



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Spring 2013

<http://refugefriends.com>

Number 44

From the President

There is a lot going on this spring with the Friends. We have our annual presentation at the Community College, the Colville Home and Garden Show (March 15th-17th), the Floods, Flowers and Feathers Festival at the Turnbull NWR, trail work projects, hikes, the annual photo contest and our education days with the Colville school district. I will expand on a few of these.

The second annual Flood, Flowers and Feathers Festival will be held at the Turnbull NWR, Saturday May 18, from 8:00 to 3:00. This is a fun event for the entire family. There will be many activities and informational booths. Take tours and learn about the wildlife, habitat and geology of the channeled scablands. Our Friends group will have an informational booth about the Little Pend Oreille NWR and an activities booth where we will be dissecting owl pellets so kids (and adults) can learn about what owls eat. We had a great time last year and this year promises to be just as fun with more organizations participating. For more information go to the Turnbull website: <http://fws.gov/refuge/turnbull>.

This spring we are going to have two weekends where you can help with trail maintenance and construction. The dates are Saturday April 20 and Saturday April 27 at 9:30AM. We meet at the McDowell Lake Trailhead. Yearly maintenance will be done on the McDowell Marsh Education Trail and we hope to do some trail construction on the new Beaver Pond overlook and Big Pines loop trails. It always fun and we won't work you too hard. Bring boots, work gloves water and lunch. Tools are provided. Work as long as you like. Most people leave around noon, but you can always work longer or just explore the refuge.

We are always looking volunteers for all events and activities. If you are interested in volunteering or have any questions feel free to contact me at bigdan65@yahoo.com.

For more information you can check out our website (refugefriends.com) and our new Facebook page. You can link to our Facebook page though our website.

Hope to see you at the Refuge and at our events.

Dan Price, President

email: bigdan65@yahoo.com

Phone: 509-684-5863



Spring Lecture Event—Woodland Caribou

Would you like to know more about Woodland Caribou? Please come and join us for our annual Winter/Spring program held on April 12 at 7:00PM at the Colville Community College auditorium, 985 S. Elm, Colville.

Our speaker is Bryon Holt, a Biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service working with Woodland Caribou and critical habitat necessary for their survival in our area, the last place that they can be found in the lower 48 states.

Following the presentation there will be time for Bryon to answer your question and have a short discussion on the topic.

The doors open at 6:30. There will be refreshments and door prizes. You will also have a chance to meet with the Friends and learn more about our Refuge. It should be a fun and informative evening. Hope to see you there! Children are welcome, and encouraged to attend.

Refuge Manager's Meandering

Spring 2013

In the last issue I alluded to the new auto tour we're installing this summer. I'm pleased to say after over 18 months of work selecting sites, designing signs and writing interpretation, the completion of this exciting project is near! To build suspense, let me provide a little background on the project.

The Refuge Improvement Act of 1997, for the first time in the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service's history, coordinated management of all refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. It directed managers to emphasize six major wildlife-dependent uses on refuges: hunting, fishing, wildlife photography and observation, and environmental education and interpretation. Obviously, hunting and fishing were easy to integrate into the Little Pend Oreille's management; they've been going on for decades. Thanks to the Refuge Friends', the education, photography and observation opportunities on the Little Pend Oreille have improved immensely. The new auto tour is the missing piece that helps interpret the tale of the refuge's history, resources and management.

Our new auto tour starts at the existing headquarters visitor kiosk with a new refuge sign and map inviting visitors to take the tour. The tour takes visitors east on Bear Creek Road to Rookery Road, then north through River Campground, across Starvation Flats before ending at the Narcisse Creek Road junction. Eleven stops address a wide range of topics including history, ecology and management.

The interpretive panels are mounted on large wooden frames supported by pairs of twelve inch diameter peeled log posts, mimicking the design of the existing headquarters kiosk. The panels' signs are 3 feet by 4 feet and of two styles. Many are mounted about waist high at a 45 degree angle, encouraging visitors to exit their cars to read the sign, thus fully experiencing, by sight, sound and smell, the subject of the exhibit. Some sites use vertically mounted signs easily readable from the vehicle since many visitors may be unable to exit their vehicles due to infirmities, contrary off-

spring or any of a variety of reasons. All the signs are illustrated with either color photos and drawings, or historic black and white photos. Every site has a "theme", and in addition to the information panel, each is decorated with a laser-cut steel graphic similar to those adorning the street light posts in Colville. For example, the site describing the early homesteaders has steel cut-out of a horse drawn plow attached to the sign frame. All the sites have either a small, 2-3 car parking lot or a graveled pull off so visitors can safely exit their vehicles.

Some of the auto tour sites have other special features. We interpret the beaver ponds along Rookery Road using a wooden boardwalk extending to the water's edge with a small viewing platform with universal accessibility. Further along Rookery Road, the McDowell Lake overlook will be accented with a low rock wall that also serves as the mounting structure for the interpretive signs. Parking for larger vehicles like campers and school buses will be included at the overlook, along with a new restroom and picnic table.

The project also includes interpretive signs for sites not immediately adjacent to the auto tour. We're placing four signs along the McDowell Marsh Environmental Education Trail, including a "touchy-feely" sign with animal track impressions visitors can grope. Potter's Pond gets a new interpretive sign, retiring the existing sign after almost 18 years of service. Small kiosks will be installed at the Mill Butte Trailhead and the new Beaver Pond/Big Pines Trailhead. Washington State Parks graciously granted permission to install a welcoming sign at the Crystal Falls pull-off along State Highway 20. This panel interprets not only the falls, but invites travelers to make a short detour to visit the refuge.

It's been challenging, aggravating, invigorating and just plain fun working with the landscape architect, interpretive sign designer, Region Office staff and my refuge colleagues as we pulled this long overdue project together. The difficult task of creating the sites and installing these valuable signs starts the spring. I'm confident that our competent staff, with help from volunteers, will have this in place and ready for visitors to enjoy before the larch and aspen turn golden in the fall.

Welcome to Little Pend Oreille

President Franklin D. Roosevelt established Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge in 1939 as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife. Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the refuge features a mountainous, mixed-conifer forest – the only refuge of its kind in the National Wildlife Refuge System outside of Alaska. Here you'll find rolling pine and fir forests, scattered lakes, ponds and marshes as well as miles of rushing waters and slow meanders.

Explore the Refuge

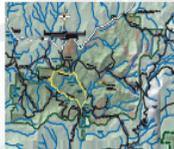
Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge is named for the river that flows through its northern head. Head Oreille, pronounced "pore-oy", means "hanging east" in French-Indian. Today, this head is one of more than 550 refuges in America's National Wildlife Refuge System, the nation's premier network of public lands and waters dedicated to conserving fish, wildlife and habitat.

Discover a wide range of things and wildlife right in your wheel chair and enjoy the view from the comfort of your vehicle. Check for wheelchair accessible routes.



Take the Auto Tour

The refuge offers an auto tour for wildlife viewing – the tour is 15.3 miles and is open from April 15 through December, weather permitting. The route takes you to places of interest on gravel roads, where you'll be encouraged to get out and investigate.



Yellow warblers are common in the refuge. They are often seen in the mixed-conifer forest. They are also found in the surrounding areas.

Look for signs with this pictorial map and/or map to help you find your way.



New sign to be mounted at the existing headquarters kiosk inviting visitor to take auto tour.

Jerry Cline, Refuge Manager

Biologist's Report

Well here we are winding down another winter and getting ready for spring. It is always nice to have a little time to slow down and catch-up during the winter months. Unlike like last winter (my first on the refuge) we had snow on the ground for most of the last few months. It has been nice getting out and snowshoeing a few times this winter. It is not all office work this time of year though as we have had few field projects this winter. The northeast Washington whitetail project is proceeding and the trappers just finished up a few days ago. They were able to get 31 radio collars on deer on the refuge this winter. This the second year of a three year project and the first year has already produced a lot of good information on timing and routes of deer migration in our corner of Washington. Some of the deer that winter on the refuge were found to move as far as Ione for the summer. Others were along the Hwy 20 corridor east of the refuge and a couple stayed on the refuge, barely moving a mile from their trap site all year. So the first year of the project saw deer that are spread out over a pretty large area during summer

come to the refuge for the winter. We have also had bat detectors working on the refuge all winter. No detections so far. This is a good thing. One of the reasons for this project is related to the white-nose syndrome disease which has killed millions of bats in the east and is moving west. This fungal disease affects bats when they are hibernating. We think that the way it kills bats is by causing them to wake up from hibernation in the middle of winter. The bats then either starve or freeze to death. If they do manage to get back into hibernation before they die they no longer have enough energy to wake up when spring really gets here. So in this case no news is really good news when in come to bats in the winter.

As the seasons change to spring so does our work here on the refuge begin to change. Josh and Tyler worked out well last year and I am hoping to hire an intern and a summer bio tech again this year. We certainly have the work and if the budget allows I will welcome the help again. It's not just the administrative work that is shifting gears this time of year. Mourning doves have returned and I see that last year the first bluebirds were seen on the refuge just about the time this will be printed. As I write this the first red-winged blackbirds of spring have found the bird feeder behind my office. Some of the earliest mammals to emerge from their winter of hibernation are chipmunks and yellow-bellied marmots. Both are usually seen in early to mid-March. In late February there was a pair of Bald Eagles behind the office which are demonstrating courtship behavior. Is this the pair that nests on Bayley Lake, is there a new pair thinking about nesting along the Little Pend Oreille River, or will they head north in a few days? Only time will tell. Either way the pair which does nest on the lake should be getting ready to nest again. The first thing would be one or both birds starting to make repairs to the nest in late winter (about now) then laying eggs around the end of March. Some other birds like great horned owls and Clark's nut-crackers should be nesting now. Still other like the ubiquitous chickadee are still in winter feeding flocks. For more information on black-capped chickadees, see the critter of the season below.

Finally, we are conducting the latest habitat management project along Bear Creek Road between the entrance and the fire cache. Watch for log trucks in this stretch during early spring. I hope you all are able to

get out and enjoy your National Wildlife Refuge this spring.



Critter of the Season

There is a little black and white bird that is the denison of backyard bird feeders over most of the US and Canada. The feisty little black-capped chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) is also one of the most frequently seen birds on the refuge. This familiar bird of both forest and town can be seen in nearly all forest types in Washington State. Several birds have been using the bird feeder outside my office. You are probably familiar with the chickadees appearance and its chick-a-dee-dee call or even it's short two or three note cheerful song. Did you know that chickadees have excellent memories? They can easily remember where they have found food in years past. That steady stream of birds visiting your feeder is not just eating your sunflower seeds. Chickadees cache seeds for later consumption. Their little bird brains are able remember numerous cache sites even under snow when the world appears very different. Additionally, during those long cold winter nights they are able to lower the body temperature several degrees becoming hypothermic. This allows them to burn fewer calories to maintain body heat and enable them to make it until next morning. This is also why you may have noticed a lot of activity around your feeder at first light. They need to pack in those calories once they do get their temperature back to normal. Speaking of food, they are among the most selective of the birds at your feeder. They are able to judge the fat content of sunflower seeds by picking them up and feeling the weight of the seeds. In spite of this pickiness with their seeds they will eat just about anything. They are especially fond of spiders and regularly chip into tree bark to extract spider eggs. They have even been seen picking the fat from dead deer. They are cavity nesters and regularly use bird houses. They can be found almost anywhere on the refuge most of the year. However, to see them nesting look

for them around the Christian Meadow bluebird trail on the Bear Creek side near the house.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Winter 2012-13—Nature Notes

Our bird feeders continue to be unusually slow this year. The first bird I saw on the feeder outside my office window was a northern shrike which landed on the roof on November 20. It started to sleet and the bird took off. At the beginning of December the shrike was hanging around again for a few days. It uses the top of the bird feeder as a hunting perch. I watched it feed on flies along the front of Headquarters and in the yard.

On December 13 Mike, our biologist, had a black-capped chickadee on the feeder outside his office window –the first bird to visit our feeders this winter, but still there were no birds at my feeder. The shrike does perch on top of my feeder before foraging in the yard. I also saw a northern flicker do the same thing. Wild turkeys are around the feeders but not jumping up on feeders as they have done in past winters. On December 14 I saw the first bird to visit the front feeder (my feeder) - two black-capped chickadees. I watched a male northern flicker feeding in front of Headquarters. He looked under the door mat, stood on tip toes to check out the door frame where he was rewarded with something edible and found lots more to eat in the rocks next to the building- perhaps dead flies. He even was tossing rocks over his back to move them out of the way so he could get to the flies- a behavior I had not seen before. Wednesday, January 23rd was the first lunch time walk I took during that week week. Monday was a holiday and Tuesday was so cold I decided not to freeze my cheeks. I started on the south end of the Mill Butte Trail. I was just getting to the part of the trail that levels off when I heard common ravens calling excitedly and then a bald eagle called. I figured there was a kill around the area. I started walking toward the creek and saw a couple of ravens, two adult bald eagles and two immature bald eagles fly up from below me. Once I could see down to the creek, I saw bloody areas on the snow, an eviscerated stomach and a dead yearling deer. Much of the hind quarters were eaten and the rib cage was exposed. The head and neck looked untouched. I took some photos and walked around the area looking for tracks to identify the predator. The snow around the body was completely packed down. I found a deer bed under the low hanging conifer branches and what looked like coyote scat in the middle of it. I wondered if a coyote was the predator. Then I walked around mid-hill through the brush heading up the creek looking for tracks. The snow conditions were not good for tracking.

Once back at the office I reported my findings to our biologist and manager and showed them the photos. Later that afternoon, Mike decided to put a game cam on the kill and asked me to take him to the spot. So I did. When I got to where I could see down to the creek, the dead deer was gone. This was only 4 hours later. I looked around and saw it had been dragged uphill about 15 feet and was hidden under low hanging conifer branches that were full of snow. Mike put the camera up then went down for a look at where the deer had been dragged from. He saw a brown print that clearly was a cougar print. I just had to wonder if that cougar watched me walking around through the brush along the creek as I looked for tracks. I still have not seen a cougar on the Refuge.

On February 5 I decided to walk toward Chimney Pasture and come back along the Little Pend Oreille River. I have been amazed at how little bird activity there are some days as I'm walking and this was one of those days. As I got near the river I could see old moose tracks heading up river along the bank. I also saw muddy turkey tracks in the snow where the birds had gone to the river's edge. Wherever there were old dried flower stalks sticking out of the snow there were many tiny seeds on the snow. I wondered if that was because birds were now feeding on the dried flower heads. I had walked down here other times and had not seen the seeds on the snow.

Large mammal sightings have been few. An elk was seen on Rookery Road January 3; a bull moose on Starvation Depression February 7 and a coyote on the hillside along Bear Creek Road on February 13.

We have seen bald eagles on and off in the cottonwood tree behind Headquarters and Mike saw a golden eagle perched there January 31. He also watched a pair of bald eagles mating in the tree and hopes we will have another nesting pair on the Refuge.

Despite all the snow cover we have had this winter, I have not seen a great amount of tracks except deer, which are everywhere. Other tracks I have seen are coyote, moose, turkey, squirrel, small rodent and songbird tracks. On January 3 Mike saw rodent tracks right in front of the Headquarters door with wing marks in the snow. And we saw more of the same out the side door window. Clearly some raptor was after them for a meal.

But I'm sure most of you are longing for spring. February 20 was a beautiful sunny day and 3 male red-winged blackbirds finally made it out to the Refuge and were singing. I also heard a northern pygmy owl calling that morning. Spring is in the air for sure. Can the buttercups be far behind?

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

2013 Mushroom Foray

Once again we are holding a mushroom outing on the Refuge. Join mycologist Jim Groth and his wife JoAnn on Sunday, May 19, for a day of observing, identifying, photographing and collecting mushrooms at several sites. We usually find morels and sometimes other edible mushrooms. We will meet at 9:30 at Refuge Headquarters (follow the brown signs as you head east out of Colville on the Tiger Highway, also called Highway 20 or 3rd Avenue in town). Bring a lunch and be prepared for rain. We are finished at about 3:30 PM. If you plan to go, e-mail us at joann.groth@yahoo.com. We usually have a waiting list, so accurate information about your attendance gives consideration to others.

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 2013 Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last August 16th and will extend until next (2013) 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.

Check the Friends website for galleries of past winners. <http://refugefriends.com>.

Information and entry forms are available from me at jan-derson@ultraplix.com. Next time you visit the Refuge, don't forget your camera!

Joel Anderson

Friends Contest Coordinator

October is traditionally the month for membership renewals, but we would still love to have your renewal. You can renew online with a credit card at <http://refugefriends.com>.

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

Newsletter Necessities

Number 44 - 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

March

13th -- Board Meeting – 6:00 p.m.
15-17th—Home and Garden Show

April

10th— Board Meeting –6:00 p.m.

May

8th – Board Meeting – 6:00 p.m.
18th—Flood, Flowers and Feathers Festival
19th—Mushroom Outing—9:30 am
12th—Caribou Lecture—6:30 p.m.

