



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Summer 2013

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

Number 45

### From the President

Summer is almost here and there are plenty of activities planned at the refuge for the season. During June you can have a chance to hike with the friends and do some trail work with the Washington Trails Association (WTA).

The WTA will be working on the Beaver Pond Overlook/ Big Pines trail on June 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. If you want to join them, for one or both days, please go to their website to register ([wta.org](http://wta.org)). They are a great organization that has helped out at the refuge many times in the past, including most of the construction of the Mill Butte trail. Its a good time to meet other hikers in the region and get to know some new friends.

On Saturday June 15<sup>th</sup> I will be leading a hike at the refuge. This year the plan is to hike to the Kidney Pond. This is an easy 3.5 mile hike that has history, fire and forest ecology, wildflowers, wildlife, and of course the pond. We will also be able to overlook some of last winters thinning operation and learn why it was done. We will meet at headquarters at 9:00 AM and it is a short drive from there to the start of the hike. Afterward if anyone is up to it there are a number of short hikes in the area where I can point out some interesting old homesteads. Bring good hiking shoes or boots, water, bug spray and a snack. Hope you can join me. For more info you can email me at: [bigdan65@yahoo.com](mailto:bigdan65@yahoo.com).

This year will be the first year for the Friends of the LPONWR to award two \$500.00 scholarships to local students moving on to study in environmentally related fields. The winners will be announced in June. Good luck to all.

Lastly I would like to thank the volunteers who helped

out at the Flood, Flowers and Feathers Festival at the Turnbull NWR. It is a great family event that we hope to continue to participate in. Join us next year and learn about the unique features and environment, of the Turnbull and the surrounding area. Thanks also to the Friends and staff at the Turnbull for putting on this event.

Keep an eye on our website and Facebook page for summer events at the refuge.

Happy exploring this summer.

**Dan Price, President**

### Refuge Manager's Meandering



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 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 offspring 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 a 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.

**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

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

Here we are once again moving from spring into summer. There are signs of this transition all around us. The cottonwoods and willows along the Little Pend Oreille River are once again covered with green leaves. More migratory birds are showing up just about every day. Spring turkey season is winding down and fishing season is in full swing. One of the sure signs of summer is nesting bluebirds on the refuge. One of the nests behind headquarters is already about to fledge. Both western and mountain bluebirds will nest several times through the summer. Many pair in our area will be able to raise as many 4 broods over the next several months. The summer field season will be upon by the time read this. Once again I look forward to summer staff being

around the office and running around on a number of projects. I will have two student interns working for me this year. We'll be up before the sun and doing those early morning bird surveys any day now. A number of other interesting projects are on the schedule for the summer as well. Last year's frog inventory was success and I hope to do some similar work with reptiles this year. We also got some funding to do one more year of weed control in the Slide Creek Wildlife Area this summer. The Slide Creek fire is turning out to be a great site for wildlife. It has been a popular site for birders looking for several species of woodpeckers which have been drawn to the burned trees. This should continue for another year or two. In addition to birds it was one of the best places on the refuge for wildflowers last summer. I hope that will continue this year. We often think of fire as a disaster and it is tragic when a fire burns through homes. In a natural forest system, though, it provides many benefits to dozens or hundreds of species that are adapted to its passage. In addition to many birds like black-backed and Lewis' woodpeckers many species of plants thrived in recent burns like Slide Creek. Last summer the unit had some of the densest fireweed and heart-leaved arnica I have ever seen. The native wild tobacco is another wildflower that thrives in this area. The majority of the trees themselves will do much better following this natural "thinning". This benefit comes in many forms. It includes the removal of thick vegetation that blocked sunlight from reaching the forest floor. It also provides a major influx of fertilizer in the form of ash mixing with the soil. Some species like fireweed and lodge pole pine have thick coats covering the seeds which need to be burned or melted off before the seed can germinate. Other plants may burn down to the roots but the fire stimulates growth hormones and flowering. If you have not been to the burn area check it out some time. The site is about a ten minute walk off the county road. For detailed direction feel free to contact us at the refuge headquarters.

I would like to thank all the folks who have helped with nest boxes this spring. In addition to the regular bluebird trial, several members of the Friends of the LPO helped build and install several boxes for Flammulated Owls-- an important ponderosa pine related species on the refuge. Nest sites are lacking and hopefully this project will help improve their numbers. For more information on the owls, see below. I hope you all have a great summer and get a chance to come and

enjoy your national wildlife refuge. When you do visit, feel free to stop by headquarters and say hello and let us know what you saw.

### Critter of the Season



Flammulated Owls (*Otus flammeolus*) can be one of the most difficult birds to detect even where they are common. They are found throughout the Rocky Mountain region wherever you find ponderosa and the closely related Apache pines. Flammulated is Latin and means flame colored and the birds are indeed a mottled gray and orange. This pattern blends in well with the bark of the ponderosa pines where they typically nest. They are a small owl that stands only 6 to 6.5 inches tall with a wingspan of about 15 inches. Unlike most owls there is virtually no difference in size between males and females. They are also the only small owl in the USA with dark eyes.

They nest from British Columbia to El Salvador. Birds in Canada and the US migrate south into Central America for the winter. Here in the Pacific Northwest they are the only owl to do a long distance migration. They nest in tree cavities but will use nest boxes when natural cavities are not available or limited in number. Here on the refuge they should arrive from Mexico in late May and will be calling and nesting throughout June and July. Eggs hatch in about 3 weeks and the young fledge in about another 3 weeks.

Although they do respond to owl calls, they have a very soft hoot that may not be heard at a great distance. This soft voice combined with being active only at

night makes them difficult to locate. They will eat small mammals such as shrews but they primarily feed on large insects. They are especially fond of hawk moths which are among the largest moths in North America. They will also take large grasshoppers, beetles and many other types of insect. They hunt moths by grabbing them out of the air with their talons (feet). In order to accommodate this hunting technique, they are very agile flyers and their long wings allow them to fly faster than most species of owls. Here on the refuge look or listen for them wherever you find large ponderosa pines. On some warm summer night you may be able to catch a look at our “owl of flames”

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

### **Spring Wildlife 2013**

Bird migration has been slow this spring. I usually hear Townsend’s warblers in mid to late April but have not heard any on the Refuge. Other birds I have not seen on the Refuge yet include spotted sandpiper, both eastern and western kingbirds, and most of the warblers. The only warblers here so far are yellow-rumped, yellow, Wilson’s and orange-crowned. Wilson’s snipe arrival was way late compared with other years and even the hummingbirds were a bit later than usual. I normally hear great horned owls calling back and forth by Chimney Pasture. This year we had a timber sale above that area and I never did hear them calling. Perhaps it was too much disturbance for them. Say’s phoebe and Hammond’s flycatchers are here; the rest of the flycatchers will be arriving as this goes to print.

For mammals, elk and moose are being seen. A yearling moose has been seen by the Samson Orchard Gate and swimming across the Beaver Ponds. A cow and yearling were seen on the Rookery Cut-off Road. Elk have been seen feeding in the Chester Field; herds of up to 20 elk along with 60 or more white-tailed deer. I saw 3 bull elk run across that field one afternoon. The missing mammal is Black bear; usually we have some sightings by now. If you have seen any on the Refuge let us know when and where.

Columbian ground squirrels have taken up residence at Refuge Headquarters. In other years you always saw them scamper across the road by Chester Field (the

field next to our Fire Cache) and they are still there. This year they are also making the lawn behind Headquarters home. Only occasionally do they wander around to the front of Headquarters where I can see them. These ground squirrels are in the same family as the familiar red squirrel of our pine forests but with a very different life style. They live underground and the young are born in these underground burrows. They also hibernate seven to eight months of the year in these burrows. Their diet is mostly grass, leaves, bulbs, fruit and seeds but they will eat birds, insects and other small mammals occasionally. Contrast that life style with the red squirrel that spends its life above ground and usually nests in a hollow tree or between branches of a tree. This squirrel does not hibernate and in the fall will store nuts and seeds to get it through the winter months. Their diet includes seeds, nuts, fruits, insects, mushrooms and occasionally bird eggs, young birds, mice and even young snowshoe hare. The ground squirrel mannerisms remind me of Prairie dogs the way they sit up on their haunches to look around then scamper quickly back to the safety of their burrow. They are interesting to watch.

Let me mention butterflies. We have seen mourning cloak, blues, swallowtails, skippers, whites, alpenes and fritillaries. If you want to learn more, attend our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual butterfly count July 13, probably meeting at Headquarters at 8 am. Cost is \$3.00. Please call Headquarters to confirm date and time, which is weather dependent.

On our Earth Day clean-up the middle of April, I was clearing tree branches and debris out of the road and uncovered a long-toed salamander. Needless to say- I put that piece of wood back over the salamander’s spot.

On March 27 I saw a pair of red-tailed hawks circling and doing a talon drop display just west of Headquarters. This is a courtship display where the pair soars near each other in wide circles that get smaller and smaller. One or both birds will drop their talons when they get close to each other and they vocalize.

April 29 I saw a Say’s phoebe carrying a stick in its mouth- nest building I assume. Someday I’d like to sit somewhere to just watch a bird construct its nest.

On April 30th our hummingbird feeder was almost frozen solid when I got here. That same day I watched

chipmunks climbing into up our birdfeeder and into the plexiglas in the middle of the feeder tray where all the sunflower seeds are. A male red-winged blackbird was feeding in the tray when a chipmunk climbed up the post and inside the feeder. The blackbird watched and pecked at the plexiglas. Then the chipmunk came around on the feeder tray to the side with the blackbird and the bird lunged at the chipmunk with its beak - effectively scaring it off.

On May 2<sup>nd</sup> I heard woodpecker sounds coming from the aspens next to the house across the parking lot from Headquarters and saw Hairy woodpeckers mating. A week later Jerry, our manager, saw a Hairy woodpecker excavating a nest cavity in one of those aspens. Hopefully they will raise a successful brood.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup> I saw a dove fly into a pine tree across the road from my office window. I grabbed my binoculars to try and identify it and saw it was a Eurasian collared dove. Suddenly a smaller bird came after it and chased it off. I've seen the American kestrel pair chase birds out of the cottonwood behind Headquarters but this did not look like a kestrel so I don't know what bird drove it off.

Now is a great time to explore the Refuge- birds, butterflies and flowers are everywhere and mosquitoes are not out in force yet. But ticks are, so be sure to check yourself when you get home.

**Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff**

### **Mushroom Foray on the Refuge**



On May 19 we held a spring mushroom field trip for 16 participants. There was much interest in the event resulting in a long waiting list. While the diversity of mushrooms seen was not great, people were able to view and learn something about mushrooms large and small, insignificant, poisonous or unknown. Collecting for the table was excellent. Black morels were found at all four stops, and some people went home with many. In addition, at two stops cauliflower coral mushrooms (*Ramaria rasilispora*) were abundant. The good news is a new productive site for both edibles was found right alongside the auto tour road, so this is yet another reason to take the tour and keep your eyes open. I will say no more about the exact location.

**Jim Groth**

### **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 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 especially 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**

## Newsletter Necessities

### Number 45 - 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)

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*Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge*.

### Calendar

#### June

12<sup>th</sup> - Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.  
15<sup>th</sup> - Hike the Refuge--9:00 a.m.

#### July

10<sup>th</sup> - Board Meeting -6:00 p.m.

#### August

14<sup>th</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.

## Friends of the LPO

### Membership Application

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### Annual Membership

\_\_\_\_ I would like my newsletter emailed to me  
\_\_\_\_ Basic Member \$10                      \_\_\_\_ New  
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\_\_\_\_ Corporate Member \$100  
\_\_\_\_ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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



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