



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Fall 2013

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

Number 46

### From the President

I hope everyone is enjoying the summer. It has been a busy summer at the refuge as the staff has been busy on a number of projects. Probably the most exciting is the continued work on the new auto tour due to open up this fall. Included in auto tour is a new bathroom (vault toilet) at headquarters. We also have a number of exciting events coming up this fall.

Before I go any further I would first like to congratulate our first two winners of the Friends scholarships, Dylan Schanz and Brogan Bateman. Dylan Schanz will be attending St. Cloud University in Minnesota to study Mechanical Engineering. He plans to use what he has learned from his Alternative Energy Classes in high school to further enhance his studies in this area. For Dylan's Senior Project he extended the Colville Rotary Trail, thus proving his interests in improving our environment. Brogan Bateman's love of the outdoors and her studies in Biology have made her keenly aware of environmental issues. Her passion to keep our earth beautiful will be shared with her students when she is teaching biology. Brogan will study at Brigham Young University this Fall and continue to pursue her love of the outdoors as well as her interests in environmental studies.

Our annual membership meeting will be Saturday September 28<sup>th</sup> at 9:30. The location will be the Fire cache/maintenance area at the refuge. Find out what we and the staff have been up to and take an in depth tour of the new auto tour and the hikes that accompany it. We will also be electing new board members and give a quick review of the past year. There will also be a BBQ (hamburgers, brats, veg. burgers.) If you plan to attend please bring a side dish. There will also be coffee and pastries at the start for coffee break.

If you wish to become more involved in the refuge and the friends consider becoming a board member. For more information feel free to contact me.

Another great event coming up will be a book signing and presentation of authors Craig Romano and Rich Landers new guide book: "Day Hiking Eastern Washington." Craig will be signing (and selling) the new book and he will give a multi-media presentation. I attended his book signing in Republic and he does a great job. He is high energy and very passionate about this book. He will be happy to answer any questions you may have. Craig has hiked over 15,000 miles of trails in the State so he is a great resource. Included in the book are two hikes on the refuge – McDowell Environmental Education Trail and Mill Butte Trail. This event is co-sponsored, locally, by the Friends of the Little Pend Oreille, the Kettle Range Conservation Group, the Stevens County Public Libraries and the Colville Chamber of Commerce. The event is September 25<sup>th</sup> at the Colville Community College. Doors open at 5:30 and the presentation begins at 6:30. Come early and meet Craig and all the groups involved. Snacks and drinks will be provided. Hope to see you there.

In September there will be the opportunity for volunteers to continue our restoration efforts on the Harnett Barn. Some time in late September the restoration carpenter will be looking for some help. It is a fun and interesting project. Dates and details have to still be finalized. We will keep you updated on our website and Facebook page.

Contact information: Dan Price email:  
[bigdan65@yahoo.com](mailto:bigdan65@yahoo.com) Phone: 509-684-5863

I have had a few email issues, so if I do not respond in a few days please call.

**Dan Price, President**

## Refuge Manager's Meandering

This summer was one of the busiest summers I can remember. I probably say that every year, but this year must have been the busiest! We had several projects planned that enhanced the Refuge for both resident wild-life and visiting humans.

In the last newsletter I described in detail the new auto tour. The Refuge planned to install the majority of the signs and parking and pull off areas, and we've begun that work. A few sites, particularly ones that include asphalt paving for handicapped access or special features like rock walls, was installed by a contractor. If all goes according to plan, that project should be finished by this fall.

We also worked to upgrade the existing interpretive kiosk at headquarters. A new map was installed that includes the routes of the new auto tour and hiking trails, none of which existed when the kiosk was initially installed. The short trails circling the pond will be upgraded with a new surface, and a spur trail leading visitors south to the bluff above the Little Pend Oreille River will provide a view of the river and the valley. Responding to visitor and volunteer comments, we will also be installing an accessible restroom for the comfort of visitors arriving on weekends or other times when the headquarters restrooms are not available.

The Washington Trails Association volunteer crews returned to complete the Big Pine Trail loop in June. This trail starts along Rookery Road and is available as a "side trip" for auto touring visitors. Their tireless work on that and the Mill Butte Trail have added immensely to visitors' enjoyment of the Refuge.

Late September should find us working with the Regional restoration carpenter to complete the restoration of the historic Harnett/Sampson barn begun last summer. Plans include replacing the missing floor planks with historically correct circular sawn timber from the Refuge, and replacing the logs along the west wall that were removed many years ago. This should bring the barn back to near original configuration and provide visitors a unique opportunity to glimpse some of the lifestyle of the original settlers in this valley.

Not all the work we did this summer was for human visitors; we also had habitat improvement projects on the long work list. The Christianson Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project has wrapped up after several months of timber thinning. A major emphasis of that project was

to "daylight", or remove encroaching conifers, from around several quaking aspen stands. Aspens are a sun loving tree; crowding and shading by conifers reduces their vigor and suppresses stand development. We've also removed trees from the meadow adjacent the Sampson Orchard area. Like a garden left unattended, lodge pole and ponderosa pines invade the meadows, trying to reclaim the open areas cleared by settlers for agriculture. We value these open areas for the unique habitat they provide and use several tools including timber harvesting and prescribed fire to maintain these important areas.

Over the last several years we've worked to improve the vegetation in the Chester Field, the large meadow situated along Bear Creek Road between the fire-cache/maintenance compound and Refuge headquarters. The old farm field had been dominated by a wide variety of undesirable, non-native vegetation (polite language for weeds). Our efforts to establish native grasses and enhance their palatability using prescribed fire were rewarded last winter and spring when we routinely observe over fifty white-tailed deer grazing in that meadow every evening. Encouraged by the result of our work there, we're beginning a multi-year project this summer to convert the domestic grasses in several old agricultural fields to native grassed and forbs. This will be a slow, incremental process, but we think the long term benefits will be significant.

These are just some of the projects we worked on this summer. As I said, it was a busy summer on the LPO NWR. I invite everyone to visit sometime in the next few months and check on our progress.

**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

## Refuge Biologist's Report

*I decided to do something a little different this time. So the following report is from Jess Lane, our student intern this past summer.*

Summer at the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge will press on, but my time here as an intern is coming to a bittersweet end. As an undergraduate studying English and Natural Resource Sciences at Washington State University, working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been invaluable in helping me make some important and rapidly approaching decisions in terms of my future career.

There have been so many exciting happenings at the refuge this season. The bald eagles spotted displaying courtship behavior last spring have a new nest, which we

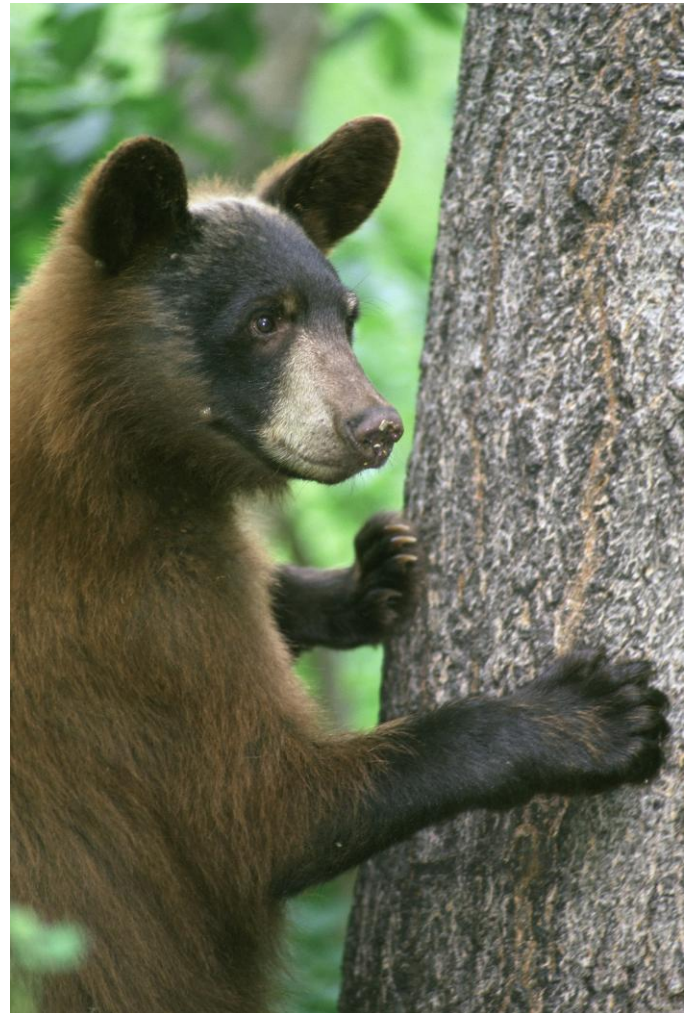
monitored until their single nestling fledged around July 17th. The northeast whitetail deer project is progressing further as plans are made for another season of winter trapping. It should be interesting to see how the data collected this coming year compares to the last, as well as to see what conclusions can be made about deer migrations in this corner of the state. After a few weeks of technical difficulties, we were finally able to get the bat detector up and running at Dailey Lake. The report we received a few weeks ago shows that the Silver-haired Bat, Hoary Bat, California Myotis, and Little Brown Myotis were most commonly detected at this particular location.

Though I was thrilled to see such bat diversity, these little critters proved to be a bit of a headache for the rest of the staff this summer when a colony of little browns figured out that headquarters is a rather pleasant place to roost during the day. Though not glamorous, the weed work we have done at the Slide Creek burn served as a great educational experience in terms of habitat restoration, as well as being a great chance to bond with co-workers. The Fourth of July Butterfly Count had a successful second year. There were more participants, which allowed us to cover more of the refuge and come up with a total of 32 species. The especially hot, dry days provided the perfect opportunity to conduct some reptile surveys. One of my favorite projects this summer was setting out cameras around the refuge, hoping to capture some passing wildlife. Pulling out those SD cards is something reminiscent of that eager Christmas morning anticipation; our efforts were rewarded with some great footage of coyotes, moose, deer, squirrels, bobcat and even a cougar.

I was delighted to spot the antics of a river otter and witness the acrobatics of osprey diving for fish at Potter's Pond. I saw several moose, though the most impressive sighting was of a huge bull passing through the LPO River Camp. Mike and I had the rare opportunity to watch a Virginia Rail foraging from the blind at the McDowell Marsh Trail. Just the other day, Barbara and I saw a herd of about twenty elk perusing the hillside as you enter the refuge on Bear Creek Road. The deer are thriving too, as are their clumsily adorable spotted fawns. I have been lucky enough to see black bears of multiple colors, from cinnamon to chocolate brown to the traditional black. However, the most memorable wildlife experience to date was when my friend and I were driving down Blacktail Mountain Road and saw two large shadows fly overhead. I stopped and jumped out of the vehicle to get a better look, and saw the two bright yellow eyes of a Great Gray Owl peer back at me before flying farther into the dense forest cover.

The Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge has been quite the summer adventure and, not only that, a life-changing learning experience. Though the wildlife and scenery is just as incredible as I had hoped it would

be, I have discovered that it is the people here that make this place so special. The LPO community has taught me and supported me throughout the season, making the experience truly memorable and meaningful. So next time you find yourself hiking the Mill Butte Trail or setting up your tent at the Cottonwood camp, appreciate not only the wildlife and the beautiful surroundings, but also the ones who work to make it all possible.



### **Critter of the Season**

The American black bear (*Ursus americanus*) is a seldom seen but fascinating inhabitant of forests throughout the country. In spite of their name they can be almost any color and as many as  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the bears here in Northeast Washington may be colors other than black. Just this year bears on the refuge have been seen with black, brown and tan colored fur. Bears are what we call omnivores which mean they will eat just about anything. They will hunt animals as large as elk or as small as squirrels or even ants. They also graze on grass and eat a

lot of berries and mushrooms. One of the most widely known facts about bears is that they hibernate. Many hibernating animals like chipmunks or bats go into a deep coma-like state for the entire period. Bears tend to sleep much lighter than these other mammals. They may even wake up for a couple of days during the winter and wander about looking for food. In order to facilitate hibernation bears have a unique physiology. When bears hibernate their body temperature drops about 15 to 20 degrees but is still well above freezing. Their digestive system and kidneys shut down and their heart beats only a few times a minute. Bears can sleep more than 3 months straight without eating, drinking, or expelling any waste. They are able to survive waste and cholesterol levels that would kill the same animal in the summer. This has prompted a lot of research with respect to kidney failure and hardening of arteries. Bear hibernation may one day be the key to solving many human health problems in these areas. Although not seen very often they can be seen almost anywhere on the refuge during spring and summer. So the next time you visit the refuge keep your eyes open for our uniquely American bear.

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

### **Summer Wildlife 2013**

I began my last wildlife article with bird migration and I'll begin that way again. Then it was spring migration, now it is fall migration.

Birds have started to flock up-- especially the blackbird family. It just amazes me the way they fly together in a tight group; turning this way and that just like a school of fish in the ocean. I've read that a reason birds flock up is a selfish reason--the larger the flock, the less chance of being killed by a predator and the better chance of locating a predator or a threat. Flocks feed together which is advantageous because all get to feed on a food source one bird located; but a large flock could be a disadvantage if the food supply was not adequate for the entire flock. A flock can also benefit aerodynamically which conserves energy. In winter the body heat of the flock helps the birds stay warm. But how does the flock react so quickly and turn together or split apart then merge back together? One theory is each bird strives to avoid colliding with the birds around it and strives to move in the same direction as its neighbors. And the birds are not eventually distributed in the flock- more space is left in front of and behind each bird. The result of a change of direction is a ripple through the flock rather than an instantaneous movement. Do some reading yourself- it is a fascinating topic.

I mentioned in the last newsletter that I would love the opportunity to sit and watch a bird build a nest... well the robins decided to build a nest above the headquarters door outside my window. Talk about an opportunity! Unfortunately I had work to do so could only take a look once in a while. Those birds were bringing nesting material so long it hung a foot or so in front of the door; 2 feet below the nest. After getting the basic nest shape completed, the sidewalk below the nest had stalks of vegetative material that had fallen off the nest. The robin would hop around picking up a number of those stalks in its beak then, with what seemed like great effort, launch itself almost straight up to the nest. After placing the plant matter in the nest, the bird would sit and move its body around to shape the new material into the nest. In early July I watched the pair of robins defending their territory- the front yard of Headquarters. A pair of Brown-headed cowbirds was attempting to forage in the yard and the robins kept flying at them to scare them off. After a few attempts the cowbirds got the message and left. The robins successfully fledged 4 young on July 17; they started nest building on June 14.

Jess, our biology intern, arrived in early June. On her first day at LPO she saw a coyote, a moose and a bear. On close to her last day she saw a cougar. One of her tasks was to monitor trail cameras which had pictures of white-tailed and mule deer, coyote, cattle, bear, bobcat and cougar. Be sure to read her article in this newsletter- she had quite the summer of wildlife viewing.

Each summer it seems one mammal species is seen more often than others. This summer sightings of moose just barely edged out elk. I saw a young bull moose walking across the hill just across from Headquarters on August 1<sup>st</sup>. Other yearlings were seen at the Samson Orchard gate, Beaver Ponds, and Potter's Pond. Adult bull moose were seen at the Beaver Ponds, McDowell Lake and River Camp; cow moose at Bayley Lake, the Beaver Ponds, the Christianson homestead and Blacktail Mountain Road.

A few folks have reported seeing an elk herd in the Duran Springs area. On July 9th I was driving in just past Langelier curve, and a group of elk crossed the road in front of me and started up the hill. I whistled and they stopped to look at me. I saw a bull, cows and 2 calves. I started to move slowly trying to get an accurate count- I thought I saw about 12 animals. I was hearing the whistling sound the cows make. The herd started going up the hill and I was counting them when more animals came in from the right. I saw 2 large bulls and a few more calves- I'd say around 30 in the herd. That made my day. The evening of July 29 I saw about 20 elk in the same area- this time only cows and calves.



A Gray Catbird has been around Headquarters for some time. I enjoy hearing their catlike meowing call. When I had the opportunity of handling birds when banding them, the catbird was a favorite since they always wrapped their toes around my fingers and held on tight. And I love that chestnut brown color of their crissum or under tail coverts (the underside at the base of the tail). Mike, our biologist, discovered a Bald Eagle nest that we could see from Headquarters. He would get his spotting scope set up and we could see the eaglet in the nest. On July 17 Mike saw the young eagle hop out of the nest and onto a branch. On July 25 I saw the young eagle on the hillside behind the Shop. Driving into Headquarters on August 14th I saw the perfect photo op but did not have the proper camera lens to capture it. On a snag, the adult eagle was perched on a branch and the juvenile eagle was perched directly across from the adult on the other side of the trunk. They were so perfectly aligned - at the same height off the ground and the same distance from the tree trunk that they looked like bookends. I tried to get a photo but the adult started screaming at me before I could get close enough for a decent photo. Needless to say- I left the area immediately.

In mid-May we had a special visitor at the Refuge- Sharon Lindsay. She is volunteering to visit as many refuges as possible with Puddles the Blue Goose. I'm sure you know the U.S. Forest Service has Smokey Bear as their mascot; well the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has Puddles. If you go to this website <http://www.coastalrefuges.org/> you can click on "Puddles' Blog" and scroll down for photos of Puddles' visit to LPO. Sharon is passionate about refuges and her goal is to publish a book about refuges. I'll let you in on a secret- I got to wear the Puddles costume for the photos at LPO.

Now that the weather is starting to cool down it is a great time to explore the Refuge. Remember that some hunting seasons start on September 1.



**Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff**

“We don’t see things as they are; we see things as we are.”

--From the Talmud

## Newsletter Necessities

### Number 46 - 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 or emailed to all *Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge*.

## Calendar

### September

11<sup>th</sup> -- Board Meeting -- 6:00 p.m.  
28<sup>th</sup> -- Annual Meeting -- 9:30 a.m.

### October

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

### November

13<sup>h</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.



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