



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Summer 2011

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

Number 37

From the President

Out and About...

Hanford Reach National Monument

In late March, as a part of the Othello Sandhill Crane Festival, I had the privilege to spend the day birding with leaders Jim Danzenbaker, Jim Moody and a small group of participants. Also on this tour was Dave Gordon, a member of our Friends group. The main part of the day we spent at the Hanford Monument. Hanford Reach National Monument is a part of the Mid-Columbia Refuge Complex. It is the US Fish and Wildlife Service's first national monument and it was put into protection in the year 2000. For most of the tour, we were in site of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and could see the results of the past 60 years of human activity in the area, specifically the use of the land for nuclear reactors, plutonium processing and military defense. Now the site is mostly decommissioned and a huge clean-up operation is in progress.

Human access is allowed on five units of the Monument, which covers over 57,000 acres. The scrub-steppe ecosystem in this area supports a very high diversity of native plants and animals. Visiting this area from my home in a mountainous region is always a pleasure. While in the White Bluffs area, we had views of a substantial elk herd and watched a fisherman pull a large sturgeon out of the Columbia River. This is the only remaining non-tidal, free-flowing stretch of the Columbia River. You can use motorized and non-motorized boats on this stretch, however camping is not permitted and don't even think about going ashore on the Nuclear Reservation side of the river. There will probably always be high security in this area and I am sure you can imagine why. The birding was great; however the cold blustery day limited our listing to about 40 species. The area boasts of over 250 bird species, so you see

we came up short. We were also a bit early for the wildflowers.

The last stop of the day was on top of Saddle Mountain. We braved the cold wind and horizontal rain to view the entire valley and watch prairie falcons soaring over the basalt cliffs. They gave us an awesome show, oblivious it seemed, to the rain and visitors with binoculars. It was a great ending to a rewarding day on the Wahluke Slope.

You can get more information at
<http://www.fws.gov/hanfordreach/>



The Othello birders on a brisk day

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 5th 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.

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Hike the Refuge with the Friends of the LPO

Saturday June 18th at 10am—meet at the Refuge Headquarters.

Come join us for a hike on the “Old Timers Trail” and explore a little used part of the Refuge.

This 4.5 mile trail winds through the hills and valleys from the Buffalo Wilson Road to the gate at Berg Lane and the Webb-King Roads. The trail features an excellent mixed forest habitat, a small stream, a nice grove of old growth Ponderosa pine, a section of Bear Creek and an old homestead. There are good opportunities for bird watching, wildlife spotting, and there should be plenty of wildflowers.

A short car shuttle will get us to the trailhead. Please bring water, a snack or lunch, and mosquito repellent as desired.

This is an easy to moderate hike good for all levels of experience and is open to the general public.

If you are interested or need more information please contact me:
Email: bigdan65@yahoo.com or phone: 684-5863

Dan Price, Board Member

Spring Wildlife 2011

Spring came late this year. Our first Tree Swallows were not seen until April 8. Last year they arrived March 23 and in 2009 the first swallows were seen April 1. Cliff Swallows are again nesting below the eaves of the Barn and Vehicle Shed. The American Robins are nesting above our Headquarters (HQ) doors, and one brood has already hatched. It always amazes me that when it finally seems like spring to me, the birds are always way ahead of where I expect them to be with their nesting activity.

I took a lunch walk mid-March and the raucous calls of Clark’s Nutcrackers were everywhere I went and so loud it seemed like I had not left the ringing office phone behind. These birds have been everywhere this spring.

I heard Ruffed Grouse drumming on April 19. A sound I always enjoy hearing; a sound I also feel in my chest. Have you experienced that? The males create the sound by beating their wings against the air.

May 4 was a big bird day at LPO. I saw our first of the year Rufous Hummingbird, Yellow Warbler and Lewis’s Woodpecker.

All 3 hummingbird species in this area are coming to our feeders at Refuge Headquarters. Recently we had Ned & Gigi Batchelder, volunteer bird banders, here at Headquarters banding hummingbirds. They placed one of our hummingbird feeders inside a wire cage. When a hummingbird entered the cage to feed, they lowered the trap door with a string. The bird was captured by hand through a smaller door then weighed, measured and banded. The first capture was a male Calliope Hummingbird – I really enjoyed seeing him in hand as he was kept still and his throat was just shining in the sunlight. They also captured female Calliope and Rufous Hummingbirds; 2 of the 3 females were gravid (meaning distended with or full of eggs). As they were packing up their gear, a Black-chinned Hummingbird appeared. Gigi said they are the shyest and usually the last species to get caught and banded.

The biggest treat was the Lewis’s Woodpecker. It stayed at the HQ sunflower feeder for 3 days driving other birds away. This woodpecker is about 2 inches smaller than a Northern Flicker. Male and female birds are alike with a greenish-black head and back, red face, gray collar and breast and a coral pink colored belly. The bird was named for Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expedition. In Stevens County this bird is considered “harder to find but usually seen annually”. Ponderosa pine country is one of its preferred habitats and our Refuge Manager is surprised that we don’t see it here more often; he has never seen one on the Refuge. I have been here 11 years and this was the first time I had seen this bird on the Refuge.

House Wrens are nesting in a bird box on the old root cellars which are near the HQ driveway. Western Bluebirds are nesting in boxes around HQ. Warblers and flycatchers are returning along with Western Tanagers and Black-headed Grosbeaks. White-headed Woodpeckers have been seen around HQ and the Fire Cache.

The LPO River behind Headquarters and towards Chimney Pasture has overflowed its banks. A number of new channels have been created and it will be interesting to see if any of them become permanent once the water level decreases.

If you come to visit the Refuge remember tick season is here. Wild flowers are blooming- right now the phlox and balsam root are in bloom and shooting stars are already starting to fade. Be sure to look for other wild flowers in bloom during your visit.

Normally by this time of year we have sightings of bear cubs and moose calves but so far no sightings. I'm not sure if it is because of less staff out and about or some other reason. Please let us know if you see any bears or moose with young when you visit.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff



Our booth at the Home and Garden Show in Colville, March 18-19.

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. This is the second of two parts.

Another issue that poses many of the same arguments as wildfire is the subject of forest insects. In fact, the two go hand in glove. Insects are as much a part of the natural system and processes that affect our forests as is fire. One might say that forest insects have always been and will always be: (I

couldn't write this without at least one pun; sorry). I am primarily addressing the issue of bark beetles which cannot be readily controlled by pesticides and not the defoliators which are somewhat susceptible to chemical control. Both of these types of insects attack live trees and can kill them. Most bark beetles are known as primary attackers, but many forest insects are secondary users of wood and only exist in dead trees.

It is important to keep in mind several relevant points when discussing insects and forests. One is the issue of forest health. Again it depends upon one's vantage. If you hold the view that the natural world is important and maintains the imperative, then you must accept that insects are a part of it and a healthy forest includes them. They are ubiquitous and nothing will change that. In fact, they are essential to forest health as a fundamental of the food chain and to help in the nutrient cycling process that breaks down wood fiber.

It is also necessary to recognize that for forest insects to become a problem for people there is always a trigger mechanism that ensues prior. The trigger may have little to do with man's intervention or practices. For instance drought may be a trigger. If drought is strictly a result of weather conditions that cause trees to be stressed, weakened and subsequently attacked by bugs there is little that can be done except to let the infestation run its course. Even if trees are harvested immediately after the outbreak is recognized, it would be a rare event to mobilize a logging operation fast enough or extensive enough to gain control. The bugs have already won because humans have no control over weather related drought and bugs move far faster and cover more area than foresters and loggers.

Droughty conditions can also be brought on by human activities that alter natural hydrologic processes such as extensive logging, improper harvest technique, farming, and irrigation. Obviously the solution here is to recognize and avoid the problem in the first place. Again, once the bugs reveal themselves it is too late.

Yet another trigger is fire. When fire was a regular visitor to the woodlands it helped maintain a healthy forest by pruning low hanging branches and favoring species that were fire hardy through a variety of fire adapted characteristics. Trees killed outright by

fire are subject to attacks by the secondary types of wood boring insects which are not the types we associate with problem bugs. However, fires that swept through vast areas of logging debris in the late 19th and early 20th centuries created forests that today, largely because of fire exclusion, comprise very dense stands that are susceptible to competitive stress for resources (light, water, nutrients), and thus create a perfect situation for insect outbreaks that would otherwise not have occurred had natural processes not been artificially interrupted. Time and effort will eventually solve these problems through the application of good science and sound land management.

The point of all this is simple. Getting caught up in the hyperbole and unsophisticated dogma that has been promulgated by the popular media only serves to perplex us and obfuscate the real issues. It is essential that people look beyond the immediate and obvious problems related to wildfire and forest insect outbreaks and attempt to recognize and understand the root causes. This can only come from continued research, education and communication. That is where the answer lies. The solutions still may be complex from biological, environmental and social viewpoints but at least we will be searching for answers in the right places instead of trying to close the barn door after Elvis has left the building! Or something like that.

The following is an e-mail sent from Environmental Education organizer Tricia Woods to several of us who helped guide a group of Colville second grade students on their spring outing at the McMeet trail. The sentiments voiced by the students were not isolated ones. For some, this event will be remembered as a milestone in their lives. We are always interested in including more volunteers. It is great fun, and enthusiasm and a love of watching kids as they discover new things is more important than deep knowledge.

Hello to all the 2nd Grade Volunteers!!

Thank you all for coming out to the refuge and helping with the second grade field trip [May 18 and 19]. We had some of the best weather ever which made the days really great. Kids in my group yesterday told me it was their best field trip ever and a couple of them wanted to move to the Refuge.

A couple of others wanted to move their school out to the Refuge so they could visit every day. On Thursday, we had 6 guides for only two classes so we only had about 7 or 8 kids each, and that was really great. My little group was very attentive and looking for everything they could find. The turtles were a huge attraction to watch while we ate lunch. We saw a vulture, an osprey, a goldeneye, a bunch of coots and red-wing blackbirds, a nest of robins in the photo blind, swallows, chipmunks, squirrels, butterflies, dragonflies, a yellow warbler, frogs, a grebe, fish jumping out of the lake, and scat belonging to deer and moose. A pink Calypso orchid was located about two inches off the trail. I didn't show it to the kids-- afraid it would get hurt. They loved the violets and the strawberries.

Thanks again to everyone who helped out, including Rick, Sandy, Bill and crew who went out early to clear the trail and the boardwalk. The kids loved the boardwalk and I let my group go at their own speed and watch the water running through there--the most I've ever seen. They spent about 15 minutes on it.

We have some time now until we have our 5th grade visitors on Friday, June 3 and Monday June 6. We can only hope the weather will cooperate somewhat and we didn't use up all of our luck!

Tricia Woods

Introducing the new Refuge Biologist

Hello,

I am the new wildlife biologist on the refuge. I am new to the USFWS as I have been in the National Park Service for the last 14 years. Most of that time was at Craters of the Moon in the desert of SE Idaho. I grew up near Pend Oreille Lake in Idaho then went to college in Nampa, Idaho and graduate school in Missoula, Montana. I have been able to visit many refuges across the western US and LPO is one of the finest in the system. I am excited about my return to the Inland Northwest and the opportunities ahead. I look forward to working with everyone on the refuge staff as well the Friends of LPO.

**Mike Munts
Wildlife Biologist**

Mushroom Foray on the Refuge

Most people who have attended the annual spring mushroom foray would judge it a good event if enough morels were found for everybody to pick a few. While I think that there is more to experiencing mushroom beauty and diversity than collecting morels, by the above standard the May 14 event this year was a success. Three locations were visited, and all yielded many morels, so all 19 participants went home with some. Weather was warm and mostly cloudy, but not rainy. Overall it has been a good, but not excellent, morel season around here. Numbers are fair .but size and quality is good due to cool, moist conditions. Late or yellow morels are being found now, which is unusual for low elevations probably because normally it gets too hot and dry for them.

A brief note about the Slide Creek burn: We visited twice, and only found scattered morels of small size in mid May, with nothing to be found in late April. While there was evidence of morel hunting, it is a large area and remote, unpicked corners of the burn were no better. If commercial pickers were there, they can't have been too happy. It will be interesting to see how many morels are there next year.

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

Newsletter Necessities

Number 37 - 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

Calendar

June

3,6th—Environmental Education

8th— Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.

18th—Hike the Refuge—10:00 a.m.

July

13th— Board Meeting –6:00 p.m.

August

10th – 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

Friends of the LPO

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

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Date _____

Annual Membership

- ____ I would like my newsletter emailed to me
- ____ Basic Member \$10 ____ New
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- ____ Supporting Member \$50
- ____ Sustaining Member \$75
- ____ Corporate Member \$100
- ____ Other \$ _____

Please mail, along with a check to:
Friends of the LPONWR
Box 215
Colville, WA 99114