



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Spring 2015

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

Number 52

### From the President

Following our annual retreat/goal setting meeting on January 31 a few of us walked from Headquarters in the spring like weather. That mirrors a number of my backcountry ski ventures this winter and, maybe yours. Hopefully February and March will bring us colder temperatures with snow so we will have adequate run off this spring. This being my first note in our newsletter, I would say that my new role as President of the Friends feels like a logical progression of responsibility and involvement. I will give my best effort in the coming year with an eye on the following:

Increase communication with you, our membership, to make sure we are offering opportunities for greater involvement to those who wish to become more active. We have a wide variety of events and projects. Some demand physical labor, some mix exercise with wildlife viewing and some like our photo contest offer a chance to exercise your artistic talent.

We will continue our primary mission to support the staff in the effort to create and maintain quality habitat for the plants and animals that make their home on the Refuge. We might even attract some new critters. I encourage members to contact me or another board member about volunteer opportunities, ask questions or give input to improve the Friends experience.

Our next major event, the winter/spring educational program is on April 17. We are bringing historian and writer Jack Nisbet to Colville. He will bring David Thompson to life as he explored in and around the same ground that was later to become our own wildlife refuge, the Little Pend Oreille. This program is free to the public. This event and others are noted on our web page, [www.refugefriends.com](http://www.refugefriends.com) as well as in this newsletter.

### David W. King, President

Meet our board:

President, **David W King:** Moved to northeast Washington in 1980. Lesley Mann and I raised two great kids here and in the ensuing years we have adopted this corner of the

state as our home. I spend my time on projects with an eye on the weather to see if I am going to ski or bicycle.

Vice President, **Dan Price:** I am a true eastern Washington boy born and raised in Pullman with two WSU professors for parents. I graduated from Western Washington U. with a Political Science degree. Further studies include environmental law and policy as well as economics.

I have had a lifelong passion to be in the outdoors. I enjoy teaching others about the environment and its importance in our everyday lives. Thus I enjoy working on environmental outreach, education, policy and advocacy. As a Friend I have worked with our environmental education program, outreach events, multiple Refuge projects from trail maintenance to cleaning owl boxes at the Refuge. At a National level I work with the Refuge Association on advocacy (mainly Refuge Funding) and other issues. I have also worked with the Nation office serving on a National Friends committees and another committee who provided comments (from a Friends perspective) on future policy direction.

Secretary, **Laurie Kulp:** after taking Scott Price's college environmental class in 2010 I became more interested in the LPO. I became a Friend, volunteered on some work projects and joined some group hikes. Wanting to do more I attended last year's annual planning meeting and volunteered for the secretary position.

**Treasurer, Pam Vail:** I moved to the Colville area with my husband Curt and our three children in 1983. We built our home a short walk from the Refuge boundary and over the years our family spent many hours hiking and exploring the LPO. Though our kids are grown and gone and my husband retired from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Refuge is still one of our favorite spots to visit and enjoy. I've been fortunate to serve on the Friends Board since 2009.

**Greg Mohr :** I have been an avid Refuge visitor since I moved to Colville in 1988, mostly in pursuit of native trout with a fly rod in hand and Dogger, companion at my side. Other Refuge interests include bird watching, ski touring and hiking. During the summer months I am employed by

the Colville National Forest in Boundary Management and the winter season takes me to 49 Degrees North Mountain Resort where I work at the Nordic Center keeping visitors informed and teaching cross-country skiing.

**Stephanie Wilson:** Hi! This is my third year on the Friends board. I have enjoyed getting out on the refuge more and working with the other dedicated board members. My emphasis has been in outreach projects and education related events. Getting kids and families outside to play is essential for healthy lifestyles. It is exciting to have such a “gem” in our Stevens County backyard to play in and to explore.

**Jay Berube:** I have lived in this area since 1988. I worked for the USFS on the Colville National Forest as a forest ecologist until retirement. After my wife, Janet, left the board I joined. We enjoy skiing, biking, hiking, kayaking, sailing and recreating on the Refuge.

### Environmental Education for our Children



Are you excited about the wonderful sights and sounds of nature that our refuge has to offer? Do you like to share your joy and enthusiasm with children? Then, sign up to help with Education Days on the LPO! Volunteers have the opportunity to lead hikes and be a nature guide with second graders. Our fifth graders need someone to guide them through a learning station and then to lead a hike. The second graders will come out on Wednesday, May 20th and on Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup>. Busses arrive at the Lake McDowell parking lot at 10:00 am and will leave at 1:00pm. The students will be divided into small groups. The more leaders we have, the smaller the groups. You take a group to the lake, pausing to look at the trees and habitats. At the lake, Amy Cabral will have insect activities and you have a picnic on the rocks!

Friday, June 5<sup>th</sup> and Monday, June 8<sup>th</sup> are set-aside for the fifth graders. They arrive about 9:00 and leave about 1:30. Volunteers help with the learning stations and then lead groups on a short hike. Again, the size of the groups depends on the amount of volunteers.

So, if you have some time available on one or all of those days, please join us! You are guaranteed a memorable experience and a chance to show our youth the joys and wonders of the outdoors.

Sign up by emailing Stephanie Wilson at [swilson915@hughes.net](mailto:swilson915@hughes.net) or giving her a call at 684-5882. THANK YOU!

### Spring Mushroom Foray

Once again, Jim Groth will lead a mushroom foray on the refuge on Saturday, May 9. While most enjoy finding edibles, emphasis is on enjoying and learning about all kinds of fungi. To reserve a spot and get more details, please e-mail us at [joann\\_groth@yahoo.com](mailto:joann_groth@yahoo.com) or call 684-1379. Space is limited and we always fill up.

### Refuge Manager's Meandering

Brown is the color of the Refuge this winter. Most of the snow at headquarters elevation (2040 ft) is long gone. Cliff Ridge still has pockets of snow, but even the ridge top is mostly snow-free. Red-winged blackbirds and American robins are frequenting the bird feeder. I heard a song sparrow singing somewhat tentatively; he knew it was early, but just too nice a spring-like day to not exercise those pipes! It's the first winter I can remember driving Rookery Road in a pick-up using 2WD. While Potter's Pond and McDowell Lake are still iced over, there's enough open water at Bayley Lake to host over eighty Canada geese and four whistling swans in mid-February. Punxsutawney Phil says there's four weeks of winter yet to go, and March can be such a fickle month. But today it's looking like we'll recall this winter as one of the mild ones.

The unusually warm temperatures have the Refuge creeks and river running high with snow melt. We're capturing that runoff to refill McDowell Lake after the draw down last fall. We still need to replace the water control structure on the north end of the lake, but this spring we'll replace as much water as possible with the reduced snow pack. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will be planting that lake with catchable size trout before the lake fishing opener in late April. Potter's Pond is already full with melt water and the excess is pouring into Bayley Lake. We'll see if there's enough snow melt to fill it this year.

Much of the winter is spent planning projects for the upcoming year, and several of these could involve Refuge Friends volunteer participation. First up is the annual Earth Day spring refuge roadside cleanup on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. We meet at Refuge headquarters at 9:00 AM, form teams, and spend the morning determining what was the most popular brand of beer consumed last year. Treasures do turn up. One year I found a hub cap I had lost from my own truck the previous summer. Pickers meet back at HQ for a chili lunch and tall-tale telling.

The Blue Goose Bicycle Ride was such fun last year we plan on doing it again. The date has yet to be determined, but likely early summer.

We expect to have 5,000 milkweed plant seedlings ready for transplanting in early fall. This is part of the nationwide effort to help restore the Monarch butterfly population that has fallen by over 90% in the last two decades. We'll need plenty of volunteers when planting time comes!

Information about volunteer opportunities is posted the Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge website, their Facebook page, and the Refuge website.

Finally, we need to hire a Social Services Assistant, the official title for the adult leader of our Youth Conservation Corps crew. This person supervises the crew of four young adults, age 15-18, from the middle of June through mid-August. The crew accomplishes a wide range of tasks involving mostly maintenance and biology, with a healthy dose of environmental education thrown in. We're looking for a responsible, energetic leader with good people skills. It pays about \$15/hour, but the rewards from working with these kids – priceless! Interested? Please give the refuge a call and we'll provide more information.

**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

## **Refuge Biologist's Report**

Ah, spring when a young eagle's heart turns to thoughts of love. OK so maybe that is not exactly how that expression goes, but here on the LPO maybe it should. It may be February as I write this but the birds are repairing nests and will be laying eggs soon. Great horned owls are laying eggs, and red crossbills and Clark's nutcrackers have all but disappeared. A sure sign these late winter nesters have gone into stealth mode when they have eggs or young in the nest. This brings up a rather fascinating side of bird behavior.

Great horned owls which are nesting now will continue calling and vocalizing for months. Simply put when you know you are at the top of the food chain you don't really care who knows you are around. Crossbill and nutcrackers which are also nesting now have all but ceased calling until the young leave the nest. They are fairly low on the food chain and any number of both avian and mammalian predators would prey on their young at every opportunity. Both of these species nest deep inside the branches of conifers. In fact I have never actually seen a nest of either species. I have watched both of these take food into a tree and even heard nestlings food begging. But could clumsy old not able to fly me find a nest from the ground, no. They are that well hidden, even when I know I am only a few feet away I still cannot find them. Nutcrackers are essentially specialized jays. I have seen both nutcrackers and gray jays go on this convoluted approach to the nest. Go in one tree and out the other side sneak around to the top of another one doubling back when the think you aren't looking then suddenly vanish when you blink. All in a (usually successful) attempt to hide the actual location of their young. Although, it is certainly frustrating as a biologist looking for nests, I can't help but admire their ingenuity in concealing their young. Those big corvid brains continue to impress.

Spring has certainly arrived early this year. Bayley Lake has thawed out and McDowell should not be far behind--it may even be breaking up by the time you read this. Before you know it chipmunks, ground squirrels, even bears will be waking up from hibernation. Speaking of hibernation I am interested in looking at when some of these go to sleep and when they emerge. Some of you are aware we keep a daily species list of birds seen on the refuge. I intend to start this for mammals this year as well to look at these dates. So next time you are on the refuge feel to stop by the office and find out what has been seen the last few days and maybe add to our list. Speaking of hibernators check out the critter of the season below for one of my favorite winter hibernators. As we look forward to spring we also want to look back on the events of the winter. What an unusual winter it has been--the mildest snow winter in a long time. As a result deer sightings in the valley are down while we are seeing deer higher up than even Jerry can remember. With such light snow pack they have had no reason to pack into the valley this year.

There are some events to look forward to coming up this year. First up for me is the annual birding trip around the refuge. Mark your calendar for Saturday June 13. We will meet at refuge headquar-

ters at 8 AM.

## Critter of the Season



Did you know that the refuge is home to one of only two turtle species native to the Northwest. The Western painted turtles (*Chrysemys picta bellii*) is common in larger bodies of water on the Refuge. Their emergence from hibernation is one of the signs of spring here on the Refuge. They start coming out almost as soon the lakes and ponds are ice free in the spring. In addition to occurring farther north, they are the largest of the 4 subspecies of painted turtle. A large adult will have a shell 10 inches across. Just hatched turtles will be about 1.5 inches across. Most are somewhere in between. Like other turtles, they grow throughout their entire lives. So a 10 inch turtle is rather old. Males first mate at about 7 to 10 years of age and females which are larger so need to be 12 to 16 years old. Some captive turtles are over 50 and no one really knows how old they can reach. Painted turtles get their name from bright orange coloring on the ventral scutes (belly part of the shell). Scutes are the specialized scales that cover the shell. A turtle shell is a fascinating thing. It grows with the turtle and is not shed the way a snake sheds its skin. The shell is part bone. It's actually an extension of the backbone. It is covered with scales which give it the painted colors of red, green, and yellow. These scales will shed individually as the shell grows.

Turtles are omnivores which means they eat just about anything. This will eat aquatic plants, insects, crayfish, small fish, and even carrion. They are ectothermic or cold blooded which is why you see them out basking in the sun much of the summer. Even though they spend most of their time in or near the water they must lay eggs in dry land. So when you see turtles crossing the road in June or July it is most likely females looking for some place high

and dry to dig a nest. They have sharp claws for digging in hard packed ground (which is one reason you never want to pick them up). They will lay about a dozen eggs which they leave to fend for themselves. Painted turtles are unique though in that rather than leave the nest once hatching they immediately go to hibernation and don't leave the nest and eat for the first time until the following spring. So the next time you visit the refuge in spring or summer check out the Beaver Ponds or maybe Bayley or McDowell Lakes for our fascinating Testudines (that's the turtle family).

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

## Winter Wildlife 2014-15

Despite the lack of snow and mild temperatures, we have not been seeing much wildlife. A young bull moose was seen by the Beaver Ponds early December. A cow moose and yearling were also spotted. Early January elk were seen just up the road from Cottonwood Campground on two different dates. Wolf tracks were seen on Rookery Road, the McDowell Lake Overlook and the McDowell Marsh Environmental Education Trail. Two parties reported what they thought were grizzly bear tracks on Blacktail Mountain Road. Grasses are starting to green up and white-tailed deer are gathering in Chester Field to feed. Recently 40 were counted in that field with others still coming in.

A few of the staff have visited Bayley Lake and all report seeing many Canada geese and from 4 to 7 Tundra Swans along with different duck species. In mid-February our biologist visited our Kaniksu Unit and saw a golden eagle. The bald eagles that nested in the Headquarters area last year have been seen in courtship flight; bringing sticks to the nest site and perched near the nest. It sure looks like they will nest there again.

In early December it was a gray foggy morning and spitting rain when I started out on my lunch walk. I debated about going out but too much good eating at this time of year necessitates many walks. A tapping sound had me stop walking to listen. I could hear some tiny taps, a red-breasted nuthatch calling and some jack hammer sounding tapping that I was sure was a pileated woodpecker. Nearby was a ponderosa pine tree with areas of bark removed all the way up the trunk. First I saw two brown creepers foraging in areas on the trunk where the bark had already been removed. Creepers forage by creeping up the trunk while nuthatches forage going headfirst down tree trunks. I moved further down the trail so I could see another section of the tree and way up there was a female pileated woodpecker tapping away. Males have a red moustache stripe that is black on females and the red crest of the male goes all the way down between their eyes almost to their bill while on the female the red colored crest stops mid fore-

head. As I was watching the pileated, a hairy woodpecker flew in just below it and started flicking bark off. It seems to be the tree to watch for bird activity.

The first birds to visit the front Headquarters feeder outside my window were black-capped chickadees. The feeder has been slow this winter. Besides the chickadees the only other birds I have seen at the feeder have been song sparrow, dark-eyed juncos, red-winged blackbirds and northern shrike.

The first weekend in February a cougar-killed white-tailed deer was located on Bear Creek Road near the Durlan Springs gate. When I stopped there the following Monday all that was left was the stomach and hide along with bloody cougar tracks and coyote tracks.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife with the University of Montana are asking the public for help in spotting collared moose. If you see a collared moose in eastern Washington please report it online at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/moose>



### Photographers Wanted!

#### Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

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 2015 and tenth Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last (2014) August 16<sup>th</sup> and extends until August 15<sup>th</sup> this year. Judging will take place soon and winners will be featured in, among other places, the Winter Pileated Post. Thank you for your submissions.

Contact me if you have questions at [janderson@ultraplix.com](mailto:janderson@ultraplix.com). Next time you visit the Refuge, don't forget your camera!

**Joel Anderson**



Mary Kitt

## Newsletter Necessities

### Number 52 - 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)

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

**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 the inhabitants on the Refuge, providing educational opportunities, and fostering understanding and appreciation of the Refuge

## Calendar

### March

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

### April

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

22<sup>th</sup>--Refuge Road Cleanup

### May

13<sup>th</sup> – Board Meeting – 6:00 p.m.

20<sup>st</sup> and 21<sup>nd</sup>—Second grader hike at McMeet

