



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Spring 2016

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

Number 56

From the President

When I moved west in the early 1970s I observed that a number of people viewed federal management of public lands with some level of contempt and mistrust. I gained some level of understanding of this attitude through an exploration of historical events. The incident at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge may be best viewed through the lens of history thus I continue my research to understand why some view federal government's management of these lands as a "taking".

At a recent board meeting Jerry Cline, Manager of our Little Pend Oreille Wildlife Refuge (LPOWR), kept us informed of the situation at Malheur and other refuges in the region. He also shared resources that lend a greater grasp of the big picture (lands managed by BLM, USFS and USDFW). I want to share some of these resources with you to encourage your own effort to understand why federal management of public lands is such a hot point of contention in the West. Yes, in the West, as public attitudes east of the Mississippi looks quite different.

Hal Herring's recent piece in [High Country News](#) gives an interesting perspective. A visit to the web site of the American Lands Council is valuable. Learning about the State of Deseret was an eye opener for me. Researching the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 gives one a view of why western lands needed some kind of protection. Reading about the Range Wars will remind us that violence related to land use has been with us for a long time. I would say that the public lands transfer movement is not going away. If you value public spaces we all have a stake in these issues. Did they teach this stuff in school? If so I do not remember.

Our next event will be our spring community education program. We will continue to highlight the "great

floods". Jay Berube has led us on this one in bringing Tom Tabberts to the Colville Community College on Friday, April 22 at 7pm. He will present a video of the flood routes taken from the above. We will have materials from the Ice Age Floods Institute, a raffle and homemade treats. Come out to learn and chat about the lands we inhabit. Look for information about "trash day" in April. You can ride with us and find all sorts of discarded items.

Finally, if you support the concept of setting aside land for the benefit of wildlife we encourage you to write to the people we send to Congress as they will decide how much to fund the Refuge system in the future. Thank you for being a Friend and thank you to our board. A big smile and nod to the staff at the LPONWR. They are in community with us.

David King, President

Refuge Manager's Meanderings

We live in interesting times. The recent occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge was not anticipated by anyone in the Fish and Wildlife Service. It's no exaggeration to say it's a watershed moment for the Service sending a ripple effect throughout the organization. For two days immediately after the arrests of the occupation leaders the Little Pend Oreille, along with all refuges in the northwest, were closed to minimize any threats to employees. Although the immediate urgency has subsided we continue to be vigilant. We received several calls from our neighbors and friends expressing their support and concern for the staff and the refuge resources. Thank you!

I'd like to introduce a pair of Refuge units that you probably don't know about but may want to visit as

spring arrives and the itch to venture outside increases. The Cusick Unit is a 250 acre parcel about 3 miles north of the town of Cusick along Highway 20. The highway forms its east boundary, West Calispel Road the north boundary and Trimble Creek the south. Previously private farm land, it's been a part of this refuge since the mid 1990's. The majority of the parcel is a grassland meadow that may have a thin layer of standing water during snow melt. The sub-irrigated grasses thrive and support common snipe, savannah sparrows and other grassland species. White-tailed deer are common, elk are seen occasionally and coyotes foraging for voles are often sighted. Ducks and geese loaf along Trimble Creek and on the half dozen shallow ponds excavated in the middle of the meadow. The parcel's northwest "panhandle" is a mixed stand of cottonwoods, aspen and conifers. Our management emphasizes maintenance of the meadow by controlling invasion by conifers and hawthorn, and encouraging deciduous hardwoods on the wooded sites. If you plan to visit, look for the Blue Goose signs along Highway 20 at the intersection with West Calispel Road. The Kalispell Tribe of Indians built a nice parking area kitty corner to our property on the east side of the highway. They welcome you to hike their extensive lands along Tacoma Creek to the Pend Oreille River.

Our larger satellite parcel is the Kaniksu Unit located in the headwaters of Deer Lake. Turn off US 395 onto the North Deer Lake Road a few miles north of Loon Lake. Stay on North Deer Lake Road as it winds along the lake shore among the houses. Be patient and go slow! Just beyond the north end of the lake you'll start to see Blue Goose signs. Refuge land includes about 500 acres of the valley bottom and about 250 acres of adjoining upland forest forming a "fringe" around the valley. The county road turns to gravel and you can follow it along the valley bottom until you reach a locked gate. You're welcome to park off the road near the gate and venture behind it to find more valley bottom with some extensive wetlands. The land was purchased in 2000 and converted from livestock grazing back into a combination of wetland, upland meadow and upland forest habitat supporting a diverse fauna; I've seen tracks of moose, deer, elk, bear, coyote, bobcat and cougar. The real treat is in the early spring when the valley bottom is flooded and upwards of 5000 ducks, mostly pintails, resting during their migration north. Shallow ponds were excavated, drainage ditches plugged and fences removed to enhance habitat quality. The small stream

flowing from the north behind the gate was extensively reconstructed several years ago to restore its natural water flow and flooding.

These two far flung refuge parcels are logistically challenging to manage, but rewarding since they're so different from the main refuge and support habitat not found here. They're worth the trip!

Jerry Cline, Refuge Manager

Refuge Biologist's Report

Wow is it really spring already? With rising temperatures come melting snow and changes in the critters we see on the Refuge. By the time this is printed blackbirds have likely returned. Chipmunks and ground squirrels should be waking from their winter slumber any day now. Bald eagles will be nesting as well. One of the signs that spring has arrived is the appearance of wildflowers. Many flowers need insect pollinators to reproduce. As I have mentioned in this column before, the refuge has been working on a bee inventory. The preliminary results just arrived and so far we have found 172 species of bees and wasps on the refuge. The most common were bumblebees with 21 species collected. The sweat bees were second with 20 species collected.

Another of the sights of spring on the LPO is the waterfowl migration on the Kaniksu unit. Speaking of the Kaniksu unit did you know that the Refuge is more than just the main unit east of Colville. We have four satellite units spread around northeast Washington. The Okanagan Unit is a 27 acre piece north of Tonasket on the Okanagan River. Then there is the Springdale Unit near Springdale which is just over 50 acres. These two are closed to public entry as they are surrounded by private property and there is no way to access without trespassing. Two other units Kaniksu and Cusick are open to the public and I would encourage you to visit these unique areas someday. Kaniksu is one of the sites where milkweed was planted last fall. As those plants grow and eventually reaching flowering age they will attract monarch butterflies and other pollinators. One of the larger aspen stands on the refuge can be found on the Cusick unit. The wet meadows are a haven for western meadowlarks and savannah sparrows. If you visit in spring to early summer, look out for bobolinks.

The Pend Oreille Valley near Cusick is one of only a few regular nesting areas for this species in Washington. There are the remains of an early 1900s small sawmill on the site. A quick walk around the site can yield remnants of this bygone time. The long abandoned mill pond often has various ducks, numerous frogs, turtle and even herons in it. Cusick also has our only low elevation (under 2500 feet) white pine stand. The refuge property is surrounded on three sides by lands managed by the Kalispell Tribe Natural Resource Program, so it is only a small part of larger area that is managed on behalf wildlife and resource conservation. So if you visit the refuge lands be aware of signage and when you might be leaving public lands. This spring I hope you are able to get out and enjoy some of these far flung pieces of the Little Pend Oreille.

variable in color. They can be pale greenish, bluish, tan, or off-white and will have brown spots or streaks. Like most songbirds the young hatch out altricial, which means they are pretty much helpless with few feathers and the eyes shut. The eyes open at 4-5 days. Both parents feed and brood the nestlings. The young birds leave the nest at 9-10 days and start to fly at 13-15 days. They are their own at about 25 days. Some females many re-nest at that time while others only nest once a year. Inland northwest birds will migrate south in late October or early November and will spend the winter in the southwest US and Mexico. They should return in late April. If you get the opportunity to check out Kaniksu or Cusick units during the May to October look around for these denizens of the plains.

Critter of the Season



Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

You can find savannah on the LPO? Well it may not be the Great Plains but you can find savannah sparrows (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) on the refuge. You probably won't find them anywhere near the auto tour though. Also, in spite of the sandwich name they are not edible either. This bird of the plains can be found in good numbers on two of our satellite units discussed above. The wet meadows of the Kaniksu Unit as well as the Cusick Unit are great places to look for these sparrows throughout the spring and summer. While savannahs are small brown sparrows they are actually fairly easy to identify. They look like a pale song sparrow but the yellow spot in front of the eye is distinctive once you see the head. This is a grassland species. If you do see them perched it will probably be on a fence post or maybe just a large rock or mound of grass. Their nest is built out of grass and will be covered. It will likely be tucked away underneath mats of dried grass from the previous year. They lay 2 to 6 eggs, which are highly

Winter Wildlife 2015

If you remember back to my article last fall, I wrote that I found a dead praying mantis in a window at Headquarters and I placed it on an ivy plant in my office. When I returned to the office after the weekend it was gone. I was quite surprised to find it on my ivy plant this week. It was in a different place and position from when I placed it there so obviously was not dead when I first found it.

This was the winter of wind storms. Staff cut trees out of roads as needed but there are many more trees to remove from roads before we open the gates mid-April.

Most winters we are treated to seeing bald eagles perched in the cottonwood tree behind Headquarters weekly if not daily- not so this winter. Activity has picked up recently and we suspect it is the pair that nests near Headquarters. Mike was walking out to the mailbox recently and heard some screaming. He watched a juvenile bald eagle come flying around the corner from the Headquarters nest location with an adult bald eagle hot on its tail obviously chasing it away from the nest site.

Early December Mike saw a weasel out his office window. It came from the direction of the silos then right up to the building. I missed seeing it but went out to look at the tracks in the snow.

The end of December I saw fresh moose tracks on Bear Creek Road just before the corral. The moose came down off hill, crossed the road and made a beeline for the LPO River. The next day I walked my lunchtime loop on Mill Butte Trail and picked up the moose tracks. It had come straight down the hill, crossed the trail and kept going toward Bear Creek Road.

The first birds to find the front yard Headquarters feeder were three black-capped chickadees. We have not had much variety at our feeders this winter. Bird species seen besides the black-caps were northern flicker, pine siskin, common redpoll, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker and dark-eyed junco.

Our Winter Bird Count early January was a wet rainy day. The team that snow shod along the LPO River saw 2 mink and even got photos. A mystery hole in the snow had tracks that came out of the hole, walked a short distance and left some poop then went back into the hole. Jerry went to investigate that afternoon and determined it was an otter hole and the other entrance was under water in the river. Bird highlights from the count were great blue heron tracks along the LPO River and 5 American dippers. Durlan Springs was the hot spot for woodpeckers with downy, hairy, white-headed, pileated and northern flicker seen.

Mid-January Jerry watched a mink bounding across the backyard. Very cool when you can sit at your computer and see mink and weasel out the window. Mid February Mike saw a radio collared deer in the backyard- #17. Two other deer were with it.

February 1st I saw my first springtails on Mill Butte Trail; the next day I walked on Bear Creek Road past the Headquarters gate and they were all over the snow there.

February 2nd I saw my first ladybug on the conference room counter at Headquarters.

I took my lunch walk across Chester Field one day and saw old moose tracks and fresh coyote tracks.

Early February Mike and Jerry did a track survey around the Refuge. Of course the most abundant tracks were white-tailed deer. But they also saw 8 or 9 different moose tracks; 4 different cougar tracks; elk, coyote, bobcat, snowshoe hare, skunk and squirrel. They went out to Bayley Lake and reported the bald eagle pair present so we are hoping for another successful nesting year.

February 18th we had our first American robins – three birds on the Headquarters lawn. Very odd that we have not seen red-winged blackbirds yet.

February 19th our first male western bluebird showed up at Headquarters.

What will the next new arrival be? Our gates will open on April 14, 2016 and you can explore for yourself.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

Be Part of Education Days

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 18th and on Thursday, May 19th. Busses arrive at the Lake McDowell parking lot at 10:00 AM and will leave at 1:00 PM. The students will be divided into small groups. The more leaders we have, the smaller the groups. We have about 25 students in each class!!! So, definitely, the more the merrier! You take a group to the lake, pausing to look at the trees and habitats. You don't have to be an expert. And the self guided tour sites are of great help in focusing the students' attention. At the lake, Amy Cabral will have insect activities and you will have a picnic on the rocks!

Friday, June 3rd and Monday, June 6th 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 or giving her a call at 684-5882. THANK YOU!

Position Available

As Spring approaches, change is inevitable! So it goes for our Friends group.... We need a coordinator for Education Days for spring of 2017. This could be combined with a board position, but it is not necessary to be on the board to be the coordinator. The role of the coordinator is to communicate with the teachers in second and fifth grade and to enlist the help of Friends for the four days set aside in May and June. There are many Friends who have volunteered year after year on the trips. Education Days are a big part of our mission to provide outreach and education of the Refuge. This will be my last year in holding the position. Truthfully, it is fun and pretty easy. There is also opportunity to make changes and be creative! If you are interested, call or email me. Stephanie Wilson 684-5882 or swilson915@hughes.net.

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 north-eastern 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 2016 and tenth Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last (2015) August 16th and extends until August 15th this year . Judging will take place soon and winners will be fea-

ured in, among other places, the Winter Pileated Post. Thank you for your submissions.

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

Joel Anderson



Jim Groth