourselves as bird realtors,” he said. “You must think of landscapes, then the patch and the site. And, of course the key is: location, location, location.”

Woodlands are important for birds in the state, which has 16 million acres of forests, and 70% is owned by private landowners. The tension zone runs through the state, resulting in different species of trees and plants and thus a variety of species of birds with that variety of vegetation. More than 100 different species nest just in forests, and they vary depending on the species of trees in the forests. “Some of the high priority birds include the golden-winged warbler, of which Wisconsin has about one-quarter of the world’s population, and cerulean warblers are state threatened species that prefer older oak forests and are declining,” he said. These birds fly over the Gulf of Mexico and winter in Costa Rica and Peru. South of the Tension Zone there are fewer conifers and acres of forest are less. Contiguous forests are mostly found along riverways.

Most birds spend large parts of their lives outside of Wisconsin, and thus landowners must consider their life cycle. For instance the Baltimore oriole spends more time in Costa Rica than Wisconsin. “Think about your habitat from the outside in, landscapes really matter,” Paulios said. “How much forest is on the landscape, and this will impact nesting success and breeding densities. Once you see what the neighborhood is like, then we can start trying to influence the composition, what type of trees, their age, etc.” Landowners must be in the right neighborhood to attract specific species of birds, or habitat changes may not attract those species.

“Once you know you are in the neighborhood for a bird, then you can start to think about little tweaks that will help,” Paulios said. “Even the type of harvest, such as single tree harvest, group selection or clearcut can all get different responses from different species of birds.” Birds change as the stand of trees change. “softer” edges help to attract more birds, and migrants are coming through and need lots of fats so they are looking for bugs, and landowners can attract them by planting shrubs that attract bugs. “Know your neighborhood, mimic a natural disturbance, keep your forest healthy, eliminate hard edges between a forest and field, and try to be more messy in managing the woods,” he said. “Birds don’t like clean forests.”

Before Coverts reunion participants departed for their Sunday field trips (canoeing the Namekagon River, learning about elk management near Clam Lake, birding at Crex Meadows, or touring Hayward State Forest Nursery), **Jamie Nack**, Coverts coordinator, reinforced that much more learning goes on from peer to peer, which is why Coverts cooperators are asked to share what they learn with neighbors and other landowners.

“If there is anything I can help you, let me know,” Nack said. The intent is to have another reunion in five years. So many people want to attend that the problem is finding a facility that will handle more than 100 people. In 2012, Coverts intends to hold two workshops, dates and locations are to be determined, but woodland owners from Minnesota and Michigan, as well as Wisconsin will be invited to apply. Applications are available from Nack and are due June 15.

Comments for Coverts Cooperators:

One person noted that one of the best attributes about the workshop is that it “makes us think about actively managing our properties.”

What do some of the cooperators say about why they attend?

- Ron Peters (2009 cooperator) – “I own 188 acres and want to get into programs that improve wildlife. The Coverts program took us out to a place that was being logged and we learned the benefits of logging and how it benefitted grouse. I listen to some of the presentations and I see it and then say, ‘hey, I can do that.’”
- Bill Johnson (2005 cooperator) – “Networking with people is the best part about this program. All of these people have common interests and I can learn what others have done that is right and wrong.”
- Lloyd Franz (1994) – “I have learned so much about management of my land for wildlife. I’ve specifically learned about what we can do to improve the land for songbirds. I have become more interested in songbirds, and have talked to some of my neighbors to encourage them to do more clear-cutting.”
- John Clemetsen (1996) – “I’ve attended these sessions because of the interesting people that I meet and talk to, and I always learn something. Plus it is always held in a delightful location. And with the information I learn I can help educate a few agency people.”
- Rick Braun (2006) – “My Dad attended Coverts in 1994 and I feel very good about the program. My goal is to educate people that cutting trees is good, because there is a place for both old growth and young succession species. I’ve made a lot of friends at Coverts.”