



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Summer 2012

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

Number 41

From the President

Summer is here and there are plenty of opportunities to get out to the Refuge and spend some time with the Friends. We have hikes, trail work parties and other activities listed on our website. From my perspective hiking and trail work are both a lot of fun and a good way to get to know the refuge and meet new people.

On June 16th I will be leading my second annual hike to places that you may not know about. Last year was the "Old Timers" trail and this year our hike will be to the old Pahlke homestead and a second very short hike to upper Manz meadow. The Pahlke hike is about 3 miles round trip with a moderate elevation gain. The hike features the old homestead, a view of Starvation Lake along with views of the Huckleberry Range and Mill Butte. There is also an interesting depression with a spring and a micro habitat. Upper Manz meadow is a 1 mile flat walk along the Little Pend Oreille River to a large meadow which should have plenty of wild flowers. Afterward if anyone wants to, and has the energy, I can show them our latest project (which I will talk about next). Remember to bring plenty of water, insect repellent, sunscreen, and a snack. We will meet at Headquarters at 9:30 AM (no car shuttle this year).

That's the fun. Now here is the work. Many of us also find this fun. Our new trail on Rookery Road, which we are calling the Beaver Pond overlook loop, is becoming a reality. The Washington Trails Association (WTA) is once again coming out to the refuge to help the Friends and staff to construct the new trail. Their help was invaluable on the Mill Butte trail where they provided a majority of the work. This year the WTA will have a weekend volunteer vacation on June 9th and 10th. Every one is welcome to join for one or both days. If you wish to help you must register on their

web site (wta.org). There is a link to the appropriate section of their website on the events section of our web site where you can find more details. On Saturday night the Friends Board will be providing a BBQ for all trail workers.

On June 24th I will be leading a day of trail work at the Beaver Ponds trail and no registration is required. We will meet at the Lake McDowell parking lot at 9:30 am and proceed from there. Please wear long pants good boots and bring a good pair of work gloves. Also bring lots of water, lunch and snacks. If you wish to help let me know so I can bring the tools necessary. There will also be other work days led by myself or Rick Moore. Just keep checking our website.

For any further information or questions you are always welcomed to contact me at big-dan65@yahoo.com or you can call 684-5863. Have a great summer.

Dan Price, President





Two events that the Friends participated in recently; above (page 1), Jay Berube at our display at the Spring Festival on Turnbull NWR and below, Dave Gordon at the Home and Garden Show in March.

Refuge Manager's Meandering

The last few days have delivered some summer like temperatures, hinting at more to come. It's none too soon for me, winter was really getting tiresome. Spring weather encourages outdoor activities, and that's certainly true on this refuge. We have a busy summer planned and it's already getting off to a rapid start.

Many remember our efforts about six years ago to control Eurasian milfoil in McDowell Lake. We had greater than expected success controlling it that summer with no reoccurrence until last summer. Fortunately we detected this re-infestation at a relatively early stage, but rapid control is critical to prevent it from overrunning the lake. Treating milfoil in a lake the size of McDowell is an expensive project. Fortunately, Mike successfully competed for a grant within our Fish and Wildlife Service region that will fund the purchase of herbicide and follow up water testing necessary to treat the lake this summer. A critical part of that project is

our partnering with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and their regional fish biologist, Bill Baker. They are providing the airboat necessary for efficient application of the herbicide. Without their help this project would be much more difficult and expensive to accomplish.

We are always trying to encourage using the refuge as an environmental laboratory. The refuge is attractive for this because the stable landownership and sustainable management practices are conducive to long term monitoring of a variety of environmental attributes. The information gleaned by these researchers contributes significantly to many of the current and future refuge management decisions.

For example, we have a couple of long-term cooperative projects going on with the Washington Department of Ecology. Bayley Lake is part the Environmental Protection Agency's National Lakes Assessment, studying the health of several lakes in the state over several decades. As part of the study the Washington Department of Ecology will spend about a day on the lake sampling water quality, macro invertebrates, macrophytes, zooplankton and sediment cores, returning every five years to resample and compare results to detect changes.

In a separate study, the Department of Ecology is also working in the Little Pend Oreille River as part of a statewide project addressing Status and Trends Monitoring for Watershed Health. This work encompasses biological, chemical and physical attributes of many of the state's streams and rivers. Long term trends in water temperature, sedimentation, bacterial loading as well as other attributes will be measured and recorded, providing a chance to observe how environmental changes like global warming are affecting the local environment.

This spring the hydrology class from Spokane Community College also spent several days surveying the Little Pend Oreille River. The refuge provides a great learning site for students studying the function of aquatic systems; providing a chance to convert classroom theory into practical experience. Part of their project is installing bank pins in some of the more rapidly eroding portions of the river. This will help us quantify the amount of bank erosion occurring annually.

The Refuge will again work with the Washington Department of Health collecting mosquitoes as part of their state-wide West Nile Virus surveillance project. This started a few years ago when then Youth Conservation Corps Crew Leader Roger Hansen incorporated mosquito trapping into the crew's regular duties. This project has since become an annual YCC activity. Although the virus has not yet been detected in Stevens County, surveillance and early detection are important to public health and safety.

We also have a couple of cooperative studies with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The long-term Northeastern Washington White-tailed deer project begun last winter has started to yield some interesting information. Radio and satellite tracking collars were attached to deer on the refuge as well as other areas in this corner of the state. While still in the early stages, this project is already yielding some interesting insights into the impact of refuge habitat management far beyond its borders through the dispersal of refuge wintering deer to summering sites many miles away. Our work with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife investigating winter bat use has been hampered due to funding, so we missed the chance to do much of that this winter. This work relates to the epidemic of White-nose Syndrome that has seriously affected bat populations in other parts of the United States. The problem stems from the fungus awaking the bat from their winter hibernation, causing them to expend energy foraging in the winter when insects are not available. Our joint project will attempt to detect bat activity during the "off-season", indicating bats are being active at inappropriate times. Bat detectors, devices that record and convert the bat's echolocation ultrasound signals into frequencies detectable by humans, are sited where bats frequent when feeding or drinking, indicating their presence.

One of the most beneficial things this refuge provides is the opportunity to increase our knowledge not only of the refuge itself, but to contribute to our knowledge of the world around us. The better informed we are, the better decisions we make. As Mark Twain said, "Supposing is good, but finding out is better."

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Refuge Biologist's Report



Mike Munts

As the saying goes, my how time flies. By the time you are reading I will have been on the refuge a full year. It has been a great first year and I have had the chance to learn many things over the last year. Little Pend Oreille is truly a gem of the national wildlife refuge system. It has certainly been a pleasure working with and getting to know the staff and many of the Friends of the LPO. I hope we have many more years of working together. It has been a great transition to the Fish and Wildlife Service and the refuge. There have been a number of great experiences this past year. For example, just a few weeks ago Jerry and I had a chance to observe a river otter eating a fish in the pond headquarters. This was my first otter on the refuge but it would not be the last. A few hours later I would see three more otters at the McDowell boat ramp. This day was the inspiration for the critter of the quarter installment below. Another highlight of the past year would be doing the spring waterfowl count at the Kaniksu Unit this last April. I have seen many ducks but to see nearly 3000 Northern Pintails in full breeding plumage was impressive. It was also a great experience helping our volunteer hummingbird banding last summer. Unfortunately, Ned has moved to southern Utah and won't be able to assist us anymore. It is not just the wildlife here. There

are many wonderful wildflowers and plants on the refuge as well. It has been a pleasure seeing flowers like trillium and calypso orchids again. The scenery on the refuge is also spectacular in many places. The Bayley Lake Overlook on Cliff Ridge is one of the finest on the refuge.

Moving back to the present, it has been a busy spring and summer looks to be even busier. The Bald Eagles have two young they are raising. I saw a Canada Goose with goslings last week and yesterday we saw a Common Merganser with ducklings in tow on McDowell Lake. The baby ground squirrels have been out and about in Chester Field and the area around headquarters for a couple of weeks now. I was in the Slide Creek Fire in mid-May and Black-backed and Pileated Woodpeckers both appear to be sitting on eggs. Other birds that are starting to nest include Tree and Cliff Swallows, Western Bluebirds and American Dippers. In addition to birds, spotted frogs are doing a lot of calling lately and I saw my first batch of frog eggs in mid-May. I have not any reports yet but I expect the first observation of fawns any day now. As we transition from spring to summer over the next few weeks, things will continue to get busy. We just treated McDowell Lake for Eurasian water milfoil and we continue to monitor the situation there for several weeks. Things will be busy around the office too. We will have a summer seasonal crew for the first time in many years. I have a seasonal biological technician and a student intern this year. I have a lot of exciting projects going on this year that the crew will be working on. In addition to ongoing projects like the bird surveys, the bee inventory, and weed control, several new projects will be taking place this summer. In conjunction with the inventory and monitoring program we will be conducting surveys for bats and frogs. The Northeast Washington Whitetail Project is proceeding. We have 16 radio collared deer running around the refuge and a graduate student from Montana is here for the summer working on that project.

Lastly, we will be trying a butterfly count this year. Rick Moore will be helping me lead a group on the 4th of July Butterfly Count. This is continent wide program similar to the Christmas Bird Count. We will be doing the first annual Little Pend Oreille Count on Saturday June 23. If you would like to learn about butterflies on the refuge and help us collect data on this fas-

inating group of animals please join us at 9AM on the 23rd.

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

The North American **river otter** (*Lontra canadensis*) is a large aquatic member of the family Mustelidae which also includes weasels, mink, ferrets, badgers and their relatives. Unlike many animals, otters seem to play simply for fun. However, much of what seems to us to be play actually has survival benefits to the animal. For example their curiosity and explorations may appear to be fun but has tremendous advantages in finding food or avoiding predators. Some behaviors, though, like surfing or repetitively sliding down a snow bank seem to have no practical value other than sheer fun.

Otters have varied diet at least within their aquatic habitat. They will feed on fish, amphibians, small mammals, even snakes. On the coast I have seen them feeding on star fish, crabs and a host of other seashore and tide pool animals. The females den in complex underground burrow systems. They will often dig multiple entrance tunnels to den sites. Most will have at least one underwater entrance. Otters are well adapted to their wet life. They have thick waterproof fur. This is the trait which caused them to be driven nearly to extinction in much of the country more than a century ago. They also have a very streamlined body and a very powerful tail for a rudder. They are able to hold their breath for several a minutes. Like seals they are able to completely close their nose and ears in order to keep out water when diving. These traits enable them to out swim fish and capturing their prey underwater.

While not common on the refuge they are seen occasionally in a variety of habitats. Locations to look include McDowell Lake and the beaver ponds. They can also be found along the Little Pend Oreille River in various places. So the next time you visit the refuge, keep your eyes on the streams and ponds and enjoy their antics.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Spring Wildlife 2012

It is Spring! Warblers are back singing to attract mates and establish territories; wild flowers and fruit trees are blooming attracting pollinators and deciduous trees have leafed out with their varied shades of bright new greens. Spring is a wonderful time of the year to visit the Refuge.

Hibernators are out of their dens after spending the winter largely inactive. Chipmunks started raiding the bird feeders at Headquarters late March. The first marmot (just off the Refuge), ticks and tree frogs were seen early in April. Ground squirrels are running all over Bear Creek Road near the Fire

Cache/Maintenance Shop people and I watched one ground squirrel at Headquarters eating the stem of a dandelion. The dandelion had already gone to seed and the squirrel started eating the stem from the bottom end so the seeds went flying as it munched.

Otters were abundant on April 13. Jerry and Mike saw one at the Headquarters pond and Mike saw 3 at McDowell Lake. Be sure to read Mike's Critter of the Season article on otters.

The mystery of the American Robin nests continues. If you remember late in the nesting season last year, something was removing the Robin nests from above the Headquarters west door and from the ledge at the kiosk. The nests were found sitting on the ground in the same condition as when the birds constructed them – not torn apart. It has happened again this year, even before the Robin was finished building the nest. We are stumped. If you have encountered this, tell us about it

I love wildflowers. Some are so small you have to kneel down to get a good look at them – but it is worth it. The detail of the flowers and the different colors and shapes are just beautiful. The white Trillium is always in bloom when we have our Earth Day trash pickup on the Refuge in mid-April. The showy yellow Balsamroot is in bloom while the tiny pink Shooting stars are fading. I walked on the proposed trail to the overlook over the beaver ponds and saw a nice group of pink calypso orchards in bloom. Wild strawberry, Phlox, Springbeauty, Violets, False Solomon's seal,

Lemonweed, and Larkspur are some of the flowers I have already seen in bloom this year. How many of these have you seen? Bring your field guide when you come out for a visit and see how many wildflowers you can find in bloom.

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 2012 Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last August 16th and will extend until next (2012) August 15th. We are looking for pictures of the flora and fauna, of panoramas, and of people using the Refuge. We are especially 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



River otters

Newsletter Necessities

Number 41 - 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 to all *Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge*.

Calendar

June

9-10th--Work Alongside WTA
13th-- Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.
16th--Hike the Refuge--9:30 a.m.
24th--Trail Work, Beaver Pond--9:30 a.m.

July

11th-- Board Meeting --6:00 p.m.

August

8th -- Board Meeting -- 6:00 p.m.

Friends of the LPO

Membership Application

Name _____

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Please mail, along with a check to:
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Box 215
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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