



This woodland bird is the most popular of Minnesota's upland game birds. Noted for its muffled drumming sounds during the spring mating season, the ruffed grouse is present in Minnesota forests from Iowa to Manitoba.

Ruffed grouse populations rise and fall at intervals of about 10 years. Many other species of wildlife also cycle at 10-year intervals. The causes of these cycles are still unknown.

In Minnesota, the annual hunter harvest varies from 250,000 to more than one million ruffed grouse. Hunting does not affect ruffed grouse populations either at the top or bottom of their population cycles.

Minnesota is a premiere state for ruffed grouse hunting. The annual hunter harvest in Minnesota is unsurpassed by any other state. Ruffed grouse populations and habitat are strong in Minnesota, and the future of grouse in the state is bright.

Private land management for ruffed grouse

Your land, a haven for grouse!

Photo by Ben Westin



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Ruffed grouse habitat

Ruffed grouse are associated with deciduous and mixed deciduous-coniferous forests in northern and central Minnesota. Young to middle-aged aspen forests provide the best habitat. Alder lowlands and patches of gray dogwood are especially attractive to ruffed grouse in summer and fall. During winter, ruffed grouse spend nearly all of their time in snow burrows to stay warm and avoid predators. Amazingly, a ruffed grouse lives most of its life within just a few acres. Ruffed grouse populations reach their highest densities in aspen forests.

Aspen, aspen, and more ASPEN! And then maybe some poplar trees just to mix it up! ;)

The best ruffed grouse habitat provides a combination of food and cover (young and old aspen or poplar stands) within a small area.

For protection from predators, grouse favor medium to high densities of slender woody stems of aspen. Overstory conifers aid in predator avoidance.

Aspen trees provide the most important year-around sources of food for ruffed grouse. Although grouse will settle for any poplar bud, it is the male flower buds of trembling aspen trees that they prefer, due to the buds' high amounts of proteins, fats, and minerals.





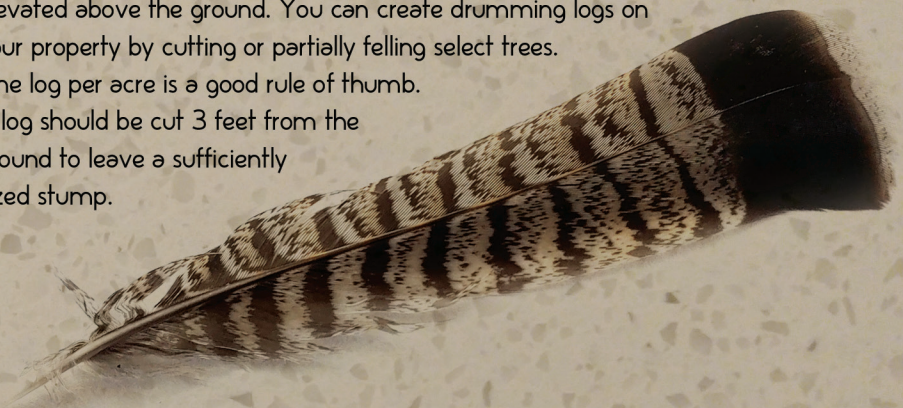
Drumming like a rock star!

Creating drumming logs for breeding grouse.

A drumming log is considered an important component of grouse breeding habitat. The male grouse drums with its wings on a fallen log to advertise his presence to females and competitors. Most grouse drumming activity peaks in April to early May and usually begins each day before daylight.



The best drumming logs are typically greater than 8 inches in diameter and more than 70 inches in length. Grouse prefer fallen logs that are slightly elevated above the ground. You can create drumming logs on your property by cutting or partially felling select trees. One log per acre is a good rule of thumb. A log should be cut 3 feet from the ground to leave a sufficiently sized stump.



Forming a plan . . .

Forest stewardship plans

A management plan can help you get the most out of your property and maximize the potential benefits for ruffed grouse. Your local SWCD can help you develop a property management plan.

A Forest Stewardship Plan written by a certified plan writer, such as your local SWCD, the DNR or a private forest planner, qualifies landowners to apply for local or state tax-relief and incentive programs. To qualify for one of these programs, a landowner must generally have at least 20 qualifying acres of land.

The DNR's Forest Stewardship Program helps landowners finalize their own goals and prepare a professional, voluntary management plan for their woodland. A forest management plan (also known as a Woodland Stewardship Plan when written by a certified writer), is a non-binding, written document that lists your land's potential, what you want to accomplish, and specific actions you can take to accomplish those goals within a given time-frame.

Want to establish the perfect habitat for ruffed grouse? Contact us to get started on a Forest Stewardship Plan

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