



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Winter 2015

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

Number 55

From the President

Most times when this article is due my first thought is "...what do I have to say...? Well, I do have a few items to talk about. First off, I wish to thank the members of our Board. You see they are a special bunch of folks who are accomplishing some important work and doing it in style. In a sense they are working for you to keep the Friends of the Little Pend Oreille Refuge alive and well. Their term on the Board is three years. Ideally they move on while a new member steps forward. This has not been happening. Since I have been on the Board we have been shy of a full Board by two. This spring we will lose another and there are others who have been on beyond the three years. If I were not concerned about this situation you would not be reading this. I will move on.

Many of you will soon see a revised membership form in the mail. One that seeks more specific information on what you want as a member of the Friends. We want to engage you and offer more what you look for in joining our special organization. We are also giving you an opportunity to donate to our scholarship fund. This money funds an annual award to high school graduates who are preparing for a career in natural resources. A second purpose of this revised form is to learn more about what you look for in becoming a Friend. Could your motivation be any of the following?

- help with projects
- financial support
- meet like-minded people
- learn something new about animals and plants
- recreate with friends
- get to know the LPO from the ground up

Our next event is our annual retreat/planning meeting after the New Year. We most likely will meet at the LPO. We want to be close to the forest as we work hard in the morning and play in the afternoon. Look for

more details on our web page: www.refugefriends.com. We are in the beginning phase of planning our spring program. It will most likely continue our focus on the "Great Floods" with a perspective from the sky. Jay Berube is our lead on this one and it promises to be very interesting.

In closing, I return to our need for new Board members. If interested call me (509/680-0115) and we can have lunch. I am buying. Think snow!

David King, President

Refuge Manager's Meandering

What a great year for fall colors! Aging makes for a selective memory, but it seemed the aspens, cottonwoods and larch were especially vibrant this autumn. Newly- golden larch, seemingly floating in a verdant sea of Douglas fir and pines, makes fall my favorite season on the Refuge. Now we've slipped into winter and so the landscape has faded from technicolor to sepia.

While Northeast Washington experienced one of the worst fire seasons in recent history, the Refuge escaped relatively unscathed except for the seven acre Blacktail Fire in early July. We rotated firefighters in from Minnesota, Texas and Kansas to augment the Refuge staff and were able to provide support to our neighbors when fires broke nearby. Hopefully this last fire season was an anomaly and not the new norm.

Deer season was busier than in recent years, probably due to the change in rules liberalizing the white-tail buck harvest. Several hunters were successful, as indicated by the number of deer hides left in camping grounds. That made the ravens, jays and eagles happy. Another "circle of life" example I guess.

Thanks to everyone who helped us plant milkweed seedlings! Almost two thousand went in the ground, with another three thousand held over for spring planting. We're anxious to see how many of those emerge this spring.

We plan to also plant a couple of thousand western white pine seedlings this spring. These pines were a significant member of the tree community on the Refuge a century ago, but harvest and infection by blister rust has decimated them. Our recently thinned Blacktail Mountain Wildlife Habitat Unit has a few remnant western white pines, indicating it's a suitable site for the species. We'll attempt to reinforce those few survivors by planting blister-resistant nursery stock from the U.S. Forest Service tree nursery in Idaho. If successful we'll try reestablishing western white pine on other suitable sites.

McDowell Lake's water is supplied by diverting part of the flow North Fork of Bear Creek using a rock-filled wire gabion diversion structure installed in 1972. Since failing in 2013 we've been keeping water flowing through the diversion to the lake by the judicious application of shovel, luck and prayer. This fall we completed the installation of a new concrete and steel diversion structure that should last until the next millennium. We still need to replace the water control structure controlling water levels in the lake, but the faucet is running as long as we can keep the drain plugged

We'll be closing the gates as usual on December 31. Since there isn't any thinning activity planned this winter it's a great opportunity to walk, ski or snow shoe behind the gates and experience the solitude and beauty of winter on the Refuge.

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Refuge Biologist's Report

Well, it certainly has been an interesting fall. The big thing for me was getting married followed by a cross-country drive. We got to visit a number of National Wildlife Refuge and National Park System units. It was some great birding and wildlife watching. I'm sure that my vacation is not what you want to read about though. So back here in the LPO it has been a busy fall. First off I want to thank all the refuge friends and other volunteers who helped get nearly 1800 milkweed seedlings in the ground. Your help is much appreciated. We will be doing more planting next spring so stay tuned. Time will tell how monarch butterflies will benefit from all

your hard work this fall. Showy milkweed is a long lived plant and won't flower until about 3 years old. So we will likely see the most benefit to butterflies in a few more years. Speaking of monarchs, I have a crew funded to work on a monarch inventory next summer. One of their first tasks will be to look at over winter survival of these planted areas.

While we are on the subject of planting; the final prep work for planting white-pine in the Blacktail Mountain Habitat project is taking place as I write this. We have trees on order and will be planting in the spring as soon as conditions allow. So stay tuned for more opportunities to help make a difference for the wildlife of the Little Pend Oreille.

I had another great year with seasonal staff. The biotech Jacob left in late October. He is off to another job on a refuge in Texas. Many of the long-term projects continued this year. One of these was the bee inventory which was winding down at the end of September. One of the highlights of this project was locating more than a dozen of the rare Western Bumblebee in at least three locations on the refuge. This is a fascinating little critter that few people even know is here. Among other things these are critical pollinators for those delicious huckleberries many of us enjoy in the late summer. The bat monitoring also continued this year with a record number of detections encompassing all 11 species known to occur in NE Washington. You may have noticed that waterfowl numbers have been picking up with migrants and winter residents both showing up in increasing numbers. The lakes and ponds of the refuge are no exception. In addition to the ubiquitous mallards and geese many divers are around. Buffleheads have returned along with both Scaup, Ring-necked Ducks and mergansers. Enjoy them while they are here as ice is just around the corner. Winter finches are beginning to arrive along with other songbirds of the north. I'm sure Barbara will write more about these and other sightings in the next column.

Have you seen moose with radio collars on the refuge or the surrounding forest? The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife was collaring moose at several locations around NE Washington last winter. Several of those moose have been located on the refuge. If you do see one let DFW know. The site for reporting is <http://wdfw.wa.gov/viewing/moose/>. If you see one on the refuge, please stop by headquarters and let us know, we have that web site posted here as well.

Winter is coming. That means track surveys, remote cameras, and lots of office time. It also means that the winter bird count is coming. This winter's count will be

the Wednesday after New Year's Day. For 2016 that is January 6. As in the past we will meet at headquarters at 8 AM and break into groups to count birds. We will have lunch back the office. Refuge staff will provide soup along with whatever other folks bring.

Winter is a great time to enjoy the refuge and if you come out feel free to stop by the office and let us know what you saw.

Critter of the Season



Do you know what the largest deer in the world is? In scientific circles it's known as *Alces alces*. In Europe they call them elk. But, here in North America we call them moose. Moose are one of those animals that are iconic in our region. They are one of the most asked about animals for visitors who stop by the refuge office. Yet how much do you really know about this animal? You probably know that as deer they do not have horns but antlers which shed every winter to be regrown in spring and summer. Unlike nearly all other deer species moose do not form herds. They are pretty solitary coming together only in breeding season. Though they are most often thought of as animals of ponds and feeding on aquatic vegetation, they can actually be found in a large variety of wooded habitats. They are particularly fond of eating various hardwoods like cottonwood, willows, birch or aspen but will eat almost any vegetation available to them. Their lips are prehensile which simply means it is very muscular and can grasp. Animals in Alaska can top 1800 pounds and stand 6 feet tall and 9 feet long. That is heavier, longer and even taller than a Volkswagen beetle. Although moose in the Inland Northwest tend to be among the smallest moose, with bulls topping out around 1200 lbs. One of the unique features of moose is the bell or dewlap. Much has been said (or written) about what purpose the dewlap serves but the bottom line is we

don't know. One theory is that, like antlers, it shows dominance among bulls: the bigger the dewlap, the more dominant the bull. Another is that it may be used in courtship somehow because bulls will often rub their chin on females prior to mating. However neither of these theories explains why females would have dewlaps as well. One thing for sure is that even this well known animal still has mysteries left to discover. Here on the LPO moose are frequently seen in water like the beaver ponds or Kidney Pond but they turn up almost anywhere on the refuge. Sightings are common in upper Olson Creek and even near the top of Blacktail Mountain Road. So the next time you visit the refuge keep your eyes open for this "monarch of the forest".

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Fall Wildlife 2015

What a gorgeous fall we had. I love it when we get those beautiful, warm, sunny fall days and cool nights. We are in the last days of modern firearm season for deer and there have been many, many hunters on the Refuge.

Mid-September we had many yellow-rumped warblers and Western bluebirds on the Headquarters lawn feeding on insects. I saw one yellow-rump catch an insect and start beating it against the sidewalk outside my window. A bluebird landed near the warbler which caused the warbler to drop the insect and back off. The bluebird quickly snatched up the insect and ate it.

Late October the bald eagles started showing up in the cottonwood tree behind Headquarters. One day there were two adults and two juveniles. It was a bit comical the way they were perched. The adults were perched apart at different heights while the juveniles were perched right next to each other facing the adult birds. It seemed like the young birds were just staring at the adults waiting for something to happen. When I walked out to the mailbox I could hear one bird vocalizing up a storm! Every morning there is one or two adult eagles perched in that cottonwood tree. One day I saw 3 adults there.

On October 29th a lone adult bald eagle was perched in the tree. Six common ravens were harassing it; a black-billed magpie came in and at one point was tussling with a raven. Then a sub adult bald eagle came in and there was some vocalizing. The ravens continued their harassment and the sub adult eagle flew back into the

conifers. The magpie was perched near the adult eagle then flew back into the conifers across the Little Pend Oreille River. The ravens flew off and the remaining eagle took the opportunity to fly downstream away from them. Now that November has arrived- the eagles have been absent from the cottonwood tree behind Headquarters.

I did not even see a bear this year so was surprised when I found bear tracks on the Mill Butte Trail near Headquarters mid-September.

Driving to the Refuge in the mornings, the fields on Bear Creek Road before getting to the Refuge have been filled with wildlife. There have been large flocks of wild turkeys and Canada geese. White-tailed deer have been grazing in these fields with the turkeys and geese. Another field had Canada geese and mallard ducks.

On October 1st I saw a beautiful male Northern harrier working the field by the Christianson homestead. This is definitely my favorite hawk. These hawks are sexually dimorphic meaning the male and female do not look the same. The male has a beautiful gray back with black wing tips and a white rump. The female is various shades of brown with a white rump. Harriers fly low to the ground, in a slight dihedral, when hunting which makes their white rump very visible. They eat insects, mice, voles, shrews, snakes, frogs, toads, rabbits and songbirds. Harriers have an owl-like facial disk that aids them in hunting by sound while most hawks hunt by sight; harriers use both sight and sound to hunt. Surprisingly they nest on the ground in a dense clump of vegetation.

A small flock of California quail has been hanging out around Headquarters.

Lately when I take my lunch time walk on the Mill Butte Trail I have been flushing up a ruffed grouse in the same spot each day.

We had scattered reports of Clark's nutcrackers through October but none yet in November. There were a few reports of American dippers and one sighting of a Townsend's solitaire and a bohemian waxwing in October. Early October there was still a yellow-rumped warbler around Headquarters.

October 26 I was excited to see a flock of small finches feeding in the alders along the creek on the east side of Headquarters. They were in the tops of the trees hanging upside down as they fed, seemingly in constant motion and relocating to different trees often. The light was poor on this gray day and the birds' almost constant

movement made them difficult to identify. Of course I was hoping to see common redpolls but all we could see was patches of yellow which identified them as pine siskins. On November 9th another flock showed up exhibiting the same behaviors. This time I was able to clearly see red on some birds so common redpolls were mixed in with a flock of pine siskins.

Belted kingfishers have been seen a few times in November along the LPO River behind Headquarters.

A highlight for me was seeing a long-tailed weasel just outside the office on November 13th. A co-worker came in that morning to say a weasel was crawling around on a trailer. When I went outside to look, I saw a white tail with a black tip hanging off the frame of the trailer. The weasel was moving around quickly so I never did see its head- just the white body and tail.

First snow on Calispel Mountain was November 4th this year; first snow on the ridge behind Headquarters was November 12th and we got enough snow to track a cat at Headquarters on November 17th.

The Refuge gates will close December 31. When the snow comes, it is a great time to visit the Refuge on skis or snowshoes. I love the winter quietness of the forest when all I can hear is the snow falling off conifer branches, chickadees and nuthatches softly calling and the snow squeaking under my skis.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

Refuge Photo Winners Announced

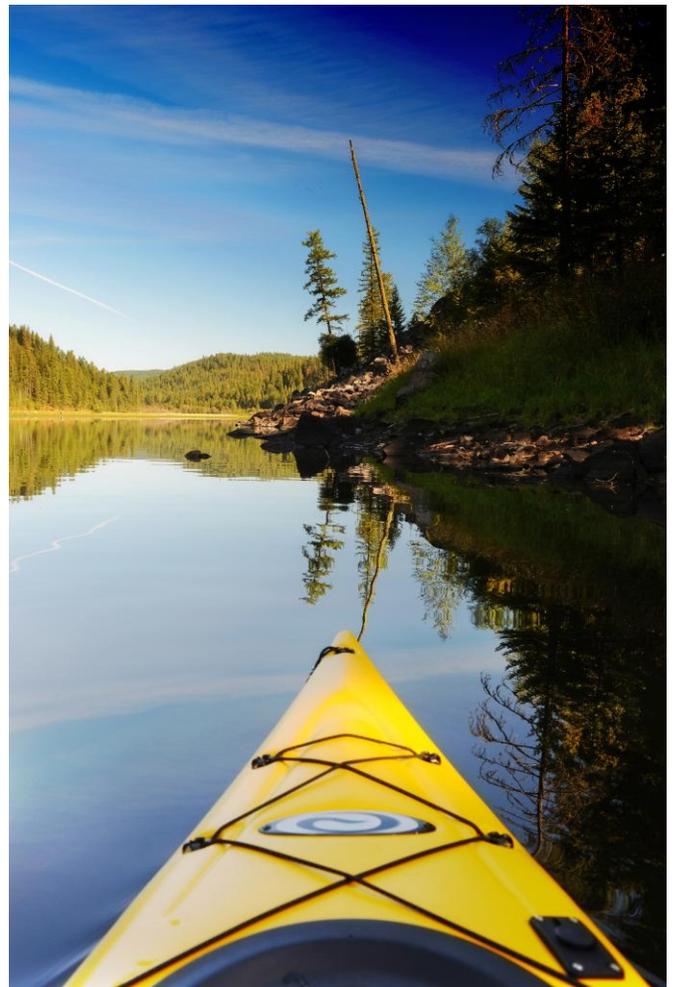
The annual photo contest sponsored by the Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge has its winners. This contest was the best one yet with 16 entrants submitting 68 photos in the four categories.

This year's winners are as follows. In the Scenic Category the winner was Jim Peterson with his black-and-white photo titled "A Familiar Place." Bertha Kamstra won in the Plant Category with her photo "Sticky Geranium." In the Animal Category, Dan Price was the winner with his photo of three otters titled "Family Outing." Joanie Christian's photo "Kayak Respite at Bayley Lake" was the winner in the Public Use Category.

The high quality of the photos entered, speak not only to the skill of the photographers but also to the photo opportunities that can be found at the LPO National Wildlife Refuge.

I would like to thank our judge, Scott Price, and the merchants that contributed prizes, Ritzes, Stephanie's Oak Street Grill, Mavericks, and Dodson's Paint and Glass

The next annual photo contest has already begun and will run until August 15, 2016. The Friends of the LPO encourage people to visit the Refuge and take their cameras with them because one never knows when he or she will find a photo opportunity. For more information about the contest, one can contact Joel Anderson at onionjoel@gmail.com.



Newsletter Necessities

Number 55 - 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 to all *Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge*.

Calendar

December

9th --Board Meeting, 6:00 p.m.

January

6th --Refuge Bird Count—8:00 a.m.

?th– Board/Membership planning Retreat -
–9:30 a.m.

February

10th – 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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