



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Fall 2015

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

Number 54

From the President

Greetings fellow members - I note we have had little to no rain since our spring newsletter. I keep an eye on local fires and can only give praise to those young men and women who strap on their boots to beat back the flames we all dread. We still have a month or two of this drought before we should get some relief from cooler temperature and hopefully moisture.

Mike Munts, our LPO biologist, has been focusing on pollinators (not just bees) with some input from Chris Loggers, biologist with the Colville NF. Jerry Cline is coordinating an upcoming effort to plant milkweed seedlings to provide food for the monarch butterfly. These are just two activities that members are encouraged to help with. I just received a request from Mike which I will cover below.

Jay Berube and Jerry have been working on having a bike rack built that will have the silhouette of a salmon. It appears that a staff fellow from the Kootenay Wildlife Refuge will build it for us. The rack will reside near the Headquarters parking lot and be handy for our annual Blue Goose ride or any time to park your bicycle.

We have formed a membership committee consisting of Jay Berube, Pam Vail, Elaine Clough and myself. Our focus is building membership and increase the involvement of our members. We will re-design our membership forms with an eye toward encouraging financial support of our scholarship fund and we will more closely follow up with those who want to be more active.

We will host a booth at the Marcus Cider Fest for the first time this year so we are looking for volunteers to staff our booth on October 3. You could take a shift and partner with a Board member. Contact a Board member if willing.

This year we are planning a special event for our annual membership meeting on September 26. It is during this

meeting that you will elect new Board members for the coming year. We will advertise this meeting to the general public to encourage new members to attend. Following this meeting will be a presentation from a volunteer connected with the planning of a trail that will highlight the Ice Age Floods. This exciting trail is in the planning phase and will extend from northern Montana to the mouth of the Columbia River. Following the presentation we will have a potluck then following lunch we will have an opportunity to help with planting milkweed seedlings with Mike Munts as our lead person. This is an important meeting for all of us; please come to vote, learn about this new Ice Age Floods project and share food. Here is rough agenda:

9:30: coffee and welcome – Jerry and David will review the year's activities and projects

10:15: vote for Board members

11:00: presentation by Melanie Bell on the ice age floods

12:00: potluck followed by an afternoon hike or help with the milkweed planting

Finally, let me speak to the issue of board elections. Our bylaws direct us to hold an annual election of board members at our September meeting. All members present at this September 26 meeting will vote for two new board members. Any member is eligible to put their name forward or nominate another member for a board position. Board members serve for a three year term. Board officers serve for one year. It is my belief that an organization like ours benefits from active participation from all members. New board members bring new ideas and fresh energy. A stagnate organization suffers from a lack of participation of its members with the same individuals taking on tasks and responsibilities. Having stated this I ask that you all come to this meeting, ask questions and take an active role in this meeting. We will learn new things about nature and animals, work to bring

awareness to the public about the LPNWR and have some fun in the process. See you on the 26th.

David King, President

Refuge Manager's Meandering



It's been a long, hot summer with no relief in sight. Everything this spring and summer seemed about a month ahead of schedule. Flowers bloomed early, ruffed grouse got a jump on the drumming season and the river and creeks carried what there was of a snow melt away before we even knew it was happening. Now flows are so low and temperatures so high the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has restricted fishing on the LPO River and tributaries to midnight until 2 PM when increasing water temperature starts stressing fish. Is this global warming?

Coincidentally, our regional fish biologists are setting up a long term monitoring site along the Little Pend Oreille River to follow, over the next several decades, changes in the water, fish and plants that may be linked to climate change. During one of the hottest days this summer they measured the water temperature in the LPO River: 54°F @ 8AM, 58°F @ 11:30 AM, 61°F @ 1:00 PM, and 63°F

at 3:30 PM. As water temperature increases dissolved oxygen decreases, so picture those fish in late afternoon panting away like runners climbing Doomsday Hill at Bloomsday. Time will tell if this will be the new normal.

This is also a summer of extreme fire conditions. So far we've only had one wildfire on the Refuge, the 7.3 acre Blacktail Fire in late July. A lightning strike on a hilltop ignited a fire that started burning its way down the hillsides like a melting ice cream cone. Fortunately it was spotted early in the day and by late afternoon a combination of fixed wing and helicopter water drops and fire crews (see photo) using hand tools were able to control its spread. Aggressive initial attack prevented it from growing into a much bigger fire.

We're still polishing up the auto tour including installing the second interpretive sign at the log barn. Also at least one sign at each tour stop now has a metal cutout, matching the site's theme, attached to the sign frame to jazz up the site. Only one sign is left to install, but that will wait until work on the McDowell Lake dam is completed next year.

Thanks to the Friends group there's also a new sign shown in photo, at Refuge Headquarters commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Refuge's creation. Diamond anniversaries are notable achievements; I expect that sign to stand until the Refuge centennial in 2039!

The Inland Northwest Refuge Complex's new Project Leader, Alice Handley, came on board in early August. In addition to the Little Pend Oreille NWR three other refuges make up our complex: Turnbull NWR in Cheney and Kootenai NWR in Bonner's Ferry, Idaho. Each refuge in the complex has an onsite Refuge Manager and support staff, but we share a combined operating budget and some support services are centralized to reduce costs. Alice supervises the three refuge managers, making sure we all play nice. She hails from California but most recently was the Project Leader at Big Stone NWR in western Minnesota. She's anxious to take on the challenges of her new job, and to learn what makes each refuge in the complex unique and special.

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Refuge Biologist's Report

It certainly has been an interesting summer this year. I probably don't need to tell anyone about the drought here in the Northwest. The drought has certainly had an impact on the refuge. The water levels have been the lowest

we have seen in several years most of the summer. The hot dry conditions impact both the plants and animals that call the refuge home. Some animals like ground squirrels and marmots will estivate in order to escape the heat. If you have not heard of that term estivate; it is essentially like hibernation. The ground squirrels around the office will all disappear when conditions get too hot and dry. They will back fill as much as three feet of their tunnels with dirt. This seals the tunnels, especially the sleeping chambers from the outside air. Once sealed in they basically just go to sleep and go into a torpor conditions similar to hibernation. The body temperature drops, the heart beat slows and the metabolic rate slows to a mere crawl. This enables the animals to wait out hot weather. As I write this ground squirrels and marmots along with many insects are sleeping through the 100 plus heat. This summer has not been just about unusual heat. Have you been out Hwy 20 east of Colville lately? The late June thunderstorm did incredible damage to trees along the highway. The refuge was not spared from this severe wind event. Hundreds of trees came down in the refuge. For first hand observations of the force of a little air moving at high speed, check out the area on the refuge just before the transfer station. You might also notice quite a few trees down next to the snow park site at the base of Olson Creek. Although the most severe winds were limited in area the percentage of trees down in those areas was extreme. These types of wind events although rare are not unknown. Along with fire, earthquakes, floods or even volcanoes it is just one more way the forest can periodically reset itself to an earlier point of succession. The Bald Eagles once again nested in multiple locations on the refuge this year. The Bayley Lake nest successfully fledged one eagle in July. We still have not been able to locate the nest near McDowell Lake but the presence of fledglings there in July indicate the presence of nest and that it again successfully fledged at least one young eagle. The river nest did not fare so well. In an early June storm the nest was blown out of the tree. While it is unfortunate that the eaglet perished in the fall it did give us the rare opportunity to examine an eagle nest up close. This included the remains of several meals. While I will not go into too much of the details, it was interesting to see that this pair of eagles had apparently mastered to art of opening turtles. While only a few animals are able to open turtles some eagles are have been known to figure out how to open this canned food.

Some things though don't seem to mind our heat so much. The long term bat monitoring equipment has recorded a record number of bats flying by headquarters this summer. Even though we got rained out on the butterfly count in July we are having a great year for butterflies. We have seen a record number or monarchs on the refuge this year. This raises the question: does that mean

that numbers are really up that much or are we simply paying more attention and actively looking. Only time will tell. Speaking of monarchs we have a few thousand milkweed seedlings coming that will need to get planted this fall. The first planting day will be the afternoon of September 26 after the annual meeting. A second planting day at the Cusik property will be on October 3, and we leave from Refuge HQ at 8:00 AM.

My seasonal crew is winding down their season and by the time this is printed both of the interns will have moved on to other ventures. The bio tech will be around for a while still and he will continue to help with a number of projects into the fall.

Critter of the Season



If you read this newsletter regularly you have seen that I mentioned the western pearlshell mussel (*Margaritifera falcata*) in the last newsletter. These are interesting little residents of the Little Pend Oreille River. They are fairly large mussels that can reach about 4.5 inches in length. The shell is dark in color. These interesting little clam like critters were once thought to be the most common freshwater mussel in the northwest. However, numbers have plummeted throughout most of their range in the last couple of decades. They are dependent of clear, cold, clean water for their survival. They have a life history typical of most mussel species. Eggs hatch into microscopic larva known as glochidia. The glochidia then swim around until they are able to attach to the gills of fish. Attached to the gills they mature over a period of a few weeks. They then drop off and try to find a sandy bottom to burrow into and mature into the adult mussel. Once attached they are filter feeders straining all sorts of organic material from the water. That is why they are so sensitive to water quality. They will ingest everything that is in the water. Once they settle in they will live a long time as adult mussels. Typical life span is around 70 years but some individuals are over a 100 years in age. At most they may only move a couple of yards for the rest of their lives. On the refuge they are known to occur in the Little Pend Oreille River itself. Mostly small populations have been found on the refuge with the largest

being about 250 animals. Shells of recently died animals sometimes wash up at the edge of the river behind headquarters as well as other areas. So the next time you walk along the Little Pend Oreille River look around for our very own seashells.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Summer Wildlife 2015

The hot summer has cut down on our wildlife sightings, but what has been seen most often is moose in and around the beaver ponds. A cow moose has been observed early in the morning as well as in the heat of the afternoon. Folks tell me she is not bothered by cars driving past- she just continues to feed. At least two different sized bull moose have also been seen in the area but I have not heard about many calves being seen. Dan Price, the Friends Vice-President, got to watch a cow moose here for quite some time. He also saw three otters- he posted his photos on the Friends of LPO Facebook page.

The other abundant mammal sightings have been snowshoe hares. Staff has seen them on Berg Lane, Webking, Rookery and Blacktail Mountain Roads. At this time of year they are mostly brown; they have white flanks and black on the tip of their ears. These mammals are hares not rabbits. They have longer and more powerful hind legs and bigger ears than rabbits. There are also differences in their skull and skeleton. Hares are born in a shallow depression ready to run and fully furred while rabbits are born blind and naked in a nest or burrow. A newborn hare is called a leveret; a newborn rabbit a kit or kitten. Rabbits typically freeze when they sense danger while hares flee. One thing I discovered that was new to me is snowshoe hares produce soft and hard pellets. The soft pellets are produced during the day and eaten for additional nutrients while the hard pellets are produced at night. Hares eat grasses, sedges, willows, aspen and the bark, twigs and buds of conifers. They will also eat dead rodents. Hares are food for Canada lynx, bobcats, foxes, weasels, mink, hawks and owls. Females are larger than males and have one to three litters yearly. Although they are usually silent, they have a loud piercing distress call. We do have a species of rabbit on the Refuge- Nuttall's cottontail. If you see one please let us know where and when you observed it.

Elk cows with calves have been seen by Durlan Springs and Winslow Cabin. Elk cows have been seen in small groups in Chester Field and west of Headquarters by the LPO River. Recently small herds (8-12 animals) have been observed on the road by the Durlan Springs and Walnut Meadows gates; cows, calves and a spike male.

We have had very few reports of black bears. In mid-June a bear with a cub was seen by Potter's Pond and a lone bear on Buffalo-Wilson Road. A cinnamon colored black bear was on the dead end road above River Camp. In late July Mike, our Biologist, was returning from our Cusick unit with his Bio crew of three. After winding up Route 20 from Tiger, they got to a straightaway and all of them saw a cougar just standing on the side of the road watching their approach. As they got closer, it turned and disappeared into the forest. This was late afternoon and Mike called it a once in a lifetime sighting.

On August 9 Dan Brauner, our Wildland Fire Operations Specialist, was driving up Blacktail Mountain Road about a quarter mile up the road from the bridge over the LPO River when he saw two cougars. This is the second time he has seen two cougars together on the Refuge. Beavers have been active on the Refuge but seldom seen. Mid-July one was seen in Bayley Lake and early August one was seen behind the Christianson homestead. With nesting season over and the hot weather, the forest has become very quiet. I have been seeing wild turkeys around Headquarters with their growing broods. Spruce grouse with young were seen on Lost Law Road in early August. The number of hummingbirds at our Headquarters feeder has really dropped off. We are mostly seeing black-chinned hummers. Western wood-pewees seemed to be abundant this year and some are still singing. The Say's phoebe is very visible around Headquarters again – I assume it is because the young have fledged. Recently a gray catbird and Eastern kingbird have been seen along the paved path from the Headquarters' kiosk to the River. In early August, white-headed woodpeckers were seen by the Fire Cache.

Mid-August I was surprised and saddened to find a dead Praying mantis in a window at Headquarters. Mantids lie in wait for their prey which includes flies, ants, crickets, grasshoppers, beetles, moths, spiders and bees. Their front legs have rows of hooked spines which make it difficult for prey to escape; the head is bitten off first. It is widely assumed that female mantises bite the head off of their mate. Further studies indicate that rarely happens in the wild - it is usually seen with captive mantises. I find their head movement interesting. The triangular shape of their head is very different from other insects and they can cock it at different angles much like a dog does when they intently listen to you speaking to them. They have two large compound eyes and three simple eyes located between the compound eyes. No wonder they are such skilled hunters.

I placed the dead mantis on an ivy plant in my office. When I returned to the office after the weekend it was gone. I thought if a mouse had eaten it, I would find at

least some crumbs of the mantis left. But no crumbs were found. I asked Mike if he had taken it for some reason. He told me he found a mantis in his home and thought it was dead but figured it was just in a state of torpor from the heat. Perhaps that is the case with my missing mantis- only problem is that the insect is still trapped in the office. Hopefully I can find it and set it free outside.

The summer heat has cut down on visitation and camping but some hunting seasons start September 1st so I expect visitation to increase. Fall is a great time to visit the Refuge – stop in and say hello next time you visit.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

Scholarship News

In 2011 an anonymous donation of \$2,000 was given to our Friends group. At the annual retreat in 2013 it was decided to start a scholarship fund with this money. And so, the Scholarship Committee was born! The scholarship has been available to high school seniors who plan to pursue careers in fields related to fish and wildlife management, environmental education, conservation and related fields.

Each spring since, we have solicited applicants in the Chewelah, Colville, Kettle Falls and Northport high schools. We have given four awards, each worth \$500.

Meet the recipients:

In 2013 two Colville students won. Dylan Schanz continues his studies at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. His intent is to work with alternative energy in his engineering career. The Graham Hill addition to the Rotary Trail was Dylan's senior project.

Brogan Bateman received the other scholarship. This helped her as she began the educational endeavor to become a biology teacher at BYU in Idaho.

A 2014 Jenkins High School graduate, Brennan Hyden won that year's award. He had a tremendous background in working with invasive plants and agriculture. He even worked on several projects that brought him to the Refuge. He is now a sophomore at WSU continuing his research and studies on plants.

This year, Colville High graduate, Jacob Morris will use the money at Eastern Oregon University. He is planning a career in natural resource management.

Applicants are required to submit a copy of their transcripts, three letters of recommendations and an essay. We look for students who have clear career goals that are linked to an interest in the environment and have demonstrated a sense of responsibility and commitment. Scholarship awards are sent to the university.

For 2016 we have roughly \$200 that is earmarked for the scholarship fund. We have this because of donations that have specified that their money be used in that way. We are only \$300 away from being able to offer another one this year. You can help by adding a few extra dollars to your membership dues. You can also help by volunteering to be on the scholarship committee! Also, if you have any ideas on how to get more contributions, please let us know.

The four students who have benefitted have been extremely grateful. Even though \$500 seems like such a small amount, every little bit helps to encourage and strengthen the minds of our youth. It is rewarding to be reminded of the high quality of young adults that are graduating from our education system!

The Scholarship Committee

Stephanie Wilson
Greg Mohr
Madonna Jones
David King

Hike the Refuge

Dan Price is planning to lead another hike. Meet at HQ at 9:00 on October 10. The hike will be on the Lenhart/Pierce Lake Loop; about 5 miles or so, and moderately difficult. Lenhart Meadows is a beautiful place. Write Dan bigdan65@yahoo.com or check our facebook page if you need more information.



Newsletter Necessities

Number 54 - 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

26th—Annual Meeting—9:30 a.m.

October

10th—Refuge Hike—9:00 a.m.

14th— Board Meeting –6:00 p.m.

November

11th – 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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