



## Big Swamp Sharptail Grouse Project Itasca County

**Partners:** Itasca County  
Five private landowners  
MN Department of Natural Resources  
USDA-NRCS

### INTRODUCTION

Sharp-tailed grouse, once common throughout the open brushland habitats of Minnesota, are now restricted to the Northwestern and East Central parts of the state where suitable habitat remains. From 1981 to 1998, sharptail numbers at dancing grounds dropped 70% in the East Central range and 81% in the Northwest range due to habitat loss and degradation.



### HISTORY OF THE PROJECT AREA

Prior to European settlement and large scale logging era of the 1800's sharp-tailed grouse in this area occupied open; fire maintained uplands and non-forested lowlands. Following logging and post logging fires, populations of sharp-tails exploded into the newly created open habitats. With settlement came fire suppression, conifer plantations and the conversion of forest and brushlands to agriculture.

The entire project area is approximately 9500 acres intermixed with state, county, and privately owned land. The WHIP project consists of approximately 1300 acres of county managed land and 130 acres of private ownership. The project area is primarily shrub swamp with scattered patches of low-density, poor-site tamarack and black spruce. There are numerous upland islands of mixed aspen, paper birch and balsam fir. Mixed upland forest, and open pasture and hayland dominate the perimeter.

### MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



**Before**

The purpose of the project is to improve and maintain high quality brushland habitat that will support a self sustaining population of sharp-tails. These open landscapes are also critical habitat for a great variety of other wildlife species such as bobolink, yellow rail (state special concern), sharp-tailed sparrow, short-eared owl (state special concern), sandhill crane, and northern harrier. Management also improves these habitats for waterfowl and white-tailed deer by stimulating early herbaceous green up and more nutritious woody browse.

The WHIP project area will be restored to early successional WHIP practices include prescribed burning, mechanical shearing and permanent grassland establishment. Itasca County which has management control on the majority of the public land, has complimented the brushland habitat objectives with timely timber sales.



**After**