



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Fall 2011

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

Number 38

### Annual Meeting of Friends

The Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge Annual Meeting will be held on September 24th at 9:30 am at the Refuge and is open to all members or interested persons. The day starts with a coffee break followed by the business meeting at 10 am. We are pleased to announce that our new Refuge biologist, Mike Munts will be the guest speaker with a presentation that includes a fascinating slide show. At 12 pm we will break for a potluck lunch with the Friends supplying the meat for the BBQ. Following lunch, there will be a group hike to Sampson Orchard. This is a easy/moderate hike to an old homestead area on the Refuge that will hopefully include some wildlife viewing. If you have any questions, please call 680-6621.

**Elaine Clough, President**

### Refuge Manager's Meanderings

What a spring we've had; lots of water everywhere on the refuge. Bayley Lake is full for the first time in several years. The Little Pend Oreille River has been flowing bank full for weeks. A couple of years ago we cleared a narrow channel to divert spring runoff into Kidney Pond, the shallow natural wetland near the old Christianson homestead. With this year's runoff Kidney Pond is full to overflowing and supports a pair of Canada geese, and mallards are flushed off every time I visit. I'm hoping for a wood duck brood there this spring. Beaver dams on flowing water have been stress tested and those furry engineers will be collecting overtime fixing those up after the high flows recede.

I expect the contractor to soon resume working on the roughly 22,000 feet of fence remaining. After that we'll still have some odds and ends of fence scattered around the refuge to remove. In May we made progress when a local Boy Scout rallied his troop and removed about 1 mile of old fence to help meet his Eagle Scout rank requirement. He was the sixth Boy Scout in the last 3 years using fence removal on the refuge as his Eagle Scout community service project. Four of them were from Spokane and removed fence on the Kaniksu Unit, and a scout from Chewelah worked on the Cusick Unit. What a great way to help the Refuge and earn a significant lifetime achievement. I guess that old fence was good for something!

The Friends of the Little Pend Oreille also contributed significantly to another Eagle Scout project by donating bluebird box kits that were assembled and installed by scouts in mid- May. The Eagle Scout candidate's original goal was to install 25 boxes. But his troop had such a good time building the boxes from the donated kits that by the time the dust settled they had 50 boxes ready for installation. Using many of the old fence posts left from the Scout fence removal project, the boxes were installed by the scouts around the perimeter of the Christianson Homestead field. Two days later, at least one pair each of tree swallows and western bluebirds had begun using the new boxes! And the troop has agreed to adopt the boxes and incorporate cleaning and maintenance of the boxes into an annual spring trip to the Refuge.

For a second year Mr. Oltean's ecology class from Jenkins High School in Chewelah made a series of field trips to the Refuge to perform a wide variety of habitat sampling and inventory tasks. This year they spent a day hosting the Chewelah 5<sup>th</sup> graders at the McMEET area, instructing them at various stations about aquatic macro-invertebrate sampling,

snag evaluation and inventory, hiking trail design and other activities they've been involved with on the Refuge. Another great example of the value of the McMEET area to an increasing number of people.

The Slide Creek fire has been popular morel hunting area this spring. Our law enforcement officers are patrolling the area to discourage any commercial harvesting while allowing recreational mushroom gathering for personal use. Rehabilitation of the area following the wildfire continues this spring and summer. Late last fall our refuge fire crew seeded the fire lines and much of the heavily burned areas with native grass seed to reduce soil erosion, discourage invasive plants and to enhance the natural recovery we expected after the fire. This spring the disturbed areas show excellent grass and forb regrowth through natural recovery augmented by the additional seeding. Approximately 40 acres next to the wildfire was treated with prescribed fire in May to take advantage of the already burned site and "fill-in" the previously planned prescribed fire treatment area. Replacing boundary fencing, monitoring the progression of the rehab and potential treatment of undesirable invasive plants will continue throughout the summer.

I'll close with a couple of personnel notes. Joe Goldsmith will be retiring after a long career in fire, first with the Forest Service and later with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Joe was one of those guys that could operate a dozer, cut down a tree and bake a cake with equal skill. We have other people that can cut down trees and drive bulldozers, but we'll really miss Joe's cakes! And we also welcome our new biologist Mike Munts. Mike is a north Idaho native, and has worked for the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and most recently the National Park Service at Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve in Idaho. Hopefully you'll be seeing a column from Mike in future issues of the newsletter.

*Editor's note: I am repeating what Jerry reported earlier regarding the Sampson barn restoration to accompany the photo that there is now room for.* 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.



**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

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

It has been quite a summer so far. As I write this it is the hottest day of 2011 with temperatures well into the 90s. This follows a very cool and wet spring and early summer. My first few weeks had me wondering just which side of Washington I had moved to. I am finally starting to learn my way around and at least recognize most of the various place names on the refuge. Working here every day is a far cry from just visiting on weekends occasionally. LPO is probably the most diverse refuge I have even visited. The diversity in the forests from Happy Valley to the upper reaches of Olson Creek is impressive. It is truly a jewel of the refuge system; although it is possible that I may be just a little biased in that assessment.

From the Common Whitetail (dragonfly) to the Rocky Mountain elk; it has been a pleasure to get to see some of the wildlife on the refuge this last 2 months. I recently was able to watch a cow moose with twins on the Blacktail Mountain Road. I have rarely seen moose twins south of the Yukon.

First impressions are always interesting. The second week I was here I was able to spend the day with a group of 5th graders from Colville. I spent a few minutes trying to teach them some bird songs. I see one of these kids around my neighborhood off and on and he simply says "hey bird guy" when he sees me out and about.

While we are the subject of birds, there have been several interesting observations on the refuge this summer. The Slide Creek Fire from last fall is turning into a real bird magnet. We have documented every species of woodpecker that is known to breed in Washington east of the Cascades either in or adjacent to the burn. Several out of town birders have made this relatively unused portion of the refuge a birding destination. I know one group reported seeing a minimum of eight Black-backed Woodpeckers foraging on the singed trees. We have some bird banders volunteering for the North American Hummingbird Project working on the refuge this summer. They have made 4 visits and as of August 14 have banded 97 different hummingbirds in the administrative areas of the refuge. Banded birds include Calliope, Black-chinned, and Rufous Hummingbirds. Thanks for your work, Ned and Gigi

Bald Eagles successfully fledged two young at Bayley Lake this summer as did the Durland Springs White-headed Woodpeckers. Sadly, the Ruffed Grouse nest Barbara found in June was not as fortunate. I have seen Osprey occasionally throughout the summer and in July, Dan Brauner of our fire staff observed evidence of nest construction. We will definitely want to keep our eyes open for Osprey nesting next spring.

I was fortunate to see Bayley Lake at such high water when I first arrived. I have been told it is the highest water level seen in many years. Now that summer is in full swing it is dropping by the day. Still, it continues to have quite a bit of water and several ducks are on the lake finding security as they molt their flight feathers before the journey south for the winter.

I'm not sure this is what everyone wants to hear about, but we have mosquitoes on the refuge. The YCC crew has been surveying in conjunction with some researchers from the state of Washington. So far they have identified at least 13 different species,

with several more specimens awaiting identification. Mosquitoes may not be the most appealing topic but they serve an important role in the food chain as a staple in the diet of numerous species of frogs, bats, and birds. I think I am starting to itch just writing about them.

Finally it was a privilege meeting several of you at the staff appreciation barbecue a couple of days ago. I hope to meet more of you in the future. Feel free to drop in and introduce yourself whenever you are out visiting your refuge.

*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. Here is the first.*

### **Critter of the Season**

For this first installment let's look at the namesake for this newsletter and one of my favorite birds. The Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*) is the largest woodpecker in the state of Washington. In North America only the Ivory-billed is larger. Pileated woodpeckers are about the size of a crow at 16 to 19 inches long with a 25 to 30 inch wingspan. Like most woodpeckers females are a bit smaller. The large red crest of the male was the inspiration for the Woody Woodpecker cartoon. The female has a noticeably smaller crest and a black malar (moustache) stripe instead of the red on the male. Calls are given during the breeding season and sound similar to a flicker although a bit lower in pitch and at a slower speed. Pileateds can be found in many forest habitats in the US as well as LPO. In the east they are often found in mature deciduous forest but here in the west they are found primarily in conifers. Here on the refuge they seem to prefer the mixed coniferous cold forest. Pileateds excavate distinctive square holes when excavating their favorite food of carpenter ants. It is these large feeding excavations that often give away their presence even when the birds themselves are not seen. Entrance holes at nest cavities are large and more of an elongated oval than the round holes normally associated with other woodpecker nests. These cavities are also critical for the use of many other species on the refuge. Animals such as northern flying squirrel, Wood Ducks, Hood Mergansers, and many other need these large holes for nesting or denning. They are widespread on the refuge, so far this summer I

have seen either pileateds or their fresh excavations on the MCMEET trail, by Bailey Lake, Moran Creek, Buffalo Wilson, Onion Creek, Rookery Road, and the Blacktail Mountain areas of the refuge.



**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

### **Summer Wildlife 2011**

Each season there seems to be one mammal species that is frequently seen – this season it has been elk. One fire crew member has been jogging on Bear Creek Road early in the morning and has seen a number of cows with calves. Maintenance staff also reported seeing elk along Bear Creek Road and on Starvation Flat. After hearing of all these reports I took a drive up to Starvation Flat before work, and I did see one elk. I saw another during my lunch walk along Mill Butte trail. I could tell she had at least one calf but did not get a clear look at them. On August 7, 14 elk were seen from Narcisse Creek Road- one of them a bull.

It has been a strange summer with moose and bear sightings way down. The second week of August visitors saw a bull moose 12 miles up Blacktail

Mountain Road and our biologist saw a cow moose with 2 calves a bit lower on Blacktail Mountain Road. A jogger also saw a mountain lion in the same area. Also reported was a bull moose in McDowell Lake and on Starvation Flat, and a cow and calf moose at the south end of Rookery Road.

Bear sightings have been sparse and no cubs have been seen. I have heard only 2 reports - a bear by the Sampson Orchard gate on Bear Creek Road and in Cottonwood Campground.

A few years ago was the year of the badger and since then nary a one has been seen, except that a YCC Crew member did see a badger mid-July in the road in front of the Fire Cache.

A few coyote pups were seen around Potter's Pond and Rookery Road and an adult was seen at Potter's Pond.

Our new Biologist, Mike Munts, is an avid birder. He and other Refuge visitors post their bird sightings on the Inland-NW-Birders email list. If you have not subscribed, go to this web site- <https://lists.uidaho.edu/mailman/listinfo/inland-nw-birders>. Sightings cover Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho. Mike has an article in this newsletter that mentions all the woodpecker species seen in the Slide Creek fire area on the Refuge.

In the last 2 weeks I have been seeing many white butterflies near the tops of the conifers. Our biologist told me they are Pine White butterflies. They are likely mating now and will lay their eggs in a row on the needles. The caterpillars feed mainly on Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir needles. It was interesting to discover the caterpillars drop to the ground on a silk thread and pupate at the base of that tree.

Mike has many new ideas – one thing we started doing is keeping a daily checklist of bird species seen or heard on the Refuge. It is located in the visitor area of Headquarters so be sure to stop in and meet Mike and record your bird sightings. We would like to be able to have visitors record their sightings when the office is not open, so let us know if you have any great ideas we can put into practice.

**Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff**

## 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 2011 Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last August 16<sup>th</sup> and will extend until next (2012) August 15<sup>th</sup>. 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](mailto:janderson@ultraplix.com). Next time you visit the Refuge, don't forget your camera!

**Joel Anderson, Board Member**



Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium* and *Mahonia repens*) are common in all of our forested areas. We see them so commonly that we take them for granted. Europeans especially like our Mahonias as ornamentals for their beauty as holly-like winter greens that have showy flowers and fruit. This year, flowering and fruit production have been particularly impressive. Not many people know that the berries, while quite bitter on the bush, make excellent preserves or wine once enough sugar is added. And they are easy to pick!

**Jim Groth**

## Newsletter Necessities

**Number 38 - 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](mailto:larchsavage@yahoo.com)

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

## Calendar

### September

15<sup>th</sup>---Letter writing potluck Colville Park—5 p.m.

24<sup>th</sup>—Annual Meeting—9:30 a.m.

### October

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

### November

9<sup>h</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.