



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Winter 2011

[http:// www.refugefriends.com](http://www.refugefriends.com)

Number 39

### From the President

I would like to thank Elaine Clough and Bill Dowd for their years of service on the Board of the Friends. A special thanks goes to Elaine, the current Board members and the Refuge Staff for making my transition to President as smooth as possible. I will do my best to keep up the good work of past Presidents.

Now that winter has arrived I thought I would catch everyone up on the progress of some of our trail projects. Working on the trails has been one of my passions at the refuge and lead to me becoming involved as a member. I have Rick Moore and Joel Anderson to thanks for that.

This year on the McMEET trail we have installed two benches along the trail and one new picnic table at McDowell Lake. We still have some work left on the observation blind and the trail leading to it. Also, because the Refuge staff had to do some necessary work on the dam, we need to do a little trail reconstruction. It is my hope that we will be able to finish the work in the spring and early summer. Keep an eye out in our next newsletter for spring work party dates, and come join the fun.

We also have another short trail in the planning stages. The trail head will be located on the Rookery Road and lead to an overlook of the beaver ponds. We will be working with the Refuge staff and the Washington Trails Associations to complete the planning phase. If things go as planned we will begin construction next year.

The last trail project I would like to mention is the Mill Butte trail. The trail is complete and we are working with Jerry and the Refuge staff to complete the trailhead sign.

Lastly it is the time of year to renew your membership or become a member for the first time. If you have not received your renewal letter you will shortly. The Board thanks you for your continued support.

Thanks and come out and enjoy the winter solitude at the Refuge.

**Dan Price, President**

### Refuge Manager's Meanderings

Like most of you, I'm wondering where the summer went?! Fall is already behind us and we've received our first snow fall at HQ today. I enjoyed the cooler weather, hunting seasons and fall colors of my favorite time of year on the refuge. But winter has its pleasures also, and I look forward to those crackly crisp sunny winter days.

We said goodbye to our Youth Conservation Corps crew in August. Like most crews they spent a good bit of time cleaning campgrounds and making the refuge look spiffy. This was a summer of fences, with both removal and construction going on depending on where you looked. The YCC crew removed and rebuilt the dodgy old fence in front of the Christianson Field and replaced it with a tight, arrow straight run of two strand smooth wire that should help keep vehicles from driving around that gate while posing a minimal threat to wildlife crossing. They also worked with our refuge fire crew as they rebuilt a few thousand feet of fence along our western boundary that was damaged by last year's Slide Creek fire. We've also completed the contract work to remove the final 22,000 feet of interior fence remaining from last year's work. There's nothing quite as beautiful as an old fence that's no longer there!

In July I had the opportunity, along with about 1200 other refuge managers, project leaders and assorted agency folks,

to attend the Refuge Visioning Conference in Madison, Wisconsin. The week-long conference was an opportunity for the front line troops to meet with the regional and Washington office mucky mucks to review and comment on the vision document developed to guide the National Wildlife Refuge System for the next decade. Issues like global warming, increasing population and changing demographics, and depressed economies all influence the future direction of refuge management. While there I visited Aldo Leopold's "shack" and farm near Baraboo, Wisconsin. This was the inspiration for his thoughts so eloquently presented in the book "A Sand County Almanac". Like every other wildlife biologist, I was profoundly influenced by Leopold's essays and it was a pilgrimage-like experience to visit his farm and the famous shack, to lean against the pine trees he planted and see the stump of the tree he described cutting down with a cross-cut saw in one of my favorite essays, "The Good Oak".

Last summer the dams on McDowell Lake and Potter's Pond were inspected for structural integrity and function. This was the first comprehensive inspection of these dams, built in 1972 and 1959 respectively, since new standards for dam maintenance and condition were developed. Both dams were rated poor in overall safety. The primary discrepancy noted was the abundance of woody vegetation growing on the dams and in the emergency spillways. These shrubs and trees, while esthetically pleasing, are a serious threat to the integrity of earthen dams. The roots penetrate the dirt core of the dam, and when the trees and shrubs die the rotting roots leave tunnels for water to infiltrate and reduce the strength of the dam. Also, large trees on the dam can be wind thrown, extracting their large root masses and weakening the dam. The solution is to remove all the shrubs and trees growing on the dam, dig out all the roots greater than one inch diameter and back fill the hole with suitable, compacted soil. Obviously, this drastically changes the look of the dam, much to many visitors' chagrin. We've completed work on the dams and native grass seed was sown on the disturbed areas before snowfall. We've received numerous negative comments about this project since we've begun clearing the dams. I certainly understand peoples' distress and consternation over why we would "destroy" the beautiful trees growing on the dams. Please keep in mind the primary purpose of those dams is to hold back the water to provide aquatic habitat for fish, waterfowl and other wildlife and plants. Losing those dams through neglect would be a far greater loss than the removal of the trees and shrubs.

We're gaining traction on the auto tour and interpretive sign project that's been simmering for over ten years. An interpretive sign design contractor is developing proposed displays for several sites along the auto tour route including the log barn, "Pines" stand, Rookery Road beaver ponds and

McDowell Lake overlook. A landscape architect has also been contracted to develop site plans for the Mill Butte Trail kiosk and other locations. Actual installation of these improvements depends on future budgets, of course. To make the money stretch, we'll probably be doing much of the hole diggin' and nail poundin' ourselves. I expect we may be calling on the Friends to help!

I want to close by once again thanking the Friends of the LPO NWR for the great staff appreciation BBQ! The staff enjoyed the food and camaraderie, and they all appreciate the support of the Friends group. I especially want to thank Elaine Clough for her hard work and dedication while serving as president. It's a tough job akin to herding cats, and she did it with efficiency and good humor. She was another in the succession of great Friends Group presidents. I am confident Dan Price will build on their work and take the group to new heights. Thank you to all!

**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

### **Refuge Biologist's Report**

As I write this, in about a week I will have been on the refuge for six months. It has been a real pleasure working with the refuge staff and various members of the Friends of LPO. As we once again move through the changing of the seasons I look forward to the peacefulness of winter. The cottonwoods and willows along the river are now devoid of leaves. By contrast the Western Larch (sometimes called tamarack) are just now beginning to rain down golden needles on fresh fallen snow. The view from my office is beautiful with the golden larch intermingled with the various shades of green in the pines and firs now covered in white from last night's snowfall. As I look across the snow to the river behind the office it is nice to see tracks left by the wild passers-by early this morning.

The critters are quickly moving into winter mode. Ground squirrels and chipmunks as well as all our amphibians and reptiles have gone to sleep for their winter hibernation. Bears should be making final preparations locating their places to sleep and trying to pack on those last few pounds of fat. Deer and elk are moving to winter ranges. Many of the songbirds have headed south for the winter. So we are down to the year round residents with wintering species starting to trickle in. A few Northern Shrikes have been sighted in the area around the headquarters. Even the resident birds are bunching into their winter flocks and areas like the Mill Butte Trail are seeing mixed flocks of chickadees, nuthatches, kinglets, creepers and others. MacDowell and Bayley Lakes have good numbers of waterfowl lately as

flocks with more than 100 birds can be seen. These too will soon head for warmer waters as the ice continues to expand.

There have been some interesting observations during this transition period between seasons. The Slide Creek Burn continues to be a hot spot for several species of woodpeckers and has been a highlight for many visiting birders from around the Pacific Northwest and beyond. Several late Ospreys have been seen throughout Washington and Idaho this fall including a bird over the LPO River near the barn. I believe it is our first November record for Osprey. While we are on the subject of birds of prey, the cottonwood behind headquarters has been a regular perch for several raptors including Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagles, and a Merlin spent more than two hours there yesterday. I also had a chance to rescue an injured Great Horned Owl from a ranch next to the refuge. The bird is undergoing treatment by one of the vets in Colville. I certainly hope it can be released back into the wild soon.

The zone inventory and monitoring biologist placed a bat detector at two abandoned mine shafts on the refuge in October. There were some technical issues with the datalogger but then that is why we do field tests prior to trying long term deployments. We did find California Bats using one of the shafts. The time of year is right and the shaft has good structure. It could be a hibernation site. We know so little about bats on the refuge it is good to start getting some information on this much maligned but very interesting group of animals.

White-tailed deer season is in full swing and we are continuing to collect tissue and teeth samples for analysis. Deer add layers of enamel to their teeth every year so they can be aged by looking at cross section just like tree rings. These collected teeth can give us a look at the age structure in the local deer population. The hunters are also providing us with data on forest grouse through the wing collection barrels. As these are identified to species and age we get a look at the population structures in these popular birds.

Finally the winter bird count is scheduled for Thursday January 5, 2012. This is a fun day for all involved and provides us with a snapshot of the bird use on the refuge in winter. I look forward to seeing as many of you as can make it out for on count day.

*Editor's note: Mike is beginning a new educational contribution that will feature a single resident species of the refuge each quarterly issue of the Pileated Post.*

## **Critter of the Season**

With coming of winter some animals head south while others hibernate. Some stay active and even change color to reflect the changing of the seasons. One of the best known of this last group is the snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*). The snowshoe hare sometimes referred to as the varying hare because of this habit of varying its color with the seasons. Their summer brown coat will turn white in winter. The feet however remain white year round which gives them a distinctive appearance even in summer. Snowshoe hare along the Pacific coast, where there is little or no snow, stay brown throughout the year but still have the white "socks". Their name comes from the fact they have fur on the pads of their feet giving them added traction while running over the snow. Of the several rabbit species in the US snowshoes are the most associated with coniferous forest. They are found throughout the conifer regions of Canada and the northern US. They are the most common rabbit (defined here to include hares, which are distinct from true rabbits) in the Selkirk Mountains; in spite of this they are rarely seen due to their nocturnal habits. Once we get snow on the ground their presence is revealed by the abundance of tracks in fresh snow. While they prefer grasses and forbs during the spring and summer months, they will eat a variety of plant material including buds and even twigs. They are one of the few rabbit species that is able to eat and digest conifer needles which are highly acidic. While they may be taken by many types of predators they are the primary food source for lynx. This is not so bad when you consider a single female can have 25 young in a single year when conditions are good. That is a lot of rabbits. So the next time you visit the refuge in winter keep your eyes open for the tracks of this common but "invisible" denizen of the forest.

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

## **Fall Wildlife 2011**

Our fall weather certainly turned quickly to winter weather. Hopefully it will bring in some rare feathered northern visitors. Keep your eyes open with that possibility in mind; there have been a number of reports of snowy owls seen in Washington and Idaho already.

Mammal sightings have been down in numbers. Mid-August had reports of bull moose and a cow with calves on Blacktail Mountain Road. I had two reports of black bear cubs one on Rookery Road and the other at River Camp.

The best mammal sighting was a bobcat on Bear Creek Road just above Headquarters (HQ). This was early afternoon in early November. Visitors said they saw the bobcat cross the road in front of them and head uphill. Since they had some good camera equipment, they were hoping to get

some photos of it. We didn't hear any more from them so assume the cat did not return to fulfill their wishes.

The second week of November, on a rare day with bright blue sky, I saw 2 adult bald eagles circling just east of Headquarters. I went for a walk on part of the Mill Butte Trail and when I returned to HQ, I saw one adult bald eagle circling over Chester Field (the field next to the Fire Cache) with a raven calling beneath it. Only one eagle has been seen perched in the cottonwood tree behind HQ- we usually see them there every winter.

The Slide Creek burn area is still proving to be very popular, especially with out of town birders, thanks to Mike Munts (our new Biologist) posting woodpecker reports on the Inland NW Birders and Tweepsters sites. All of the woodpecker species we have on the Refuge have been seen there (except Lewis') - Downy, Hairy, Black-backed, Pileated, Three-toed, White-headed, Red-naped and Williamson's sapsuckers and Northern flicker.

It's not unusual to see American dippers in the LPO River behind Headquarters. Belted kingfisher keep visiting the HQ pond and white-headed woodpeckers are being seen in the area around HQ. I had two of them calling on the hillside S of Chester Field. We have only seen a few Clark's nutcrackers so far and one shrike was in the Cottonwood tree behind HQ the end of October.

With the price of bird seed, we just got our feeders started at Headquarters- no birds yet to report.

I've just seen a mourning dove fly onto a patch of green grass under the Headquarters eaves. We measured the snow in the front yard earlier today (ca. November 18) and it was 10 inches. I have not seen doves around here since mid-October and here one finds a bit of bare ground to feed on in the midst of a snowstorm.

Modern firearm season for deer has closed. Now is the time to come out to ski or snowshoe. Our gates will close the end of December, then all visits will be on foot, the perfect time to go tracking and learn to read the stories in the snow.

**Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff**

## **Refuge Photo Contest Winners Picked**

The Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge are happy to announce the winners of this year's contest, which ended on August 15<sup>th</sup>.

The winner of the Public Use Category with his picture titled "Fisherman's Fog" was Dan Price of Colville; in the Scenic Category the winner was Joel Anderson of Onion Creek with his photo "Morning on McDowell"; Christine Tidwell of Colville won this year in the Plants Category with her picture "Wild Rose at Lakeside"; and Jody Johnson won in the Animals Category with "Black and Yellow". Photos are in order below.

We wish to thank Scott Price, our judge this year. We also want to thank those local merchants who donated prizes: Clarks All Sports, Stephanie's Oak Street Grill, Picture Perfect, and Dodson's Paint and Glass.

This is an annual photo contest and the contest for 2011-2012 began last August 16<sup>th</sup> and will run until next August 15<sup>th</sup>. If you take any photos out at the LPO Refuge and want to enter the contest, contact Joel Anderson at 732-4350 or email him at [janderson@ultraplix.com](mailto:janderson@ultraplix.com)

**Joel Anderson, Board Member**





## Two January Events for All

Don't forget two winter events that you are all invited to attend. On Thursday, January 5 will occur the annual Refuge bird count during the morning hours—no experience necessary and a free lunch to boot. Meet at Headquarters at 8:15. Dress warm and bring snowshoes or skis if you wish. Then on January 21 we will have our winter planning board meeting where we welcome input and discussion from members on what we should be doing. Location will be Tricia and Fred Woods' cabin on Lake Heritage. Meeting will be followed by a pot luck lunch and snow activities. Need more? E-mail or call Jim Groth.

## Newsletter Necessities

### Number 39 - Jim Groth - Editor

To send comments, write articles for the newsletter, or to contribute items of interest, please contact:

Editor, *The Pileated Post*

P.O. Box 215, Colville, WA 99114

Email: larchsavage@yahoo.com

*The Pileated Post* is published quarterly and is mailed or emailed to all *Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge*.

## Calendar

### December

7<sup>th</sup> --Board Meeting, 6:00 p.m.

### January

5<sup>th</sup> --Refuge Bird Count—8:00 a.m.

21<sup>th</sup>– Board/planning Meeting --9:30 a.m.

### February

8<sup>th</sup> – Board Meeting – 6:00 p.m.

**Our Mission:** The Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the conservation of native fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats on the Refuge, providing educational opportunities, and fostering understanding and appreciation of the Refuge.



Box 215  
Colville, WA 99114