



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Summer 2015

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

Number 53

### From the President

First off we want to honor Karla Rumsey by remembering her support over these past years. She lost Steve a few years back and now she has passed onto the next plane, maybe to join him. Karla and Steve gave time and energy to our organization; true friends they were. Their children, Jason, Melissa and Gretchen have now given the Friends a gift – donations granted by their friends. Thank you for remembering our group and mission.

In addition to planning and implementing upcoming events we are renewing efforts to connect with you, our Friends. We are seeking new Friends and want to strengthen our tie with our long standing supporters. Look for a phone call from a Board member if you expressed an interest in volunteering for an event or activity.

As you probably know the roads in the interior of the Refuge are now opened. The Auto Tour gives you access to prime wildlife habitat. If you wish to trek on a lesser known trail or road talk to a Refuge staff member or talk to Dan Price as he knows his way around like no other. The new map is very handy in gaining access to roads and trails.

Thank you to all Friends who helped with recent trail maintenance and trash pick-up. Thank you to all who have come forward to help on Education Days. Stephanie Wilson leads this annual event that introduces 2nd and 5th graders to the LPO. On May 20 & 21 and again on June 5 and 8 we will match wits with these future naturalists. A special thank you to JoAnn and Jim Groth who lead the mostly annual mushroom foray on May 9th this year. Also Jim has been our steady newsletter editor for these past years. Thanks Jim.

We want you to know that we are planning an especially interesting program for our September annual membership meeting. Slated for September 26 we have invited a volunteer with the Ice Age Floods Institute ([www.iafi.org](http://www.iafi.org)). More details to be posted on our web site ([www.refugefriends.org](http://www.refugefriends.org)) so get out your calendars as this promises to be very interesting.

Finally, we ask that you talk to a friend and ask them to become a Friend. Also, there are many new folks in our community that you might ask.

*Editor's note:* The Friends depended heavily on the Rumsey's publication, the *North Columbia Monthly* to advertise many of our events. It has been an especially informative periodical. We hope that this publication can continue—it fills a niche that will not be replaced easily.

**David W. King, President**

### Refuge Manager's Meandering

Before I report all the refuge news worth reporting, let me tell you about my most recent wildlife encounter. I often spend my mid-day break rambling to the bridge east of headquarters where I stare at the river gliding over the rocks for a few moments before hoofing it back to the office. Today I was treated to an American dipper standing on one of the mid-stream river rocks. Allow me to opine briefly; I much prefer this bird's traditional name of water ouzel, which my Funk and Wagnall's says originated in Old English as "osle" or blackbird. Ouzel has so much more panache than dipper, don't you think? Anyway, while the bird and I were staring at each other, he started sending me a message in semaphore! Well, not really, but ouzel's have a white nictitating membrane or third eyelid that

protects their eye while diving. When they blink, it flashes white, like a floundering ship sending distress signals in a heavy sea. After several blinks, and lacking a satisfactory response from me, the bird wearied of my company and flew under the bridge and out of sight.

After a couple of summers of installing new things like the auto tour signs, parking lots and paved trails, we'll spend much of our time this summer catching up on maintenance projects. A new construction project slated for late summer involves replacing the diversion structure on North Fork Bear Creek that shunts water to McDowell Lake. After 43 years it's breaking down and will be replaced with a new structure incorporating better design and materials.



Our first habitat improvement project this year was burning the cattails in McDowell Marsh. Over the last decade the cattails have increased drastically, altering the desirable 50:50 ratio of open water to emergent vegetation that's optimal for a wetland like that. Burning the dried cattail stalks, then immediately flooding the remaining roots, should stifle their regrowth and create more open water for the next several years.

We're gearing up for the summer field season by bringing on some new seasonal employees and welcoming back some returning hands. Maintenance worker Gary McKinney left his sailboat behind in southern California to spend another summer with us fix'n stuff and helping keep the refuge looking spiffy. I've lost count of how many summers Gary's been with us, but we're grateful for at least one more. Sadly, Janet Thrasher, our fire engine crew supervisor, left us after ten years for a new job with the Forest Service that meshes better with her family's needs. And finally,

after being vacant for over 18 months, the Inland Northwest National Wildlife Refuge Complex project leader position was recently filled. Alice Hanley, currently a project leader at Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge in western Minnesota, will be onboard in Cheney, Washington by early August to oversee Turnbull, Kootenai and Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuges and be my new boss.

We're hosting the Blue Goose Chase Family Fun Bike Ride again this year! Join us on June 27, from 8:30 am 'til noon at Refuge Headquarters to join the ride, enjoy some music and refreshments, and maybe win a raffle prize!

**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

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

Wow, is it really June already? By the time this is printed my field crew should be here working on the summer's assortment of projects. As always we have a number of interesting things happening this year. After a lot of eagle activity I finally located the nest stand by McDowell this May. All three Bald Eagles nests have young that are growing rapidly. We have not had all three be successful in the same year before, but I am optimistic all three will fledge young this year. This summer the Monarch Initiative is in full swing for the whole USFWS and LPO is no exception. We will be more actively searching out both monarchs and milkweed this year. We will also be doing site identification and preparation for a large milkweed planting project on the refuge this October. We will be asking for volunteers to help plant in the fall. So if you would like to help make things better for this imperiled and well as beautiful species stay tuned to this newsletter, as well as the Friends and Refuge web sites for more information on helping. In addition to the Fourth of July Butterfly Count, John from Spokane is continuing to volunteer to do a butterfly inventory. Speaking of interesting critters have you ever heard of the western pearlshell mussel? I hadn't either a few months ago. However this was once the most common freshwater mussel in the northwest. They are extremely sensitive to water quality and they have declined nearly 90% in the last few decades. Biologists from the USFWS office in Spokane surveyed the Little Pend Oreille River

this spring. They have found a couple of hundred animals and hope to collect breeding females for a captive breeding program to restore the species in the Columbia watershed. McDowell Lake is full following the exotic fish treatment last fall. Trout have returned and the fishing is said to be excellent this spring. Bird migration is in full swing with birds arriving almost every day. The old field restoration to native grasses continues this year with work starting in Slide Creek and continuing on Starvation Flat. This project has shown some nice results already. The deer and elk use of Chester Field and East Christianson field is impressive. Last year for the first time a Western Meadowlark nest was found in that field. Both lark and vesper sparrows were found singing there as well. With the diversity of native grasses available the Chester Field ground squirrel colony is continuing to expand. These in turn have become prey resulting in increased observations of coyotes, badgers, and several raptor species. While most of the fields around the auto tour are abandoned farms fields and pastures from before the refuge was established, a few in the highest elevations are natural mountain meadows. One of these is near the top of Scrabbler Mountain. Last summer the western bumblebee was found there. We will continue our efforts in the higher elevations again this summer to locate these important pollinators. These previously common but now rare bees are known to prefer those types of forest opening. The plant genus *Vaccinium* (huckleberries, blueberries, and cranberries) is primarily pollinated by native bumblebees. So if you like huckleberries, blueberry pie or even cranberries with your Thanksgiving turkey, you have bumblebees to thank for it.

We have several Saturday events coming up this year. I will be doing the annual birding tour of the refuge on June 13. Next up is the return of the Blue Goose Chase bike ride on June 27. Then the Fourth of July Butterfly count on July 11. At least two planting days in September and October (dates TBA). You know about bears, you know about lions (the mountain kind), but did you know about the elusive tigers of LPO. Just keep reading to find out more.



### Critter of the Season

Have you ever gone stalking the ferocious wild tiger? OK maybe our tigers aren't that ferocious unless you are an earthworm or maybe a cricket. However the tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) is still a most interesting inhabitant of our forests. Few people see them as adults as they are very nocturnal and burrow into the ground where they sleep through the heat of the days. They have a stocky body with a very wide head. They have a mixed black and yellow or pale green barred pattern which gives them the name tiger. This pattern also results in the name barred salamander sometimes being used. They are one of the largest salamanders in the US and are the largest salamander in Washington. Typical adults coming in at 6 to 8 inches but a few have been found up to 12 inches in length. Their diet consists of worms and assorted small insects. Large adults may take the occasional frog or even small mice. They are one of the most terrestrial of salamanders rarely returning to water except to breed. Their burrows can be a few feet deep which allows them to escape the summer heat as well as hibernate below the frost line. In the Inland Northwest they are primarily found in shrubsteppe areas of the Columbia basin. They are also found in ponderosa pine areas in the lower portions of Northeast Washington including the refuge. The tadpoles may take two or more years to mature and will overwinter in the breeding ponds. They can be fairly large tadpoles and are heavily preyed upon by trout. As a result they are generally only found in ponds without fish yet large enough to not freeze solid during winter. In ponds with poor water quality they may metamorphose into adults at a young age and very small. Other sites with good water quality they may remain as tadpoles for a couple of

years not metamorphosing until they reach adult size. While adults are extremely difficult to find, tadpoles can be found in many fishless ponds and small lakes on the refuge. So the next time you hike into Pierce Lake or Kidney Ponds look around for large gray tadpoles feeding in the water.

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

### **Spring Wildlife 2015**

In mid April I was behind our Headquarters building and watched a dung beetle pushing dung with another dung beetle attached to the dung. This was not a ball- it was oblong and easily 5 times the size of the beetle.

At first I could not tell a beetle was attached to the dung "ball" and then thought it must be dead since as the "ball" was rolled this beetle ended up on the bottom and was being rolled over and climbed over. But I watched it very intently and saw it move so it was alive. I read later that the female beetle holds on as the male rolls the dung along. At one point a fly landed on the dung and all movement stopped for a while.

Opening our gates mid-April with the nice weather brought out many turkey hunters and birders. Some of these birders were serious about finding certain birds for their lists then moving on to another birding spot or county. Others, including some hunters, just were happy to look at whatever wildlife they happened upon. The Columbian ground squirrels have made their way to the front of our Headquarters building to feed and some have even dug burrows in the front yard. I like the chestnut color on top of their nose. We have decided to relocate them to the Christianson Meadow since they are burrowing around our propane tanks and building foundation.

The American robin has decided not to nest above the Headquarters door this year. The last two years their nests have been predated and destroyed. This year the robin nest is higher- just below the eaves.

The Say's phoebes must have been courting on the roof above my office with all the vocalizing I was hearing. The "pdeer" song of the phoebe is one of my favorites. The phoebes are nesting above the bird netting (designed to keep birds out of that area) in the corner by my office.

The garter snakes are warming themselves on our driveway. Mike has added amphibians, reptiles and

mammals to our monthly species checklist. Common garter and Western terrestrial garter snakes are both found at the Refuge. Mike has told me one way to tell them apart is the common is more likely to have a red stripe. But the best way is to look at the labial scales, which are around the mouth, meaning I would need to have the reptile in hand; no thanks- I don't do snakes.

Our annual Earth Day trash pick-up day on April 22 was a beautiful day. I walked the route on Rookery Road past the beaver ponds. I was amazed how many white trilliums I saw in bloom. On the hillside opposite the beaver ponds was a large patch of blooming bluebells. When I saw a bunch of pink under the trees I wondered what litter had been shredded and scattered- but it was a patch of shooting stars in bloom.

An unusual sighting was reported by Jerry- he saw a Mourning cloak butterfly chasing a bat. For all you butterfly enthusiasts – we will be hosting our annual butterfly count on July 11. Meet at Refuge headquarters at 9:30 am. You don't need to be able to identify butterflies or even capture them-- come and learn from our experts.

**Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff**

### **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 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 [jander-son@ultraplix.com](mailto:jander-son@ultraplix.com). Next time you visit the Refuge, don't forget your camera!

**Joel Anderson**

## Second Graders Have Great Weather



An excerpt from the article “Kids in the Woods” that ran last winter in the e-newsletter for small forest landowners of Washington is reprinted to give some history of this event. It can still be found at <https://foreststewardshipnotes.wordpress.com/2014/12/15/kids-in-the-woods-at-the-refuge/>

Second- and fifth-grade students from the two Colville elementary schools now spend part of a day every year exploring nature. This idea came about when Tricia Woods, who founded and presided over the [Friends of the Little Pend Oreille Wildlife Refuge](#) at the time, suggested the Friends would be glad to sponsor a spring field trip to replace the bowling event that some of the classes participated in—a treat for the kids when there were few other options readily available. The friendship between Tricia and some of the teachers undoubtedly helped get things going. The Friends were developing the McDowell Marsh Environmental Education Trail (McMEET) at that time and Tricia thought this would be a fun site for the kids to visit. It also would not strain the schools’ budget as we would also pay for busing. The trailhead is only 13 miles from Colville.

For the second graders, this trip was first offered in 2003. It worked so well that it became an annual event. The fifth graders were offered a similar outing in 2005. A more rigorous experience was planned for them with several stations to visit, tasks to complete, a hike to the lake, and a report to write. Their teachers were provided with educational materials referred to as “trunks,” packaged as complete self-contained kits on different biological topics.

**Jim Groth, Editor**

## Newsletter Necessities

### Number 53 - Jim Groth - Editor

To send comments, write articles for the newsletter, or to contribute items of interest, please contact:

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## Calendar

### June

10<sup>th</sup>- Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.  
13<sup>th</sup>—Birding Event—7:30 a.m.  
27<sup>th</sup>—Family Bike Ride—8:30 a.m.

### July

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

### August

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



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Colville, WA 99114

**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.