



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Winter 2012

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

Number 43

From the President

First off, I would like to welcome our three new board members: Stephanie Wilson, David Olsen and Greg Mohr. Stephanie and Greg are also new members. Welcome and thanks to all three. I look forward to working with them in the months and years to come.

I would also like to thank all of our volunteers. Our volunteers put in over 400 hours of work on our many projects and activities in the last year. We were able to continue our environmental education days with the Colville School district (a special thanks to Tricia Woods), we continued maintenance and enhancement of the McDowell Environmental Education Trail and we got a great start on a new trail known as the Beaver Pond Overlook and Big Pine Loop. The new trail would not have been possible without the help of the Washington Trail Association and refuge staff, notably the Fire crew and Dan Brauner. We also had volunteers participate in our public outreach effort which included our annual Winter Program, the Colville Home Show and the Floods, Flowers and Feathers Festival held at the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. So again thanks to all who helped and if anyone is interested in volunteering feel free to email me

Our winter planning meeting will be held on Saturday, January 12, 2013 in the house next to Refuge Headquarters. The meeting starts at 9:30 AM. A pot luck lunch and outdoor activities will follow.

One last note. This year's winter program will feature biologist Bryon Holt of the Fish and Wildlife Service. His presentation will be on Woodland Caribou, critical habitat management, and the current status of the Caribou. Keep an eye out as the date for the presentation has not been finalized, but will be most likely in late March or early April (as always on a Friday and most likely at the Community College in Colville).

The Board and I wish everyone, and all the wildlife, the best in this Holiday Season!

Dan Price, President

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Refuge Manager's Meandering

Last night I finished watching Ken Burn's latest documentary on PBS, "The Dust Bowl". It was especially interesting since my previous gig was as the biologist on the Cimarron National Grassland in Elkhart, Kansas, smack dab in the middle of the dust bowl country. I recognized all the places mentioned and even some of the faces of those interviewed as they reminisced about life in the Dirty Thirties. Living there in the mid 1990's we remodeled a craftsman bungalow-style house in Elkhart built in 1929. It still had the original double hung wooden sash windows with cast iron counter weights enclosed in the casings. When I opened those casings to replace the sash cords, each contained four to eight inches of fine dirt, a reminder the "dusters" that had repeatedly blanketed the area with wind-eroded soil.

Unfortunately, our culture fails to learn from its mistakes. We seem headed down a similar path by depleting aquifer to irrigate naturally arid agricultural lands, contaminating those same aquifers through fracking to increase natural gas production, and re-plowing farmland previously sequestered for decades as grasslands through federal conservation programs and planting them to crops for biofuel production. Spend some quality couch time watching "The Dust Bowl" and learn about what many consider the worse man-made disaster in our country's history.

In September, Friends of the LPO NWR volunteers assisted the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Restoration Carpenter, Regional Historical Archaeologist and refuge staff for several days as they stabilized the historic log barn about ½ mile east of refuge headquarters on Bear Creek Road (see photos below). The first land claimant for the

property occupied by the barn was Charles Hartnett in 1892. By the time he “proved up” his claim in 1897 Hartnett had built a 14’X16’ frame house, a stable and had 20 acres in cultivation. About 1900 Sam Sampson, a Norwegian immigrant, had filed on a homestead near Hartnett. At some point Sampson acquired Hartnett’s land claim and the barn became known locally as the Sampson barn. Sometime after 1965 all the other buildings were removed save for the barn. It was altered by removing the gable end hay doors and patching the openings with siding. The hay loft floor was removed, and an 8’ X 10’ opening created in the west end by chain sawing a hole in the log wall.

For many years the barn stored hay for winter deer feeding until that program was abandoned in the ‘80’s. Preparing for this summer’s project we cleared several inches of accumulated hay chaff off the barn floor and found a system of mangers, stalls and gutters. It was obvious to this farm boy (who was practically raised in a dairy barn) that Mr. Hartnett and or Mr. Sampson used the barn for milking cows. This conveniently fits the description of a stable mentioned in the land claim documents.

Staff and volunteers replaced the decayed cedar piers with new cedar piers made from trees on the refuge. This squared up the building so it’s no longer slipping off its footings, making it stable for another hundred years. The carpenter and historian plan to return next summer to replace the logs previously removed from the west end to the barn and repair some of the damaged floor planks.

Did I say the Harnett-Sampson barn is eligible for the National register of Historic Places because it displays excellent craftsmanship in its construction methods and is associated with early-twentieth century homesteading? It will be a key stop on the new auto tour (more about that later, I need to save something to talk about in the next newsletter!) that greatly enhances visitor’s understanding of the homesteading era prior to the establishment of the refuge.



Jerry Cline, Refuge Manager Biologist’s Report

Once again I look forward to the changing of seasons here on the refuge. One of the many things I enjoy about living in the Inland Northwest is that we do get to experience all four seasons. It has been a great fall and as we move into the early part of the winter I look forward to the changes we will experience. With the coming of winter many changes are in store for the natural world. Snowshoe hare, weasels and several birds change color. Some bats and many birds head to points south. For some arctic and boreal birds NE Washington and the refuge are points south. We have been seeing Northern Shrikes and increased numbers of Bald Eagle the last few days. Hopefully redpolls will be showing up soon. The beaver ponds and most of Potter Pond have iced over with most of the remaining waterfowl concentrating on Bayley and McDowell Lakes. Although the first significant snow of the winter has already melted, it was here for a few days. During those few days it was obvious that beavers were hard at work on Bayley Lake. Numerous tracks were seen and the routes used to transport branches to the lake were readily observed in several locations. With snow starting to accumulate in the mountains this week we are starting to see deer numbers increase. By the time you read this general deer season will be over and with it much of the fall traffic on the refuge. One exception to that is smaller thinning projects along Bear Creek Road this winter. They are cutting in the Sampson Orchard area as I write this. Steve Fowler did a great two part piece on that program in this newsletter last year and I would encourage you to take a look at those articles if you have not read them. The focus of this group of projects is to restore not just Ponderosa Pine but quaking aspen and even some meadow habitat. It should be a real boost to several of our aspen groves which are so important to many wildlife species here.

Another sign of the changing of the seasons is the departure of seasonal employees. As I write this Josh the bio tech is finishing up and will be headed home to Wisconsin in a few hours. It has been great having him here and he has done a lot of work we could not have otherwise accomplished this year. Some of the projects Josh was able to work on this fall include bat migration surveys. In one 12 day period we recorded over two thousand individual bat calls and identified 9 species along the river by headquarters. Josh was instrumental in getting the old field by the Christianson homestead replanted as part of restoration efforts in that area. Most of the refuge staff was involved with this project at some point. The fire crew did a great job burning the field in preparation for replanting. Even Jerry got out of the office and got in some tractor time on this project. Come check it out next spring when hopefully the site will be green with native grasses. One other interesting project we ran this fall was deployment of a series of remote cameras. The focus of this was to document carnivores, but anything that moves will get picked up. One of the cameras spent most of the fall on the stretch of upper Bear Creek Road above the wash out. We were able to determine that many animal species were using the road as a travel corridor. Species photographed include deer, elk, moose, black bear, coyote, and bobcat.

Winter is not all office work and we do have some upcoming activities through the winter. The Northeast Washington Whitetail Deer Project is continuing this winter. Washington State biologists will resume trapping on the refuge and fitting deer with radio transmitters as soon as snow levels permit. This project has already produced some great data on the timing and route of deer migration in the area in and around the refuge. The annual winter bird count is scheduled for January 9, 2013. Once the snow accumulates the refuge can be a great place to get out and see animal tracks. So I hope you all have a chance to come out and experience your refuge this winter.

Critter of the Season



Western Larch - *Larix occidentalis*

By Mary Vaux Walcott

I thought I would try something a little different this time and discuss a tree rather than an animal. As I write this in early November, I have a most spectacular view of the larch across the Little Pend Oreille River. Larches are very unique in the tree world. The genus *Larix* contains 7 species worldwide and are the only members of the family Pinaceae that are deciduous. Here in North America we have 3 species with the other 4 in the mountains of Europe and Asia. One species, the western larch (*Larix occidentalis*), is common on the refuge. Western larch like it's eastern cousin is sometimes called tamarack. They are well known throughout the west for the spectacular displays of fall color. They have a dense wood which decays slowly. For this reason it is preferred by both firewood cutters and many species of woodpeckers. Larch is very fire resistant when mature and it found in most forest types on the refuge. The bark is similar to and sometimes confused with ponderosa pine. Those famous needles grow out in clusters of many from little nodes on the twigs rather than the typical bundles of two to five you see on pines. Although western larch grows in many types of forest it needs well drained soil and does not tolerate wet sites. If you hike the McDowell Lake Environmental Education Trail you may notice several dead larch trees. These trees died together during a high water event

sometime in the past that caused all of the larch to drown while other species of pines and firs came through the flood unaffected. You can see one of these larch snags at post number 3 along the trail. If you look closely you can see different sizes and shapes of holes that indicate at least 4 different species of woodpeckers have used this snag for nesting over the years.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Fall 2012—Nature Notes

Never know what you might see around the next corner, and here On August 24 I took my lunch walk along the Little Pend Oreille River. In a puddle cut off from the river by a sand bar, in open water about the size of a kitchen table there were 60 water striders. I wondered if it was a recent hatch. I can remember as a child growing up in New England, I always enjoyed watching water striders. If you are not familiar with them, they kind of look like a brown spider on the surface of the water; they have a thin body and six legs. The front 2 legs are shorter and used to capture prey – they mainly eat insects and do not bite people. I read that they push with their middle legs and steer with their hind legs. These amazing insects walk on water. They have many fine hairs on their legs and with the surface tension of the water it keeps them from sinking. I've always loved watching the shadows they cast on the bottom of the stream or pond – the middle and hind legs cast oval shadows that with the shadow of the body make the shadow more noticeable than the bug itself since it is only ½ inch long. And they can move quite fast. Surprisingly they overwinter as adults. You should look for them in still water next year.

There have been scattered reports of elk with calves, bears with cubs and coyotes. But moose sightings have been predominate. The number of sightings of bulls or cows with calves has been equal. The best sighting of the season was on Blacktail Mountain Road. Josh, our BioTech, was driving quite a ways up the road, came around a corner and there were two bull moose fighting in the middle of the road. Unfortunately, as soon as they saw the truck they ran off. This occurred on September 11th. As I've often written in this column, you never know what you might see around the next corner, and here is some proof.

A cow and calf moose were seen at the junction of Bear Creek and Narcisse Creek Roads in mid November. In fact

the President of the Friends group got some good photos of them. Thanks for sharing those photos Dan.

On September 24th I heard a Blue Jay while on my lunch walk behind Headquarters. Ravens and magpies were making a ruckus and I heard the jay numerous times but never saw it. Mike, our biologist, found what was left of a deer carcass next to river. We figure that is what attracted the birds to the area.

In mid-October our maintenance staff saw two young bobcats on Blacktail Mountain Road. They watched these cats hunting while walking on logs. That same day our BioTech was getting water samples in Bear Creek behind Headquarters. He scared up bear along the creek and couldn't say who was more surprised – the bear or him.

After having more than one frost and even light snow I was surprised at the flowers still in bloom at the end of October and into early November. I saw scarlet gilia, blue harebell, white and pink knapweed, Deptford pink and dandelion in vivid color. Often only one colorful flower remained on the plant and it sure stood out on a gray day.

In early November I took a day off to tour the Refuge with family. The highlight was a herd of 8 elk on Rookery Road. I only got to see their rumps but my sister saw more of their bodies and said they were all cows.

On November 6th I watched a female White-headed Woodpecker foraging in the crevices of a ponderosa pine for tasty morsels. She was about 3 feet from the ground when I came upon her and was backing down the tree trunk. Her head would cock and turn every which way as she searched for insects. I walked slowly past averting my gaze so as not to disturb her. She did fly to a nearby tree and when I turned around to look at her, she was backing down that trunk in her search for food.

In mid November we started seeing Wild Turkeys around Headquarters every day. In past winters they have become quite a nuisance raiding the birdfeeders. The reason our birdfeeders have bungee cords around them is to keep the turkeys from knocking the roof off and eating all the seeds. And speaking of our feeders- I am quite surprised there has been no bird activity. I first put seed out on November 13th and the feeders are in the same location as in previous years.

The strangest wildlife report I got was a white-tailed doe looking into a bunkhouse window. I don't know what Josh was doing at the time, whether food odors attracted her or music got her curiosity up, but he reported a peeping doe.

But there may have been a stranger report. There were only a few staff at Headquarters and I saw the phone line in the Barn was being used. The Barn is the building behind

Headquarters. After waiting for half an hour the line was still in use. Since that did not make sense, a co-worker and I went down to the Barn to check it out. Before we got the door open, I could hear and see something hitting a window trying to get out; it was a Northern Flicker. As this bird flew madly about trying to get back outside, it must have landed on or bumped a phone button. Since then, the hole a flicker made in the side of the building has been sealed.

So which is the stranger story?

For your information, hunting seasons are open on the Refuge until Dec 31th. Archery for deer and elk and grouse and turkey are the most popular hunts still on going.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

Refuge Photo Winners Announced

The seventh-annual Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge Photo Contest has its winners. As in past years, the contest ran from mid-August to mid-August. There were winners in three categories. The winner in the Scenic Division was Larry Carlson with his photo of the Little Pend Oreille River at the mouth of Gap Creek. The winning photo in the Animal Division was of an Eight-spotted Skimmer taken by Joel Anderson. Mr. Anderson also won in the Plant Division with his photo entitled "Scarlet Gilia".

The photo contest committee would like to thank our judge, Scott Price, and our sponsoring merchants, Dodson's Paint and Glass, Stephanie's Oak Street Grill and Mavericks Restaurant.

The eighth annual contest has already begun and we encourage all amateur photographers to visit the Refuge, take their cameras and record some of the beauty which one often sees when there. Any photos taken at the Refuge can be entered in the contest. Rules and entry forms can be obtained by e-mailing Joel Anderson at janderson@ultraplix.com or phoning him at 732-4350.





Newsletter Necessities

Number 43 - Jim Groth - Editor

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

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

Calendar

December

12th --Board Meeting, 6:00 p.m.

January

9th --Refuge Bird Count—8:00 a.m.

12th– Board and Membership planning Meeting --9:30 a.m.

February

13th – 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.

Friends of the LPO

Membership Application

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