



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

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Friends of the Little Pend Oreille Wildlife Refuge present

CANADA LYNX RECOVERY IN WASHINGTON STATE AND *Other Footnotes*

by *Scott Fisher*

Mt. Fisher is an award-winning DNR biologist monitoring existing lynx and tracking population changes in NE Washington.

Friday, April 1, 2011, 7 p.m.



Photo by Scott Fisher

Colville Community College

985 S. Elm, Colville
Doors open for at 6:30 for refreshments.

Scott Fisher has been conducting wildlife research in Washington since 1990. He began his career working for the US Forest Service on northern spotted owl issues on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. He was hired by the Washington Department of Natural Resources as the Region Fish and Wildlife Biologist in Northwest Region in

1998, where his work focused on northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet conservation on state lands. In 2003, he transferred to Northeast Region, based in Colville, where he changed his focus from feathers to fur, working primarily on Canada lynx, grizzly bears, and, now, wolves. He is a lead investigator on the current lynx habitat research project in Okanogan County, a member of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone Technical Team, and he recently discovered the second breeding pair of gray wolves in northeastern Washington. He holds a Bachelor's degree from Humboldt State University and in his free time can usually be found chasing upland game birds with his yellow Labrador or being humbled by elk with his bow.



Photo by Scott Fisher

From the President

In case you missed it...
January 29th a group of loyal Friends and Board members met at Jim and JoAnn Groth's home in the woods for our annual Retreat and Fun in the Snow day. We spent the morning planning our activities for the upcoming season. Here is a brief rundown of upcoming events. I encourage you to read your emails and newsletters to stay up-to-date with opportunities.

- March 18 & 19—Friends of the LPONWR display table at the Colville Home Show
- April 1—Speaker Biologist Scott Fisher at the Colville Community College Theater, 7pm
- Early May—Clean-up day for the McMeet Trail
- May 14—Mushroom Foray on the Refuge with the Groth's
- May and June—Completion of the McMeet Photo blind access and signage
- Early June—Environmental Education Days for Colville 2nd and 5th graders
- June—Beaver Pond Overlook Trail construction project with the Washington Trail Association
- June—Touch-up work on the Mill Butte Trail and installation of signage
- Late July—Friends group hike
- Proposed for Summer 2011—Historic Barn restoration project on the Refuge with the Regional Historical engineer
- Later September—Fly Fishing Workshop at McDowell Lake

We also will be ordering two weatherproof benches and one picnic table to be installed along the McMeet Trail in early summer.

With many of these events and projects there is a great need for volunteers. Often it falls to the members of the Friend's Board to fill the need. I encourage you to step forward, make a call and be a part of the fun.

Speaking of fun, following our planning session we partook of a wonderful potluck lunch and then headed outside with snowshoes and skis. Jim Groth gave us a delightful tour of the wintery acreage out back of their property in the North Basin. You are all invited next year to our annual Board and Membership Retreat.

Elaine Clough, President

Refuge Manager's Meanderings

Winter has evolved into snirt season. What's "snirt"? It's that combination of snow and dirt that accumulates along the roadsides late in winter, mak-

ing us all yearn for spring. Although not pretty, I try to put a positive spin on snirt and view it as a harbinger of springtide.

Personnel changes are the big news on the Refuge. We're finally closing in on filling the biologist position. With luck we'll make a selection in February and have someone learning that program by late spring. Karl Mallory, the man who's kept the Refuge roads graded, the buildings painted, the equipment running and the outhouses pumped will be retiring at the end of February. We'll soon be looking for someone to assume those duties. Joe Goldsmith from the fire staff will also be hanging up his Pulaski at the end of May. Joe's looking forward to his first summer vacation in twenty eight years. Karl and Joe's expertise, comradeship and dedication to the Refuge will be sorely missed both by their co-workers and Refuge users.

We're privileged to add a new law enforcement officer to the Inland Northwest Refuge Complex Team. Tim Cusack comes to us from Arizona by way of Florida and other places, arriving in time to help with last fall's hunting seasons. Tim's beat includes Turnbull and Kootenai National Wildlife Refuges as well as the LPO. In case you're wondering, Kelly Knutson still works out of the LPO headquarters, but his responsibility extends throughout the Columbia Basin as far east as the Tri-cities. Kelly still spends some time patrolling on the LPO, so we feel fortunate to have the support of two officers.

This is the time of the year when I try to develop a work plan for the upcoming year. Like most plans it's subject to changes I can't foresee. But now is a good time to discuss some of the things we'd like to accomplish this field season. We should be winding down on our Buffalo Bells timber sale along Buffalo Wilson Road. This project has had a longer life than we originally planned so finishing it up will be gratifying. Our next habitat improvement project via timber harvest will be in the Black-tail Mountain area along Cedar Creek Road. Like all our harvesting projects the objective is forest stand and associated wildlife habitat improvement, with the timber produced a byproduct that makes the project affordable. Help from the Friends group figures prominently in a couple of upcoming projects. Constructing the access ramp to the new photo blind will be a finishing touch on a long but

worthwhile project at McDowell Lake. A new project, a short walking trail to an overlook above the beaver ponds along Rookery road, will be designed with input from the Friends and built with the help of the Washington Trails Association. And finally, I'm really excited about the plans to stabilize and partially renovate the Sampson log barn alongside Bear Creek Road near headquarters. Originally built in about 1900, the barn has been altered many times over the years for various purposes. Our goals are to stabilize the foundation to prevent further subsidence, exclude causal entry for public safety, while maintaining as much of the barn's "character" as possible. Our regional archaeologist/historian and the regional restoration carpenter will be supervising a volunteer workforce rebuilding the rock foundation and replacing missing logs with new logs harvested from the Refuge. This barn has witnessed over a century of history; it will be a pleasure helping preserve it for another 100 years. Lastly, by mid-summer the contractors will finish removing the remainder of the approximately 22 miles of old barbwire fence they started on last fall. While that's certainly a significant amount of fence, it's not all we have to remove. About 12,000 feet of old fence remains that we couldn't afford to have the contractor take out. I'm hoping some Boy Scouts or other volunteers will tackle those last few miles and complete a task that seemed almost insurmountable just a few years ago!

You can see we have a busy summer ahead with many new staff members learning their way around the Refuge. I'm anxious for spring so we can begin accomplishing our planned projects. And aren't we all looking forward to saying goodbye and good riddance to snirt?!

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Winter Wildlife 2010/11

I have enjoyed watching the Steller's jays at the HQ feeder. I don't recall them hanging around like they have been this winter; usually four jays in the feeder or on the ground. One day a jay was on the feeder with a Northern flicker and they attracted the attention of a Black-billed magpie. When the magpie swooped in the jay dropped to ground where flicker was- that didn't faze it at all. A second magpie came in but nothing interested it and both left. The jays keep flicking sunflower seeds on the ground

then feeding on them. I have not seen the deer come to feed on the seeds that are on the ground. In other years the deer would be out there during the day eating the seeds under each feeder.

In mid-January I saw three immature eagles soaring, quickly getting out of binocular range. It frustrated me that I could not get a positive id on them. All I saw was white on the undersides of the wings and tail on two of them-so I had to do some research. I learned juvenile Golden eagles have a solid white band at the base of the tail and white patches at the base of the primary feathers on the wings. Juvenile Bald eagles have a more mottled white appearance on the belly and underwings and the underside of the tail is mostly white. The quickest key to id a juvenile eagle is the wing pit - on Golden's it is dark, on Bald's it is white.

I did see an adult Golden eagle fly past HQ the end of December and Bald eagles are again perched in the cottonwood tree behind HQ. Dan saw a juvenile eagle feeding on a deer carcass at Cottonwood Campground.

One bird a number of the staff has seen this winter is Northern pygmy-owl. Dan saw a pygmy-owl perched on a fence post by Chester Field (the field just after the Fire Cache/Shop complex). It flew down and caught a mouse then flew up into a tree where he was able to observe it. Another time while walking to the Cache, Dan and Joe saw a pygmy-owl with a vole in its talons. This bird also flew up into a tree then out of sight. I was returning from a lunch walk to the bridge by Cottonwood Campground; the wind was strong and cold in my face when I saw a bird perched on the top of a mullein stalk. When I put my binoculars to it I discovered it was this owl. This was right along the bend of Bear Creek Road just past the HQ gate. Maybe a week later I saw a pygmy-owl perched at the very top of one of the popular trees along the south side of HQ. This was late afternoon as I was leaving for the day. This species of owl is unusual because of its diurnal behavior- it is active during the day.

Northern shrike has been seen twice around HQ. We also had 3 California quail hanging around the building and feeders. Lately I've only seen two. The feeders have not been very active. An Evening grosbeak flock was here twice and one day some

Red crossbills - otherwise no other finches. Northern flicker, Downy woodpecker, Black-capped chickadee and Red-winged blackbird are the other feeder regulars.

On January 18 I was surprised to see a living woolly bear caterpillar on the back step of HQ. Has anyone else seen any woolly bears this winter?

Despite the cold temperatures and continued snow, day length is increasing. Local kids will be finding buttercups in bloom sooner than I ever believe possible. I recently came across an interesting website seeking citizen input where you register to report the date of the first leaf, flower and fruit of selected trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses. This operates much like the Great Backyard Bird Count many of us participated in on Presidents' Day weekend. So if you are interested in botany, go to this web site for information: <http://www.neoninc.org/budburst/> and help them out.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

Three events to note

1. Home and Garden Show booth-- Come see the Friends at the Colville Home and Garden Show, March 18th and 19th, Community Ag Center, Colville, Washington.
2. Mushroom foray--Mycologist Jim Groth will again lead a one-day mushroom foray on Saturday, May 14 on the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge. Emphasis will be on collecting morels for the table, but stress will also be put on identification and ecology of all fleshy fungi encountered. Meet at the Refuge headquarters at 9:30. Follow the brown signs as you head east out of Colville on Highway 20. Bring a bag lunch, water, collecting bag (no plastic) or basket, rain gear, and wear long pants. Also bring binoculars if you wish—birds and plants will be included for those interested. We should be finished by 3:30 PM. Please call Dr. Groth (509-684-1379) if you intend to participate—enrollment is limited.
3. Environmental Education event--As we have been doing for several years, the Friends will conduct an end-of-school outing at the McMeet Trail for all 2nd and 5th grade students of the Colville Schools. This event occurs over four week days in

early June. We can always use more participation by Friends. With the guided nature trail in place, being a trail guide has never been easier. If interested, e-mail or call Jim Groth (see item 2 above or editor's e-mail).

An Alternative Perspective on Forest "Problems"

This editorial was written by former Refuge Manager Steve Fowler. One would have to look long and hard to find an objective Forest Ecologist who would disagree with Steve. Part two will appear next issue.

Each of us has a developed viewpoints and ideas about many things that seem mundane, commonplace and, dare I say, normal. Our beliefs come from our own learning and experiences from a wide array of sources. When it comes to the natural world and the natural processes that shape it, we often see these processes as cataclysmic events because of the spectacular results and human hardships that often ensue. Certainly, this is a normal and natural response. At the same time many of us recognize that natural processes by their very nature are fulfilling an essential role in the way nature takes care of itself. Examine wildfire.

It is safe to say that fire existed in a natural state for millennia before mankind ever existed and took note of it as something to be feared. Even today, the destructive power of fire has always left an indelible mark on anyone who has witnessed it or been touched by it. As a result, the dread of fire has become the way we view fire in our everyday existence. Yet fire as a tool has been known and used by humans for centuries. This fact is not surprising if one has ever witnessed flocks of snow geese landing on blackened ground behind a flaming front on coastal barrier islands, or how quickly grass grows in the spring on soils that were blackened the previous fall. Still the fires that stimulated these actions are contributing far more, albeit less dramatic, benefits to the ecosystem.

Forests are dynamic resources and in a constant state of flux. We rarely acknowledge it because it is a relatively slow and unremarkable process compared to the swift and fearful force of fire. Depending upon the specific forest type, forests generally produce tons of litter (read *fuel*) each year. This incredible accumulation is part of the way a forest recycles nutrients and fire plays a huge role in that

process. More importantly, and paradoxically for the purpose of this rant, wildfire, through the consumption of these fuels, reduces the danger of wildfire! That is the untold story of fire.

The point being that outside of the classroom and scientific community, we have been taught to think of fire as destructive while giving little thought or ink to its beneficial effects. Obviously, when we are subjected on a regular and recurring basis to the terrible destructiveness of fire, via television, radio, newspapers and virtually all forms of media, it is difficult for most people to view it in any other way. After all, no less a *personage* than *Smokey the Bear* himself repeatedly tells us that “Only you can prevent wildfires”. We have heard that message for something on the order of 60 years, but the truth is **no one can prevent wildfires**. What we can do is learn to prevent human caused wildfires and understand the natural role of fire. Without boring you with the long history of wildfire in America and how it was viewed during the European settlement and particularly the early 20th century, let me simply note that aggressive fire prevention and firefighting is necessary and essential in our society. Lives and property must be protected. At the same time, we must accept natural and human use of fire in wild lands. Without a proper balance between fire prevention and fire use, we will simply continue *to throw the baby out with the bath water* and misrepresent wildfire. Of course much of this continued misunderstanding cannot be prevented; ignorance runs rampant and *scientific* ignorance reigns supreme in the popular media.

We became extremely good at arresting the process of fire. But nature is relentless (will we ever learn?) and fuels continued to build up and natural ignitions continue. In today’s world, because we became so good at stopping fire, we have inadvertently achieved a nadir of the *mankind verses nature* conflict. We have reached a point where, in many parts of the world, and not just in North America, the ability of wildfire to overcome our best firefighting efforts has been reached. Technology and skill has proven no match for the forest fuels and wildfires they support today. Second and third growth forests are jam packed with stems, young trees have little resistance to fire and fuels have accumulated for a century without any periodic removal natural or otherwise. Millions of dollars are spent in battling wildfires each year when the funds would be better

spent in applying methods annually to reduce fuels in an effort to return the natural process of fire in maintaining healthy forests. Even that terminology is subject to interpretation. What constitutes a healthy forest is truly in the eye of the beholder and beholders come in all flavors from profiteer to preservationist. Many believe that the “intensive” style of forest management as practiced in Europe, and parts of the U.S. (pine plantations of the Southeast), are the ideal as opposed to the “extensive” style of forest management as applied to most of the managed forests of the world including the U.S. The fact is that if you are in the business of restoring natural processes, as is the USFWS, to many of the lands it is charged with managing, the answer lies somewhere between the two extremes.

Fortunately, modern public land managers have accepted the fact that fire is an essential tool of management if it was ever a component of the natural system being managed. A century of fire prevention is a lot to overcome but at least we have begun. Perhaps the next century of management will see us at a point where less money is spent on firefighting each year and more funds are spent in fire use to the point where a reasonable balance is achieved. *Photographers Wanted!*

The more time one spends out at our Refuge, the more one becomes aware of the variety of opportunities for taking wonderful photos of this unique place in our corner of northeastern Washington. Ours isn’t a single season refuge. It changes from day-to-day, week-to-week, and season-to-season. There are hidden corners of our Refuge to explore with one’s camera. There are photo-ops just waiting for visitors on any of their trips to the LPO.

The 2010 Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last August 16th and will extend until next (2011) August 15th. We are looking for pictures of the flora and fauna, of panoramas, and of people using the Refuge. We are also looking for photos from students.

Information and entry forms are available from me at janderson@ultraplix.com. Next time you visit the Refuge, don’t forget your camera!
Joel Anderson, Board Member

