



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Fall 2014

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

Number 50

### From the President

Summer is slowly coming to an end and the cool winds of fall will soon be upon us. With the end of summer it is now time for our annual membership meeting. This is a good opportunity to find out what has been happening the past year and find out what projects and activities we have planned for the Fall. We will be meeting Saturday-September 13th at the Refuge. The meeting will be held at the Fire cache and will begin around 9:30 AM with 9:30 to 10:00 coffee and snacks and a meet and greet. 10:00 is the start of the meeting. Our Refuge manager, Jerry Cline, will have year-end roundup of what has been happening on the Refuge over the past year. I will also give a brief review of what is known as the new "Friends Policy" and how it will affect our group and the Refuge. Next up we will have Board elections. Here you all can help out. If you wish to become a little more involved and be up to date on Refuge issue please consider joining the board. We have been short a few member for a couple of years and we could use some new input. Its fun and does not take up that much of your time.

After the Board elections we will have lunch. Please bring a side dish or dessert. The board will provide the main course. Please RSVP at [friendslpo@gmail.com](mailto:friendslpo@gmail.com).

After lunch there will be a hike to the Durlin Springs area. We will start the hike from the Fire cache. The hike is a moderate 3.5 mile hike. Durlin Springs is a great birding area and is also a good place to spot deer and elk during the winter after the gates have closed.

A little more information on the new Friends Policy. The new policy's goals are to better outline the relationship between the Refuge and the Friends. The policy outlines how staff and Friends share responsibilities, fund raising issues, insurance issues and more. There have been some concerns over the new policy, which are being worked out. I can give a brief summary of some of the problems that have come up at Refuges across the country. Happily for us things are pretty clear cut and it is my

hope we will sign on to a new agreement with the Refuge this winter. If anyone would like to look over the new policy please let me know.

I would also like to thank all of you who have volunteered over the past year and I would also like to thank all members for your financial contributions. We have been able to keep our environmental education going strongly thanks to staff, volunteers and even some staff members from the Colville National Forest who have always been a great help. We also were able to keep up on some of our trail maintenance and many other projects and activities.

A special thanks goes out to Stephanie Wilson for organizing the programs and volunteers for the environmental education days for Colville school children.

Lastly thanks to all of you who volunteered or attended the Refuges 75th Anniversary celebration and Blue Goose Family Fun Bike Ride. It was a great success as we had about 100 people attend and enjoy the day at the Refuge. Thanks also the Clark's All Sport for their support and great mechanic who help many riders. Also thanks to the Browns Mountain Boys Bluegrass Band, Linda Shaw (our medical help), the Colville swim club (thanks for the chairs), Lori Roberts for catering and the local Rotary for supply kids bicycle helmets. Also thanks to the Refuge staff. Without them this event would not have been possible.

Keep you eye on our website and Facebook page for Fall activities and volunteering opportunities.

**Dan Price, President**

### Refuge Manager's Meandering

It's been a busy summer on the Refuge! The centerpiece of the summer was of course the Refuge's 75th Anniversary celebration on July 26th. About 100 people celebrated with us that day. The highlight of the event was

the Blue Goose Chase, a family-oriented bicycle ride around the new auto tour loop. The Chase was so successful we're going to do it again next year! Music by the Brown's Mountain Boys bluegrass band, cake and raffle prizes rounded out a great birthday celebration. The events success is directly contributable to the financial and moral support of the Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR. And let's not forget the refuge staff, many of whom worked very hard to complete the auto tour construction in time for the event, and then worked on their day off to make it a fun and safe event.

Our other big project this summer is replacing the water control structure in the dam on McDowell Lake. That dam and structure were installed in 1972, and it finally rusted through and started leaking last summer. We were able to temporarily patch it with a generous application of concrete at the wound site, but a total replacement is necessary. Digging into a dam holding back a 50 acre lake is not a project to be taken lightly, so we are trying to plan this operation carefully. We've already started to drain the lake in preparation for removal of the old structure. This draw down serves two purposes. We also plan to take advantage of the mostly empty lake to work with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to treat the lake with rotenone to kill the invasive Tench. Tench are a non-native species of fish inhabiting the lake and inhibiting the sustainability of the trout population. We've also recently discovered non-native sunfish in the lake, likely "planted" by a well-intentioned but misinformed member of the public. After the rotenone treatment and water control structure replacement, we'll begin refilling the lake this fall and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will restock the lake with trout next spring.

We also recently wrapped up the 1010 acre Pierce-Paulke Wildlife Habitat Management Project. This commercial thinning project removed most of the lodge pole pine and small diameter Douglas fir and ponderosa pine from several different units on the refuge. This results in a healthier stand of trees growing at a more natural density with increased shrub and other understory habitat components. If you drive the auto tour you'll pass parts of this project. Watch how the disturbed sites "heal" and green-up into much improved wildlife habitat.

I'd like to close this column by including the speech I gave at the Refuge anniversary celebration, I don't write many speeches, so please indulge me will I wring a little extra mileage out of this one.

"On May 2nd, 1939 President Franklin Roosevelt signed an executive order designating almost 40,000 acres in Stevens County Washington as a new national wildlife

refuge. The purpose of that refuge was "... as a breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife...". Here we are, 75 years later, celebrating that event. The refuge is still here fulfilling that purpose.

Let's talk about a few other good things that happened in 1939 and that are still with us today. John Steinbeck published his classic novel "Grapes of Wrath". It's a great book, and was made into a good movie. But it wasn't the only great literary milestone that year. Did you know that Batman, debuted as a comic book character in 1939? And while there's only been one Grapes of Wrath movie, there have been at least seven Batman movies! Both Steinbeck's novel and the comic book character are still enjoying public favor.

Both the *Wizard of Oz* and *Gone With the Wind* premiered in 1939. Thousands of motion pictures have been made since; but these two movies have remained favorites for three quarters of a century.

Women's nylon stockings first became available in 1939. Improved many times over the years, I'm told, but still with us to this day.

It was in 1939 that General Motors introduced the first passenger car equipped with a fully automatic transmission in their new Oldsmobile. While Oldsmobiles are no more made, try finding a passenger car without an automatic transmission. Good ideas last.

Probably the most important event in 1939 happened on September First, when Germany invaded Poland, igniting World War II, the worst armed conflict in human history. Fortunately that war ended long ago, but the zeal for public service displayed by soldiers and civilians during that war is still with us today.

The important characteristics found in these historical events: public favor and appreciation, constant improvement, recognizing a good idea, and dedication to public service, can all still be found here on the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge.

Nineteen Thirty-nine gave us many good things, and today we thank you for helping us celebrate this one."

**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

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

*I got a lot of positive feedback from letting the intern last year write up some thoughts on her summer. So I*

*thought I would try it again. First up is Emily. She came here from Virginia Tech University.*

The day I left for my summer internship at the Little Pend Oreille Refuge, I remember sitting aboard Delta flight 5411, watching Virginia shrink below us as the plane flew towards Washington. It was such a mixed bag of emotions: relieved to have completed another semester, sad to be leaving home, but mostly excited and eager to start an entirely new adventure out in the great wild west – and what an adventure it was!

Work began right away once I arrived and I knew right away I was in for a busy summer. One of my favorite projects was monitoring the bald eagle nest at Bayley Lake. Having the opportunity to watch two chicks grow and fledge was such a memorable experience. Camera trapping around the Refuge was also fantastic. We had such fun in the office sorting through all of the photos of bear cubs, cougars, elk, coyotes, and my favorite, moose! I also had the opportunity to design and plan a small mammal trapping study at Starvation Flats. While I only caught two deer mice, the exercise of researching and designing a field protocol was invaluable.

I learned so much from the various wildlife projects, but I know I learned just as much from the people at the LPO. Hard work, camaraderie, laughter, drive, empathy, and passion were all exhibited on a daily basis and it was a joy to come to work every morning. I left the East Coast not knowing a soul in Washington and I left with several friends and mentors. So while I'm back on the East Coast gearing up for my final year of school, the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge, its mountains and wildlife and people will always hold a special place in my heart!

*Next we have some thoughts from Aurelia who came to us from Chico State University in Northern California.*

The Refuge staff frequently repeats “summer is our busiest time of the year”. Coming into the middle of upgrading the auto tour, installing new interpretive signage, having record fires in the state, and planning the refuge’s 75th anniversary, I would have to say so. Not to mention all the exciting field work and wildlife involvement scratched on the calendar in the bio crew office; which soon became invaluable practice in building my knowledge of biological surveying, and land management. Thanks to this refuge, I have been exposed to so much more than opportunities that have advanced my career skill sets.

The annual bald eagle nesting started off the season.

Every other week or so us “bio girls”, consisting of Emily the Student Conservation Association intern, Kira the biological technician, and myself, a Bio Tech Volunteer would drive up Cliff Ridge Rd. with the spotting scope. We monitored the nest that towered over the edge of Bayley Lake until the last nestling fledged around the end of July. Either participating in weekly weed eradication, setting up game lure and trapping cameras, calling for owls at the peak of midnight, or running aspen and reptile surveys, we all stayed busy. Mike had to complete bird point counts before the peak of nesting season ended. Although, Mike’s bird identification expertise was essential to every sunrise bird survey that was conducted, us bio girls traded off in assisting those early-scheduled mornings. There is also the monthly water quality samples the refuge collects. Personally, I enjoy getting my arms wet for the short period of collecting water out of Bear Creek and Little Pend Oreille River. Another interest not only for me, but also the Refuge is the lovely insects. Apart from my independent entomology based projects designed for the expansion of known refuge specimens, weekly bee surveys are sent in to Regional biologists who aim to make all identifications to the genus or species level. For the aquatic and terrestrial insect collections I am leaving for the refuge, the best I can currently provide is identification to a family level. The current project is now draining the water out of McDowell Lake for eradicating Tench and rehabilitating the aquatic ecosystem. In all of our biological antics, I feel so blessed having extended this position until the end of September. I have become familiar with a variety of both flora and fauna of Washington, exposure to government protocols, the traveling lifestyle of fire fighters, community involved butterfly counts, leading field trips and workshops on LPO’s ecology and land management, and above all a loving, supportive staff.

## **Critter of the Season**



As we move into fall, hunters will begin to pursue their quarry on the refuge. One of lesser known of the game species is the spectacular spruce grouse. Spruce grouse

are the smallest of the three grouse on the refuge. Males have a rather striking black, white and gray pattern with bright red “eyebrows” during the breeding season. Females are grayish brown with strong barring on the underside. This color lets them all but turn invisible when sitting on a nest in the forest understory. They live exclusively in coniferous forests and are one of the few animals that can eat pine and spruce needles. In fact their diet is primarily needles supplemented by insects and other plants only during summer. The chicks eat primarily insects which are high in protein for growth but also because the capacity to digest highly acidic pine needles takes time to develop. Speaking of eating they have huge crops. They can eat 10 percent of their own weight in a single meal then spend the night sleeping and digesting all those pine needles. To put that into perspective that would be equivalent to a 200 lb man eating a 20 lb steak just before bed time. Spruce grouse would rather walk than fly but come fall and winter will fly into trees to forage. Every fall they grow pectinations (comb like projections) on their toes. These seem to provide them with a better grip on branches as well as wider snowshoe like surface over snow. The pectinations are shed in the spring only to regrow in the fall. Like other grouse they nest on the ground underneath a shrub or small tree. During the breeding season they make a low pitch owl like hoot. This hoot is said to be the lowest frequency sound made by any bird in the world. Here on the refuge they can be found in the higher elevations. Observations are usually near the top of Blacktail Mountain Road or Olson Creek Road. So the next time you visit the refuge high country keep your eyes (and ears) open for this often elusive bird.

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

### **Summer Wildlife 2014**

Thanks to our Friends group, all our volunteers and all the folks that came out to celebrate our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary with us. It was a great event. We had over 100 folks here and over half rode bikes on our Auto Tour Route. If you have not seen the new interpretative signs along the route take a drive and see for yourself. We have had lots of positive comments on the new interpretative route. With all the high temperatures we have had, 3+ weeks, wildlife sightings have been down. It's not that the wildlife is not still here; it is just not being seen as much. Every summer there seems to be one species of mammal that is seen more than any other- this year it has been the moose. A larger number of elk have been seen since they hang out in gangs (really- a group of elk is called a gang) but there have been fewer sightings of elk than moose.

And these moose have been seen everywhere on the Refuge: on the Auto Tour Route by the Aspen Sign, Bayley Lake, the Beaver Ponds, Berg Lane meadow, Big Pine Trail, Blacktail Mountain Road, the Christianson homestead, Headquarters, Lost Law Road, Pierce Lake and Sampson Orchard. Bulls, cows, bull and cow, cow and calf- all kinds of combinations have been seen but not many young.

Elk have been seen in Durlan Springs, the Christianson homestead and Starvation Flat. Most sightings of gangs of elk have been in Starvation Flat.

Bear sightings have been fewer than normal. They have been seen on Bear Creek Road, Blacktail Mountain Road and Olson Creek Road. I remember a turkey hunter came in and said he saw a bear with cubs heading toward the Fire Cache area in the middle of the afternoon.

An otter with young were seen in Potter's Pond and a cougar with young on Bear Creek Road. See Kira's article below for the complete report on this cougar sighting.

Our trail cams have been busy with elk, deer, cougar, bobcat, coyote, cows and many bears. One camera had 4 or 5 different bears visiting the same area but no wolves have been captured on camera.

Not much for unusual bird sightings. We have been hearing evening grosbeaks and Clark's nutcrackers. I watched a group of juvenile chipping sparrows foraging in the Headquarters lawn mid August. One caught a grasshopper and kept hitting it against the sidewalk. When it was sufficiently tenderized it ate it after fleeing from another hungry sparrow.

The other day I was out for my lunch break and while sitting on the hillside NW of Headquarters I heard a loud splash in the LPO River. I immediately started walking towards the river to see what was there, but saw nothing to explain the loud noise. Getting back to the office I learned Aurelia, our Biology Intern, had also heard the splash and not seen what caused it.

Just a reminder--hunting seasons start September 1.

**Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff**

## Three Lions

It's a bluebird morning, still early and there is a chill lingering down by Bear Creek. A Wednesday in early June leaves the Refuge all but devoid of people and we are no doubt the first down the auto-tour road. With our spotting scope tucked safely in the backseat of the truck, we drive out of Headquarters, heading for Bayley Lake. A couple bird monitoring projects require our attention.

The truck turns easily around a bend into a particularly shady section of the road. There before us, about 20 yards away, are three cougars. They scatter like startled birds from a feeder as we approach. Two go uphill, one goes downhill.

As they dart into the brush, I clearly see that two are small and vaguely spotted – yearlings!

Despite the descending cloud of mosquitoes, we stay frozen in place, hoping to catch just one more glimpse of the elusive alpha predator. Our patience is rewarded. One of the small cats shoots up the hill but then changes its mind, perhaps unwilling to separate from its sibling. It crosses the road and again presents itself for our viewing.

Mom follows soon after. Caggy and experienced, however, she chooses to cross the road farther up than her progeny and all we see of her is a flash of fur. We hear snapping branches, then the splashing water as the animals cross Bear Creek. We catch sight of movement on the far bank. The family is reunited and heading for higher (and hopefully more private) ground.

Mountain lions are inherently rare due to their status of top predator, occupying large home ranges of 25 to 200 square miles. The Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge provides acre upon acre of choice habitat for these animals. Although no exact count exists of how many of these solitary hunters use the Refuge as a home range, there are numerous cats within the vicinity of the Refuge. Due to their stealth and furtive hunting style, mountain lion sightings are rare, occurring only with the perfect combination of luck and timing.

Most wildlife enthusiasts have life lists of exciting animal sightings. Many desperately *hope* to add mountain lion to that list. I've been on the Refuge one month so far, and have counted myself lucky a few times already by the sights I've seen: Cormorants flying along Bayley's surface, Calispell Peak – majestically snow-capped on a clear spring day, a beautiful white lady slipper or-

hid. I have even been lucky enough to see black bears, cow elk, and a young moose.

The Refuge has a wonderful variety of forest types and ecosystems, due the implemented management plans that hold wildlife and their habitats paramount. The LPO Refuge is teeming with wildlife, waiting to be spotted by the willing and patient observer.

A mountain lion sighting isn't an expectation; it's a gift from nature.

## Kira Powell, Biological Technician

### Congratulations, Brennan!

Our 2014 scholarship recipient is Brennan Hyden. Brennan graduated from Jenkins High School in Chewelah. He will be attending Washington State University Fall Semester to study Integrated Plant Sciences. Brennan has a strong interest in conducting plant research as it relates conservation and propagation of endangered species.

While he was a freshman at Jenkins, Brennan had the opportunity to help with a field research project in his ecology class. This project took place on our wildlife refuge! In the summer of 2012 Brennan was involved in a WSU research internship and received high honors on the national level for his work.

The goal of our scholarship is to encourage students interested in studying fields linked to conservation, ecology, wildlife, and the environment. Our \$500 award will help Brennan with tuition this fall. This bright young man has the interest, motivation and background to make a difference in his chosen field of study.

## 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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## Calendar

### September

10<sup>th</sup> -- Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.  
13<sup>th</sup> -- Annual Meeting—9:30 a.m.

### October

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

### November

12<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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