



SHARP-TAILED GROUSE RESPONSE TO FALL PRESCRIBED FIRE AND MOWING

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

We examined sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) responses to prescribed fire and mechanical treatment (mowing) in the fall (mid-August through November) during 2015-2019 in northwestern Minnesota. We surveyed sharp-tailed grouse use at sites and measured vegetation before and after management at 16 mowing treatments and 12 prescribed burns, ranging in size from 5 to 664 ac (2–269 ha) and totaling 2,766 ac (1,118 ha). We also surveyed 22 control sites ranging in size from 6 to 460 ac (3–186 ha) and totaling 1,638 ac (663 ha). We surveyed sharp-tailed grouse use 0–28 (mean 9.1) days before (PRE) management, and 1 week (1WK), 1 month (1MO), 1 year (1YR), and 3 years (3YR) after management by conducting fecal pellet transects and documenting sharp-tailed grouse observed at the site. We detected sharp-tailed grouse pellets at 6 of 28 treatment sites and 5 of 22 control sites prior to treatment. Following treatment, we detected sharp-tailed grouse pellets in ≥ 1 fall survey (1WK or 1MO) at 13 treatment sites and 6 control sites. We observed sharp-tailed grouse at only 1 treatment site and 1 control site in PRE surveys, but in later fall surveys (1WK or 1MO) we observed grouse at 4 treatment and 2 control sites. Sharp-tailed grouse use of treated sites increased by more than 50% in 1YR surveys, but this was not significant in interim analysis due to high variability in site use. Our results thus far indicate that sharp-tailed grouse pellets provide a more useful indicator of site use than observations of grouse, and that sharp-tailed grouse use of treated sites was notably higher 1YR after management. Vegetation results indicate that shrub height was lower 1YR after mowing treatments and that forb cover was higher 1YR after burn treatments, however all other metrics measured did not differ 1YR after treatment. Vegetation metrics at sites occupied by sharp-tailed grouse did not differ prior to treatment, however in 1YR surveys, occupied sites had a significantly lower proportion of shrubs. Additional fieldwork is planned to complete 3YR surveys and improve statistical estimation of differences in occupancy, detection, and vegetation metrics.

INTRODUCTION

Sharp-tailed grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*) rely on early successional habitats of open grass and brushland. Historically, these habitats were created and maintained through periodic wildfire. More recently, fire suppression has played a role in reducing habitat for sharp-tailed grouse (Berg 1997). Prescribed fire has become an important management tool for maintaining open grass and brushland habitats, but it can be difficult to implement effectively or safely under many conditions (e.g., too wet, windy, humid, dry) and can require considerable staff and resources to execute. Thus, wildlife managers supplement prescribed burning with mechanical habitat management tools (e.g., shearing, mowing) to maintain early successional habitats. Although mechanical treatments set succession back, they may not produce the same wildlife response as fire does. Wildlife managers have expressed concern that sharp-tailed grouse are not responding to management in the way they would expect if habitat were limiting.

Fall may be a particularly important season for management because juvenile sharp-tailed grouse disperse to surrounding habitat in the fall. Currently, most prescribed burns on state and other lands in the sharp-tailed grouse range occur in the spring (Roy and Shartell, unpubl. data from DNR Wildlife Managers). Region 1 (R1) regularly conducts fall burning, however Regions 2 and 3 (R2/3) have not been burning in the fall because of concerns about peat fires during drier conditions and challenges mobilizing a large number of fire-qualified staff on short notice during the fall (R1 has a Roving Crew to assist with prescribed fire treatments and R2 does not). This study aims to measure the response of sharp-tailed grouse to prescribed burning and mechanical treatments in the fall, as compared to untreated controls.

Historically, fires occurred throughout the year and maintained early successional habitats, such as open grass and brushland, on the landscape. Grassland fires were started by lightning during the growing season, and Native Americans set fires during both the spring and fall dormant seasons in both grasslands and forests to aid hunting (see review in Knapp et al. 2009). Stand replacing fires occurred at 0-10 year intervals in grass and shrub vegetation types, and in forest and woodland types, understory fires occurred at 0-10 year intervals, with more severe, stand-replacement fires occurring at less frequent intervals in Minnesota (Brown and Smith 2000).

Native Americans referred to the sharp-tailed grouse as the "fire grouse" or "fire bird" because of their association with habitats frequently burned, and kept open, by fire. Sharp-tailed grouse have been shown to respond to prescribed fire treatments. Kirsch and Kruse (1973) found that the numbers of broods hatched per 100 acres was higher in 2 burned areas compared to an unburned control 1 year after spring prescribed fires. Sexton and Gillespie (1979) reported that grouse switched leks just 2 days after a spring burn, abandoning the former dancing ground in favor of the recently burned site 480 m to the north. Sharp-tailed grouse have also been observed returning to leks to dance the day after a burn (J. Provost, pers. comm.).

Burn season may have an effect on the response of sharp-tailed grouse to prescribed fire treatments. Burns conducted in the fall might attract dispersing juveniles searching for habitat. Numerous bird species are known to be attracted to fire, smoke, and recently burned areas (Smith 2000); smoke, flames, and dark burned ground could provide strong visual cues about habitat creation and its direction from a large distance. Young grouse disperse during September and October (Gratson 1988), typically <6 km from brood rearing areas near nest sites. Sites burned in the fall are not followed by regrowth of vegetation during winter (Kruse and Higgins 1990) and could serve as lek sites the following spring. Sharp-tailed grouse also resume dancing at leks in the fall; Hamerstrom and Hamerstrom (1951) suggested that these fall dances, which include young males, might establish leks for the following spring.

Similar long-distance cues to habitat creation and maintenance are not provided by mechanical treatments. Thus, we might expect wildlife responses to management lacking these cues to be delayed or muted. In Florida shrub-grassland, burned plots were colonized by birds sooner than the mechanically treated plots, in which shrubs were chopped (Fitzgerald and Tanner 1992); birds were observed in burned plots the next day but not for months in chopped plots. Species richness and abundance remained lower in winter chop plots than in burned and control plots throughout this study. Fitzgerald and Tanner (1992) suggested that this was because burned plots provided more complex structure than mechanically treated plots.

Sharp-tailed grouse densities and responses to management treatments have been measured with numerous methods, but pellet counts are the simplest to execute. Pellet counts along

transects have been shown to be indicative of the relative abundance of sage grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*, Hanser et al. 2011), density of red grouse (*Lagopus lagopus scoticus*, Evans et al. 2007), and habitat use of red grouse (Savory 1978). Pellet counts along transects in plots have been used to compare sage-grouse responses to mechanical and chemical treatments (Dahlgren et al. 2006). Schroeder and Vander Haegen (2014) used pellet counts along circular transects to examine the effects of wind farms on sage-grouse.

OBJECTIVES

1. To compare sharp-tailed grouse use prior to and following fall management within burn, mow, and control treatments.
2. To relate vegetation metrics to differences in sharp-tailed grouse use of burn, mow, and control treatments.

Hypotheses

Sharp-tailed grouse use will increase following burning or mowing, with burned sites showing a greater increase in use than mowed sites, and both treatments having greater use than controls.

Vegetation composition and structure will influence the use of treatment and control sites by sharp-tailed grouse, with increased use in early successional conditions.

METHODS

Study Areas

Our study was focused in the northwestern sharp-tailed grouse region of Minnesota. Treated study sites were mainly on state-managed lands, however 3 sites owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and 3 privately-owned sites were included. In 2015, we conducted pre-treatment surveys at 16 sites planned for management and at 15 control sites. Of these, 10 sites (6 mows and 4 prescribed burns) were treated (Table 1). In 2016, we conducted pre-treatment surveys at 9 sites planned for management and 6 control sites. Of these, 4 sites (1 mow and 3 prescribed burns) were treated (2016 was an unusually wet year which restricted management opportunities). In 2017, we conducted pre-treatment surveys at 13 sites planned for management and 8 control sites. Seven sites were treated (2 mows and 5 prescribed burns). In 2018, we conducted pre-treatment surveys at 16 sites planned for management and 10 control sites, with 7 mows completed.

Data Collection & Experimental Design

Treatment sites varied in size, date of management, vegetative composition, surrounding landscape, and local sharp-tailed grouse density. We attempted to match treatments in each DNR work area with a control site of similar size and successional condition (e.g., crude habitat classification, visual assessment of percent cover shrubs and herbaceous vegetation, and average shrub height) *a priori* as determined by inspection of aerial imagery, conversations with managers, and site visits. Control sites were identified ≤ 6 km from treatment sites when possible (based on dispersal distances of young males in the fall; Gratson 1988). Control sites helped account for changes related to seasonal progression (i.e., changes in habitat use, social behavior, and vegetation) not related to management. Dahlgren et al. (2006) implemented a similar design to account for temporal differences in the application of management treatments for sage grouse. However, we decided that a paired analysis was inappropriate due to the difficulty to closely match treatment and control sites. Thus, beginning in 2017, we selected 1 control for nearby sites treated on the same day. This also provided for a more balanced sample size among the 2 treatments and controls.

We surveyed treatment and control sites as close as possible in time (within 21 days), both before and after treatment (Smith 2002, also see Morrison et al. 2001:118-130). We walked systematically spaced parallel transects with a starting point placed on the site boundary and the transect traversing the treatment, capturing both edge and interior portions. We standardized the sampling rate to 10 m of transect/ac (25 m/ha), with transects at least 150 m apart, based on placement of pellet transects in other studies (Evans et al. 2007, but half as dense as Dahlgren et al. 2006, Hanser et al. 2011). We counted sharp-tailed grouse pellet piles ≤ 0.5 m from the transect, removing all pellets encountered (Evans et al. 2007, Schroeder and Vander Haegen 2014). At each pellet pile, we recorded pellet freshness and vegetation category (i.e., grass, shrub, forb, grass-shrub mix, grass-forb mix, etc.). We also recorded all sharp-tailed grouse observed (heard, flushed, tracks seen) at the site.

We sampled transects 5 times at each site—once before treatment, targeting measurements within 2 weeks of treatment (PRE), and 4 times after treatment; at 1 week (1WK), 1 month (1MO), 1 year (1YR), and 3 years (3YR) after treatment. To date, we have conducted 3YR surveys at 4 sites treated in 2015 and at 2 sites treated in 2016, where additional interim management had not occurred, as well as 2 additional sites treated in 2016 where interim management had occurred.

To adjust naïve occupancy rates for detection differences among treatment groups, vegetation categories, and other sources, we conducted pellet detection assessments. We accomplished this by surveying transects with pellets placed in known locations (but unknown to observers) and estimated detection probabilities for each vegetation and management category. Dahlgren et al. (2006) reported detectability of pellets along transects to be very high and similar in different types of vegetative cover. However, they conducted their study on sage grouse in sagebrush, and sharp-tailed grouse habitats in Minnesota differ considerably in vegetative composition and structure.

We sampled vegetation within treatment and control sites using point-intercept sampling (Levy and Madden 1933, Dahlgren et al. 2006) to determine percent cover and average height of broad vegetation classes (i.e., tree, shrub, forb, and graminoid) before and after treatment. We sampled vegetation along 20 m transects placed perpendicular to the pellet transect, with the number of transects based on the size of the site. We marked the start of each vegetation transect using ground staples with numbered aluminum tags and flagging, and we used GPS coordinates to allow for relocation and re-measurement following treatment. During 2015-2016, we recorded maximum height for each vegetation class every 0.5 m for a total of 40 points per transect. After exploratory analysis of data and considering logistical tradeoffs, we reduced the amount of vegetation data collected in 2017-2019, recording height and class every 1.0 m for a total of 20 points per transect. We used a pole with graduated measurements every dm to determine the highest point at which each vegetation class intercepted (touched) the pole. We also recorded whether the vegetation was dead/dormant, and combined those categories for analysis because it was unclear due to natural plant senescence whether vegetation was dormant or dead in late-fall surveys. Following treatment, we classified cut vegetation as dead/dormant, recorded height, and noted that the vegetation was cut. If no vegetation was present, we recorded the substrate type (e.g., bare ground, rock). For the purpose of this study, we considered moss and lichen a substrate type rather than vegetation.

We calculated vegetation metrics for each study site. We compared the proportion of cover in each class and mean maximum height among treatment types and between sites with and without sharp-tailed grouse use. In our preliminary analysis, we included both live and dead vegetation, using the maximum height of either type at each point. We tested for differences

among survey periods using Tukey's Honest Significant Difference, and tested for differences between sites occupied and unoccupied by sharp-tailed grouse using T-tests. We used a significance level of $P < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We detected sharp-tailed grouse pellets on transects at 6 (21%) of the 28 treatment sites and 5 (23%) of the 22 control sites prior to treatment (Table 2). Following treatment, we detected sharp-tailed grouse pellets in ≥ 1 fall survey (1WK or 1MO) at 13 treatment sites (46%) and 5 control sites (23%). Sharp-tailed grouse observations from transects prior to treatment exhibited similar patterns, with detections at only 1 treatment site (4%) and 1 control site (5%) in initial surveys. In later fall surveys (1WK or 1MO), however, we observed sharp-tailed grouse at 4 treatment sites (14%) and 2 control sites (9%, Table 3). In 1YR surveys, we detected pellets on transects at 7 (25%) of 28 treatment sites and 4 (18%) of 22 control sites, and we observed grouse from transects at 2 treatment sites (7%) and 1 control site (5%).

Our pellet survey results thus far suggest that our methods are capturing sharp-tailed grouse use of treatment and control sites. Naïve occupancy rates (i.e., site use) from data collected thus far are suggestive of increases in sharp-tailed grouse use of sites following management, although estimates of effect sizes are imprecise (Figure 1). Although occupancy and detection are confounded in naïve estimates for the 1WK and 1MO surveys (due to treatment effects on screening cover), 1YR and 3YR surveys should have similar detection rates to PRE surveys due to regrowth of vegetation the next growing season, especially in burn sites. Thus, the PRE vs. 1YR and 3YR comparisons should be reasonably straightforward and informative, whereas results from other time comparisons are more tenuous to interpret from naïve occupancy rates due to large differences in detection (Figure 2). The naïve probability of sharp-tailed grouse site use at treated sites increased by more than 50% in 1YR surveys at mowed and burned sites, but neither of these changes were significant in preliminary analysis due to high variability in site use (Figure 3). We also found the area of the disturbance to be a predictor of the probability of site use in interim analysis (Figure 4).

General field observations of vegetation prior to treatment indicated that mowing might be applied to sites at a later successional stage than prescribed fire. Prior to treatment, mow sites had greater mean proportions of forb and shrub cover and taller shrubs than burn sites, however these differences were not significant (Table 4). The lack of significance could be due to the high variability among sites.

Control sites had significantly lower graminoid height ($P < 0.01$) in 1MO surveys than in PRE surveys, which was likely the result of vegetation senescence (Table 5). One year later, we did not detect differences in vegetation cover or height at control sites compared to PRE surveys (Table 5). At sites that were mowed, graminoid, forb, and shrub cover ($P = 0.01$, $P < 0.01$, $P < 0.01$) and height ($P < 0.01$, $P < 0.01$, $P < 0.01$) were all lower in 1MO surveys, but in 1YR measurements only shrub height remained lower than PRE survey ($P < 0.01$). At sites that were burned, graminoid cover, forb cover, and graminoid height ($P < 0.01$, $P < 0.01$, $P < 0.01$) were lower in 1MO surveys, but in 1YR surveys the only significant difference was that forb cover was greater ($P < 0.01$, Table 5). Vegetation metrics did not differ between sites occupied and unoccupied by sharp-tailed grouse during PRE surveys, however during 1YR surveys, sites occupied by sharp-tailed grouse had lower proportions of shrubs ($P = 0.04$) than unoccupied sites regardless of treatment (Table 6).

This report includes 5 fall surveys for sites managed 2015–2016, however we will conduct the 3YR survey for sites treated during 2017 and 2018 in fall 2020 and 2021. We will not include additional sites in the study. Results presented in this report are preliminary and subject to revision.

Managers throughout sharp-tailed grouse range in Minnesota have expressed a need for information to manage habitat for sharp-tailed grouse more effectively. Given the current population concerns in the east-central region, information on the effectiveness of various management options would be helpful for decision-making with finite resources for management. Managers in the northwestern region are also interested in this information to ensure that their management actions are as effective as possible.

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Table 1. Management activities completed for sharp-tailed grouse habitat in northwestern Minnesota during fall 2015–2018 and associated control sites, in order of treatment date.

Site	Work area	Treatment	Treatment date	Treatment ac (ha)	Control ac (ha)
Roseau 2015 mow	Roseau River	Mow	28 Aug–16 Sep 15	31 (12.5)	28 (11.3)
Skull Lake 2015 burn	Karlstad	Burn	1 Sep 2015	90 (36.4)	70 (28.3)
Halma 2015 mow	Karlstad	Mow	16–23 Sep 2015	41 (16.6)	39 (15.8)
Red Lake 2015 mow	Red Lake	Mow	22 Sep 2015	12 (4.9)	22 (8.9)
Spooner 2015 mow	Baudette	Mow	28 Sep 2015	22 (8.9)	26 (10.5)
Caribou 2015 burn	Karlstad	Burn	28 Sep 2015	664 (268.7)	No control
TL 2015 burn	Thief Lake	Burn	28 Sep 2015	58 (23.5)	31 (12.5)
Red Lake 2015 burn	Red Lake	Burn	19 Oct 2015	152 (61.5)	176 (71.2)
Prosper 2015 mow	Baudette	Mow	19–30 Oct 2015	63 (25.5)	201 (81.3)
TL 2015 mow	Thief Lake	Mow	30 Oct 2015	20 (8.1)	19 (7.7)
TL 2016 burn	Thief Lake	Burn	1 Sep 2016	31 (12.5)	37 (15.0)
Noracre ^a 2016 burn	Roseau	Burn	14 Sep 2016	71 (28.7)	22 (8.9)
Roseau 2016 mow ^b	Roseau	Mow	27 Sep–7 Oct 16	23 (9.3)	29 (11.7)
Espelie 2016 burn	Thief River Falls	Burn	3 Oct 2016	443 (179.3)	460 (186.2)
Halma 2017 mow	Karlstad	Mow	28 Aug–8 Sep 2017	62 (25)	61 (25)
Gates 2017 burn	Red Lake	Burn	8 Sep 2017	388 (157)	320 (129)
K 2017 burn	Roseau	Burn	13 Sep 2017	90 (36)	93 (38)
F 2017 burn	Roseau	Burn	13 Sep 2017	99 (40)	Same as K
Prosper 2017 mow	Baudette	Mow	27 Sep–26 Oct 2017	70 (28)	41 (17)
O 2017 burn	Roseau	Burn	9 Oct 2017	17 (7)	100 (40)
I 2017 burn	Roseau	Burn	9 Oct 2017	48 (19)	Same as O
TL Mow 3	Thief Lake	Mow	21 Sep – 10 Oct 2018	73 (29.5)	No control
Graceton mow	Baudette	Mow	1 – 11 Oct 2018	75 (30.4)	89 (36.0)
HQ brush mow	Roseau	Mow	4 – 5 Oct 2018	5 (2.0)	6 (2.5)
TL Mow 1	Thief Lake	Mow	24 Sep – 16 Oct 2018	53 (21.4)	45 (18.2)
TNC site 10	Karlstad	Mow	19 – 22 Oct 2018	11 (4.5)	Same as site 9
RRWMA brush mow	Roseau	Mow	17 – 25 Oct 2018	9 (3.6)	Same as HQ
TNC site 9	Karlstad	Mow	23 – 27 Oct 2018	45 (18.2)	43 (17.4)

^a The Noracre burn site was burned again in spring 2017 and sprayed with herbicide in spring and summer 2017, before the 1-year post-treatment (1YR) survey.

^bThe Roseau brush mow of 2016 was burned in spring 2018, after the 1YR survey but before the 3YR survey.

Table 2. Sharp-tailed grouse pellet detections at treatment and control sites in northwestern Minnesota during 2015-2019. We conducted surveys before (PRE), 1 week (1WK), 1 month (1MO), 1 year (1YR), and 3 years (3YR) after treatment. The number of pellet detections on transect are indicated numerically, and pellets detected off-transect are indicated with an OT, indicative of site use not captured in sampling. An asterisk indicates that snow impeded detection of pellets, and T indicates that tracks were detected in the snow. Surveys with confirmed sharp-tailed grouse use through any source of sign are highlighted in gray. NS indicates that the 3YR survey has not yet been completed. TRT indicates that a survey was not conducted, or if it was conducted was not comparable, because of additional treatments conducted after the original treatment.

Fecal pellets Site	Treatment					Control				
	PRE	1WK	1MO	1YR	3YR	PRE	1WK	1MO	1YR	3YR
Red Lake 2015 mow	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	0
TL 2015 mow	0	0	0*	0	TRT	0	0	0*	0	TRT
Spooner 2015 mow	0	0	3	0	3	0	0	0	0	1
Roseau 2015 mow	2	1 OT	1	0	TRT	0	0	0	0	0
Halma 2015 mow	0	0	0	1 OT	1	1	1	2	0	0
TL 2015 burn	1 OT	0	1	1 OT	NS	0	0	0	0	TRT
Skull Lake 2015 burn	0	1	0	1	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
Red Lake 2015 burn	0	0	0	0	TRT	0	0	0*	0	NS
Prosper 2015 mow	0	1	0*	2	TRT	1	11	2T*	5 4 OT	TRT
Caribou 2015 burn	1	2	1 OT	0	32 16OT	-	-	-	-	-
TL 2016 burn	0	1	4 7 OT	7 1 OT	0	0	0	0	0	0
Noracre 2016 burn	0	9 3 OT	0	3T* TRT	1 TRT	0	0	0	0	0
Espelie 2016 burn	1	6	18 31 OT	1 3 OT	1 3 OT	1 OT	1 3 OT	4 5 OT	3* 2 OT	2 1 OT
Roseau 2016 mow	1 OT	0	0	0	0 TRT	0	0	0	0	NS
Halma 2017 mow	0	1 OT	1	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
Gates 2017 burn	0	3	0	0	TRT	0	-	-	0	NS
K 2017 burn	1 1 OT	0	7 11 OT	0	NS	-	-	-	-	-
F 2017 burn	4 1 OT	1	5 5 OT	14	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
Prosper 2017 mow	0	3T*	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
O 2017 burn	0	0	0	0	NS	-	-	-	-	-
I 2017 burn	0	0	0	1 OT	NS	3 OT	1 OT	0	6 30+OT	NS
TL mow 3	0	0	0*	0	NS	-	-	-	-	-
Graceton mow	0	0	4T* 1 OT*	0	NS	4	2	3	0	NS
HQ brush mow	0	0*	0	0	NS	0	0*	0	0	NS
TL mow 1	0	0	0*	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
TNC site 10 mow	0	0	2T*	0	NS	3	1 1 OT	0	2 OT	NS
RRWMA brush mow	1	0	1 OT*	0	NS	-	-	-	-	-
TNC site 9 mow	0	0	3T* 1 OT*	1	NS	-	-	-	-	-

Table 3. The number of sharp-tailed grouse observed at treatment and control sites in northwestern Minnesota during 2015-2019. We conducted surveys before (PRE), 1 week (1WK), 1 month (1MO), 1 year (1YR), and 3 years (3YR) after treatment. Sharp-tailed grouse observed while off-transect are indicated with OT, indicative of site use not captured in sampling. Surveys with confirmed sharp-tailed grouse use through observations of any birds at the site are highlighted in gray. NS indicates that the 3YR survey has not yet been completed. TRT indicates that a survey was not conducted, or if it was conducted was not comparable, because of additional management conducted after the original treatment.

Grouse observations Site	Treatment					Control				
	PRE	1WK	1MO	1YR	3YR	PRE	1WK	1MO	1YR	3YR
Red Lake 2015 mow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TL 2015 mow	0	0	0	0	TRT	0	0	0	0	TRT
Spooner 2015 mow	0	0	11	3 OT	0	0	0	0	0	0
Roseau 2015 mow	2 OT	5 OT	2 OT	0	TRT	0	0	0	0	1
Halma 2015 mow	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
TL 2015 burn	4	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	TRT
Skull Lake 2015 burn	0	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
Red Lake 2015 burn	0	0	0	0	TRT	0	0	0	0	NS
Prosper 2015 mow	0	0	0	1	TRT	0	0	0	12-20	TRT
Caribou 2015 burn	0	5	13	2 2 OT	27	-	-	-	-	-
TL 2016 burn	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Noracre 2016 burn	0	0	0	0	1 TRT	0	0	0	0	0
Espelie 2016 burn	0	1	2 OT	0	1 2OT	5 OT	1	7 OT	0	0
Roseau 2016 mow	6 OT	0	0	0	0 TRT	0	0	0	0	NS
Halma 2017 mow	0	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
Gates 2017 burn	0	0	0	0	NS	-0	-	-	0	NS
K 2017 burn	0	0	0	0	NS	-	-	-	-	NS
F 2017 burn	1 OT	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
Prosper 2017 mow	0	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
O 2017 burn	0	0	0	0	NS	-	-	-	-	NS
I 2017 burn	0	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
TL mow 3	0	0	0	0	NS	-	-	-	-	-
Graceton mow	0	0	0	0	NS	1	0	0	0	NS
HQ brush mow	0	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
TL mow 1	0	0	0	0	NS	0	0	0	0	NS
TNC site 10 mow	0	0	0	0	NS	0	1 OT	0	0 ^a	NS
RRWMA brush mow	0	0	0	0	NS	0	-	-	-	-
TNC site 9 mow	0	0	0	0 ^a	NS	0	-	-	-	-

^a 15 sharp-tailed grouse were observed on the road between TNC site 9 and the TNC site 10 control during the survey at the control.

Table 4. Mean pre-treatment vegetation cover and height for 4 vegetation classes at control ($n = 22$), mow ($n = 16$), and burn ($n = 12$) sites sampled for sharp-tailed grouse use in northwestern Minnesota during 2015-2019. We did not observe any significant differences ($P < 0.05$).

	Control	Mow	Burn
Cover (proportion)			
Graminoid	0.94	0.94	0.98
Forb	0.31	0.41	0.22
Shrub	0.36	0.40	0.26
Tree	0.05	0.05	0.05
Height (m)			
Graminoid	0.51	0.51	0.54
Forb	0.31	0.32	0.28
Shrub	1.19	1.30	0.74
Tree	1.44	0.76	0.73

Table 5. Change in mean vegetation cover and height from pre-treatment to 1 month after (1MO, control $n = 21$, mow $n = 16$, and burn $n = 12$) and 1 year after (1YR, control $n = 22$, mow $n = 16$, and burn $n = 12$) at sites sampled for sharp-tailed grouse use in northwestern Minnesota during 2015-2019. Significant differences ($P < 0.05$) between measurements pre- and post-treatment are indicated with an asterisk.

	Control 1MO	Control 1YR	Mow 1MO	Mow 1YR	Burn 1MO	Burn 1YR
Cover (proportion)						
Graminoid	-0.02	< 0.01	-0.22*	-0.04	-0.43*	-0.04
Forb	-0.12	0.01	-0.30*	0.01	-0.18*	0.19*
Shrub	-0.06	0.04	-0.28*	-0.03	-0.10	< -0.01
Tree	-0.02	< -0.01	-0.03	-0.04	-0.02	0.02
Height (m)						
Graminoid	-0.14*	-0.02	-0.39*	-0.07	-0.25*	-0.05
Forb	-0.04	-0.01	-0.22*	-0.05	0.07	-0.05
Shrub	-0.08	0.11	-1.10*	-0.71*	-0.02	-0.04
Tree	-0.33	0.16	-0.58	-0.65	-0.08	0.04

Table 6. Mean vegetation cover and height at sites unoccupied and occupied by sharp-tailed grouse during pre-treatment (unoccupied n = 36, occupied n = 14) and 1 year (unoccupied n = 32, occupied n = 18) surveys in northwestern Minnesota during 2015-2019. Metrics at occupied sites that differed ($P < 0.05$) from unoccupied sites are indicated with an asterisk.

	Unoccupied PRE	Occupied PRE	Unoccupied 1YR	Occupied 1YR
Cover (proportion)				
Graminoid	0.95	0.95	0.94	0.91
Forb	0.35	0.25	0.39	0.34
Shrub	0.37	0.29	0.40	0.27*
Tree	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.04
Height (m)				
Graminoid	0.51	0.55	0.49	0.44
Forb	0.32	0.27	0.29	0.24
Shrub	1.17	0.98	1.02	0.76
Tree	1.00	1.19	0.85	1.04

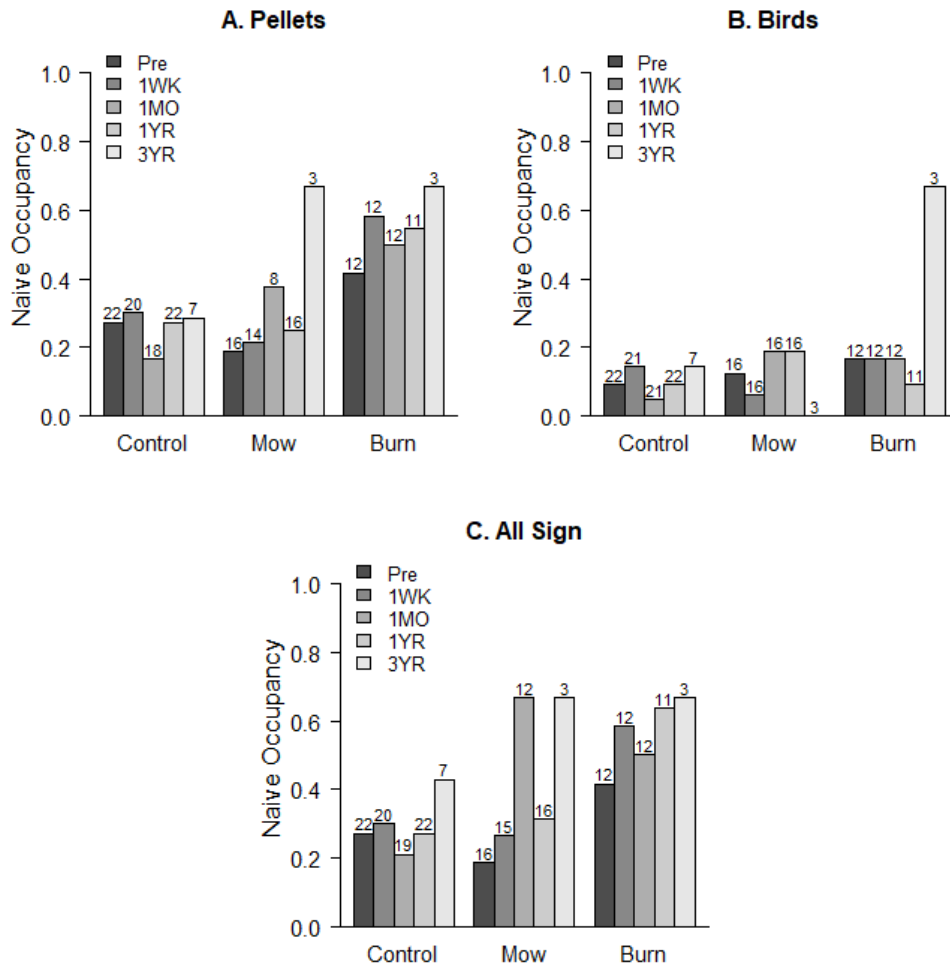


Figure 1. Naïve occupancy for sharp-tailed grouse pellets (A), sharp-tailed grouse observations (B), and all sign (includes off-transect detections, C) during surveys conducted before (PRE), 1 week (1WK), 1 month (1MO), 1 year (1YR), and 3 years (3YR) after treatment at sites sampled during 2015–2019 in northwestern Minnesota to assess the effects of prescribed burning and mowing compared to control sites. Numbers above bars denote sample sizes (number of sites).

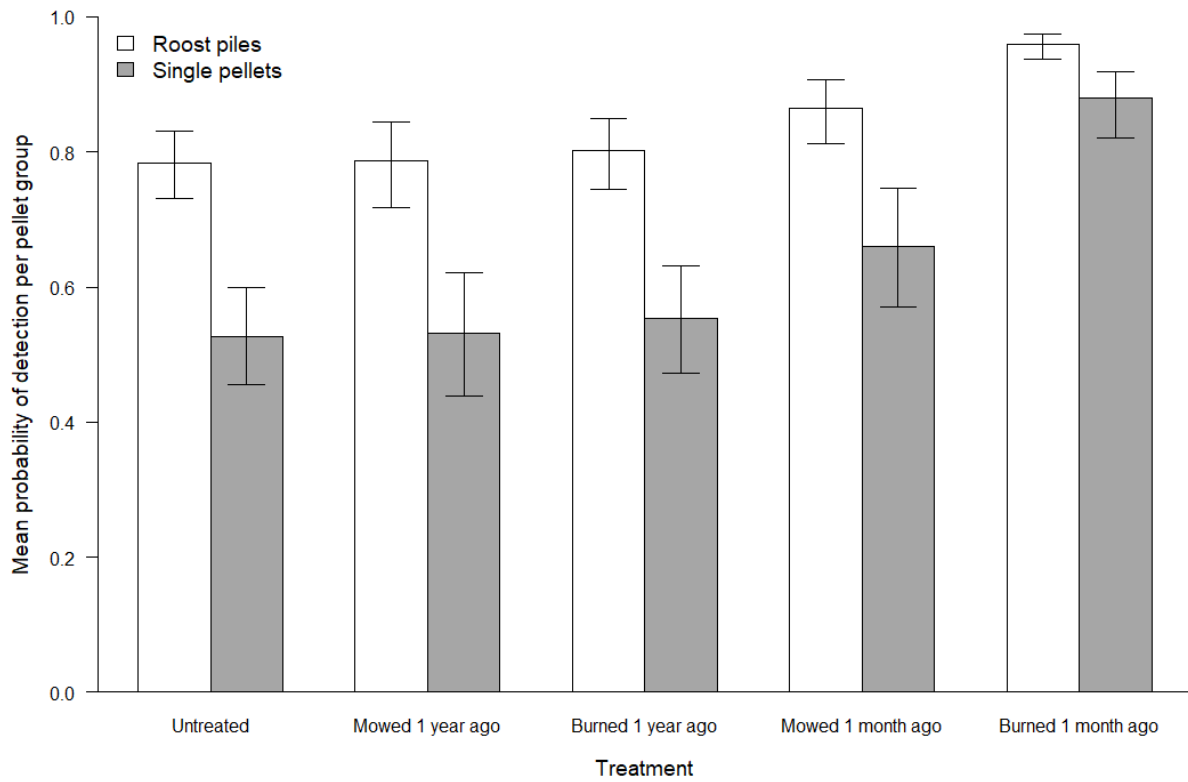


Figure 2. The probability of detecting sharp-tailed grouse fecal pellets (i.e., singles and roost piles), given that they were present at sites burned or mowed 1 month or 1 year prior and at sites not recently treated in northwestern Minnesota during 2015-2019.

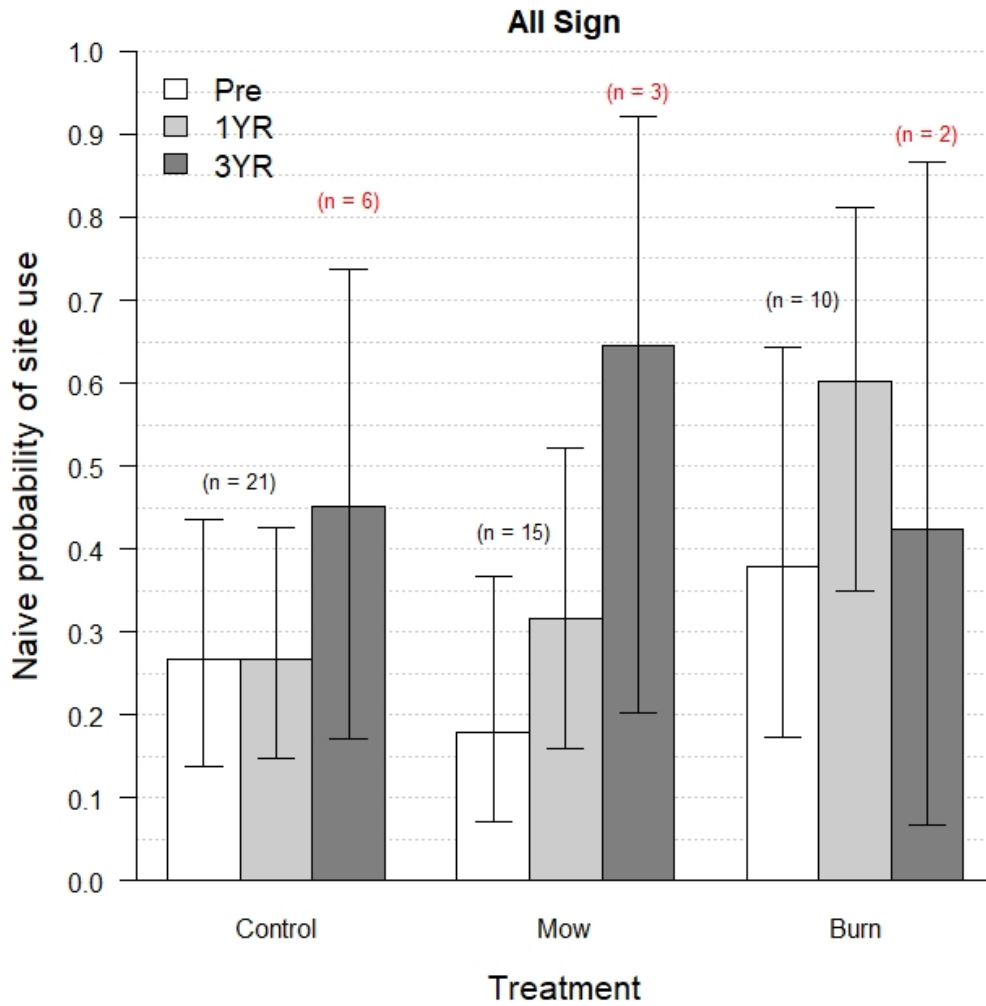


Figure 3. Mean naïve occupancy index of sharp-tailed grouse before, 1 year (1YR) and 3 years (3YR) after management (with 85% confidence intervals) at sites in northwestern Minnesota sampled during 2015–2019 based on a mixed-effect logistic regression model. We have not yet completed 3YR surveys at sites treated in 2017 and 2018.

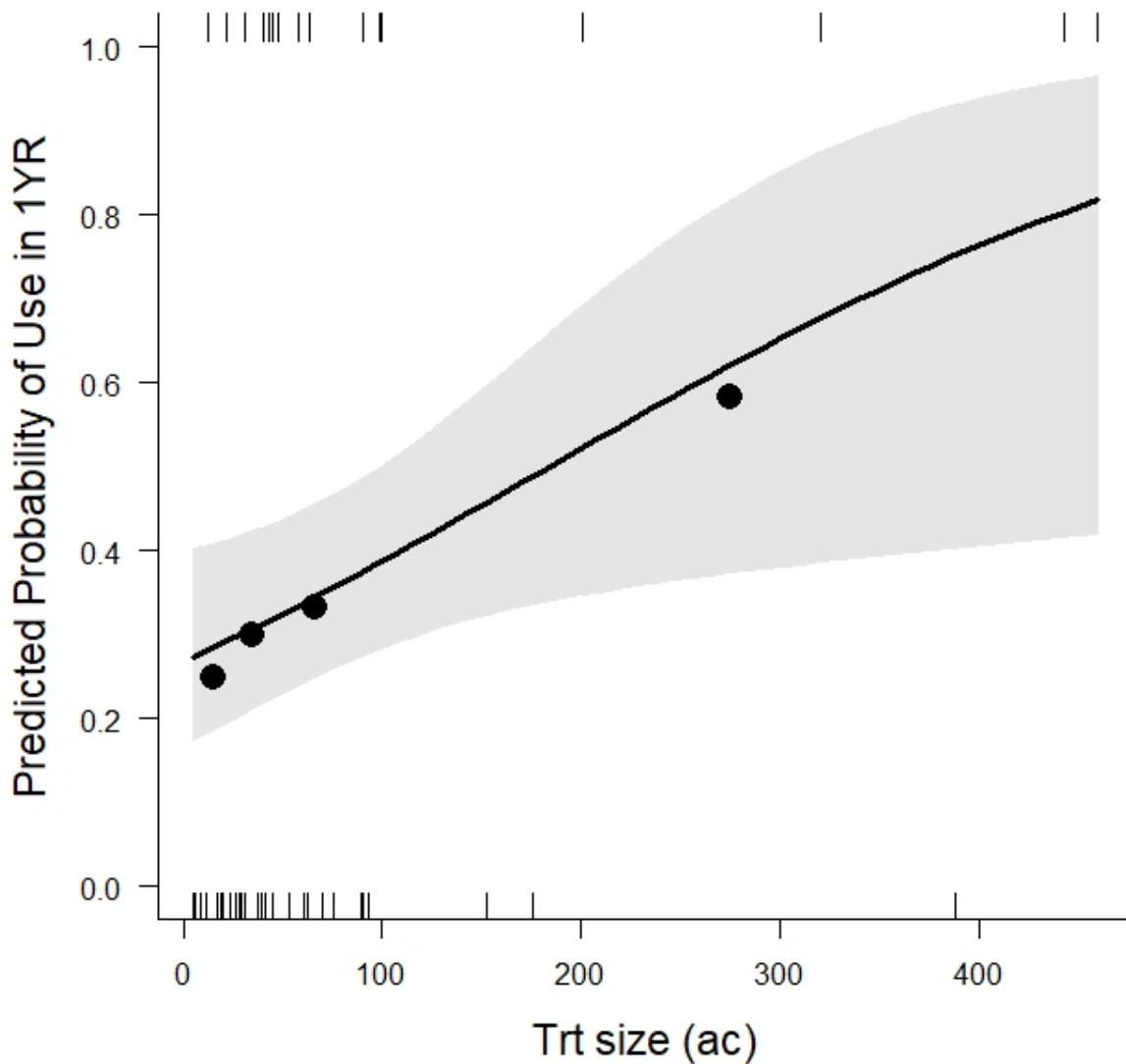


Figure 4. The relationship between the area disturbed (Trt size in acres) and the probability of sharp-tailed grouse use in northwestern Minnesota during 2015-2019. The black line is the predicted probability of use from a logistic model with 1 predictor (Trt size) when we condition on 1YR (no repeated measures) and assume no treatment effect. The gray polygon is the 85% confidence interval. Black circles are the proportion of sites, pooled across treatments by size quartiles, with evidence of site use (all sign) in 1YR. The upper rug describes the distribution of treatment sizes for sites with evidence of sharp-tailed grouse use, whereas the lower rug is the distribution of treatment sizes for sites where we failed to find evidence of site use.