



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Fall 2016

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

Number 58

From the President

First off, I want to mention the Blue Goose Chase held on July 23rd at the LPO Refuge. About 40 people came out to ride the Auto Tour road. This is a family event, not a race, along the 13 mile route. Live music and finger foods were enjoyed while raffle prizes were generously given out. Look for another Blue Goose Chase next year.

Just a few days ago the Friends celebrated with all LPO staff our annual Staff Appreciation BBQ. This event recognizes all the good work accomplished by summer, seasonal and full time staff. We fed about 40 folks delicious burgers, sausages with potluck side dishes. All members are welcome to this event; it is a good way to meet the staff and hear about their work.

October 15th there will be a planting of western larch and white pine near Blacktail Mountain. We are looking for you all to come out and lend a hand. We will meet at the Headquarters at 8 am and travel together to the location. Lunch will be provided. Look for more information on our web site – refugefriends.com or our Facebook page.

On Saturday, September 24th we will have our annual membership meeting. This important event will begin with coffee and rolls at 9:30 am. Our program will move into a review of refuge and Friends projects and events during 2016. Following this Lisa Langelier, past LPO manager and retired Complex manager, will read from her new “The Wildlife Eye: Field Notes from a Wildlife Refuge.” This event is very important to us as it is the only time we focus on you, our valuable members. This is your opportunity to tell the Board what you would like us to focus on for the coming year. We also are still look-

ing for two members to join our Board. Come out and get with us!

Lady luck has been with us so far this season with enough rains to keep our forests green. Hopefully we will get into fall and cooler weather without smoke getting into our eyes and lungs.

Finally, I want to welcome Amy Cadwell as a prospective Board member. She and her husband moved to this area about one year ago. He transferred to a new position with the Park Service. Amy is employed at the Do It Center. We look forward to her contribution.

David King, President

Refuge Manager's Meandering

This is easily the greenest summer in recent memory: the “verdant meter” is off the scale! It's a most welcome change from that dry and smoky summer of 2015.

It's been a busy summer on the Refuge, with lots of young people working on various projects. Some are working on milkweed and aspen monitoring, another inventorying our abundant weed population, and still more newly minted biologists running camera traps and doing other biological shenanigans. It's been a pleasure to spend time with them learning their stories and hearing about their passion for resource management. This summer we also hosted a Youth Conservation Corps team of local teenagers who did various maintenance projects as well as the “cool” stuff like banding Canada geese and electrofishing trout in the Little Pend Oreille River. I'm sure they'll all remember this as one of the most inter-

esting summers of their lives.

We're finally replacing the water control structures in Potter's Pond and McDowell Lake this fall. We've been ramping up to this for a couple of years, ever since both structures started failing two years ago. We've patched them temporarily but the time is finally here to crack open those dams and replace the plumbing. We've already drained all the water we can out of McDowell Lake and have started doing the same at Potter's Pond. Due to its size and remaining water, we're hoping many of the fish in McDowell will survive until we can start refilling the lake in October. We're planning to round up the fish in Potter's before its dry and relocate them to Bayley Lake. Both should start refilling this fall and be back to full pool by next summer.

Potter's will be restocked next spring but we've discovered sunfish living in McDowell Lake. We found them back in 2014 when we treated the lake with a chemical to kill the long-time evasive tench. Thousands of sunfish rolled up on the beach, and that's a good thing. Sunfish propagate rapidly and soon are competing with the trout for food. Just as rapidly they compete with each other and the result is a dense population of stunted sunfish dominating the lake. We're not sure how they got in the lake in 2014 but there are some local folks that like to practice "bucket biology" and deposit live sunfish caught in other lakes in the trout lakes. Maybe some of the 2014 sunfish survived our poisoning two years ago, or maybe someone decided to augment the trout population using the bucket method. Regardless, we'll again be working with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist to vanquish these invaders and restore trout to the lake.

About October first we'll be looking for volunteers to help us plant western white pine seedlings in one of the more remote areas of the Refuge. Western white pine was one of the dominant tree species in the area, but white pine blister rust killed most of the trees decades ago. The area we're planting still has a few tenacious white pine trees, so we know the site is suitable for that species. Our planting stock is nursery raised and rust resistant, so hopefully we can begin restoring a population of this important tree species to the

Refuge. With the help of the Friends Group, we'll provide a nice "woods lunch" for the project volunteers, always my favorite part!



Youth Conservation Corps team help USFWS fish biologist electrofish the Little Pend Oreille River to determine fish species, numbers and size.



Student Conservation Corps intern and Youth Conservation Corps member team up to band a Canada goose for a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife study.

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Refuge Biologist's Report

It has certainly been a busy summer. We have had a number of projects going on this season.

The new bald eagle nest on McDowell Lake was successful with its first young taking flight in early July. The river nest failed when the eaglets were lost during a severe thunderstorm.

I have written about the western pearlshell mussels before but this year began a new phase of that re-

search with placement of rearing pens in the river. So far all the young mussels are doing well.

We have also set a record for the number of monarchs sighted in a year. Our previous record of 9 has been surpassed with 17 and southbound migration is still yet to come.

Our restoration works continues with several projects in the works. First the South McDowell thinning project will begin this fall. We will also be starting work on the Slide Creek Meadows restoration in September. Finally we have 2500 western white pine and western larch seedlings coming this fall for planting in the Blacktail Mountain Habitat Management Unit. We are planning an October 15th event that will include lunch. Please stay tuned to the Refuge and the Friends' websites for more information.

I received two grants this summer to hire additional interns. The first was Inventory and Monitoring grant to bring on a three person crew to work on baseline inventories of quaking aspen and milkweed on the refuge. The second was an invasive species intern. He spent the summer doing a pilot project to map invasive plants. Including the regular bio tech and Student Conservation Association (SCA) intern positions, this gave me a 6 person crew doing biological work on the refuge this summer. For those who may not be familiar with SCA, it is a nonprofit organization that connects university students and recent graduates with internships at National Parks, Forests, Refuges and other agencies. The refuge's interns this year are Jacob, University of Richmond; Savannah, University of Florida; Rebecca, Bates College; Keaton, Carleton College; and Juliana, State University of New York at Genesee. Some readers may recall a couple of years ago I asked my interns to write a few words for the Pileated Post. I got several very positive comments on that. So I decide to try that again. I have included below some thoughts from Juliana and Jacob who have been working on the Inventory and Monitoring crew since the end of May.

Hello Friends, my name is Juliana and I am an SCA intern working on the refuge this summer. Savannah, Jacob, and I are spending the summer conduct-

ing inventory and monitoring on the refuge's quaking aspen and showy milkweed. As those of you who helped plant seedlings know, the refuge is currently working to increase the size of its milkweed population. Since the LPO is located within the migration corridor of the western monarch population, we are taking efforts to improve conditions for them. As interns, we contribute to these efforts by revisiting milkweed planting sites to record the success rate of the seedlings and surveying naturally occurring milkweed patches to record the number of plants present and identify any signs of monarch eggs, caterpillars, or butterflies. Every 7-10 days we also travel to a satellite property on the Okanogan River, where there are an estimated 20,000 milkweed plants! Our sightings confirm that monarchs are here, and hopefully our planting efforts will attract more to the area. You can see patches of milkweed along the north side of Bear Creek Road and planted patches below the McDowell Lake Overlook.

Quaking aspen is a priority habitat for the refuge and a focus of refuge management efforts, so now a few words from Jacob: Across the western United States, quaking aspen populations have been dying off at unprecedented rates. Our job is to document the location, size, and condition of the existing aspen stands on the refuge. This in turn will inform the refuge's restoration efforts. So far we've been able to fully survey over 50 stands and have mapped over 100. While the three of us will be leaving the refuge behind in September, the experience we've gained this summer will certainly serve to guide us as we begin our own careers.



Critter of the Season

Did you know that northeast Washington has its very own boa constrictor? Ok maybe not like the boa constrictors you know about, but the rubber boa is indeed a boa. While it is not made out of rubber its grayish brown color has the appearance of natural rubber. They are the smallest of the boa species and they are found farther north than any snake except for the common garter snake. The scientific name is *Charina bottae*. The genus charina is Greek for graceful. Like all boas they are constrictors which means they dispatch their prey by squeezing. They are one of the slowest snakes in the United States, so they prefer to forage on equally slow moving prey. Much of their hunting is done underground with baby mice the primary prey species.

They are among the most docile of snakes and are sometimes described as looking like a giant earthworm. Although, they are not so much a giant by snake standards as their maximum length is only about 27 inches. They are usually found associated with coniferous forest and do not do well with warm weather. When the weather heats up they will stay underground, only coming above ground at night. They are more cold-tolerant than nearly all other snake species. One trick they have is to maintain a higher body temperature in the head, keeping the brain safe, while allowing the body temperature to drop. This allows activity in cooler weather. They have been recorded being active with a body temperature as low as 44°F. Rubber boas are very long lived but neither their average nor maximum lifespan is known. One long term study in California has found wild snakes that are over 40 years old. One captive animal is at least 75 and still produces young. Like all boas they do live birth of 2 to 8 young that are 7 to 11 inches long. They generally give birth every 4 years.

Here on the refuge they can be found almost anywhere but look for them in shady areas with rotting logs. Looking in the cool of early morning will also increase your chances of finding one.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Summer Wildlife 2016

Red crossbills are often on our roads getting gravel or sand to act as grit in their gizzard to help with their digestion. Recently flocks of crossbills and pine siskins have been in the parking lot at Headquarters ingesting sand. Often visitors and staff keep driving expecting these birds to fly away at the vehicle's approach- Nope! I have seen many crossbills flattened on our driveway and Bear Creek Road. So slow down and wait for the birds to get out of the roadway.

On June 21st two Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife staff set up at Bayley Lake to band Canada geese. Two kayaks were used to herd the geese toward the south end boat launch where a temporary enclosure was set up. Our SCA (Student Conservation Association) and YCC (Youth Conservation Corps) young people had quite the time catching and holding the birds so they could be sexed and banded then released. As the catching and banding was going on I watched an adult bald eagle swooping low over Bayley Lake. I saw a splash which I thought was a duck driving under water. The eagle landed on the lake twice. The last time it swam to shore so I was sure it caught something. I never saw it feed so it was just water logged and needed to dry its feathers. Later I saw it fly off and land in a nearby tree.

On August 4th I was on my usual lunch time walk on the Mill Butte Trail when heard a loud thwack. I stopped to listen thinking it might have been a Pileated woodpecker pounding on a tree but did not hear it again. So I started walking and heard the thwack again. This time I could tell what area of trees it was coming from so I stood still and watched and listened and could tell cones and branches were dropping to the ground. Was there a bear or cougar up the tree? Now my interest was really peaked so I slowly walked closer to the area and watched. I kept hearing and seeing cones drop from high in the pine tree- then I saw the red squirrel harvesting cones. After a few minutes it came down the tree trunk, totally oblivious to my presence, and starting looking for the cones it had just cut loose - perhaps getting ready for winter.

An interesting visitor came in on August 10th. Her goal is to visit every National Wildlife Refuge and

she has already visited over 300 (there are currently 561 refuges). I learned she raised her family in Ohio but is now on the road full time as an RVer without an RV. Her home base (a PO Box) is in Texas. Renee started her quest in June of 2013. This spring as she was driving in Mississippi she was listening to NPR (National Public Radio) and heard a refuge manager plead for volunteers. They needed some bird surveys done and she ended up staying there for 2 months in refuge provided housing. Really a sweet deal for her. She visited Kootenai NWR on August 8. At Little Pend Oreille Refuge she is hoping to see black-backed and white-headed woodpeckers which is entirely possible. Since she does not want to visit refuges when the snow flies, she will be heading south. I wished her the best on her quest.

Usually there is one mammal that is seen more often than others in the summer, this year it is basically a tie between elk, black bear and moose. If you count numbers of animals seen, not number of sightings, elk definitely wins. One to four elk were seen around Winslow Cabin, Berg Lane, the entrance to the Refuge on Bear Creek Road and the old Paulke homestead. An elk calf was reported in the Christianson field – no mention of adults with it. Twelve elk were seen around the Shop, 15 elk on Narcisse Creek Road and 35 elk on the lower end of Mill Butte Trail; 10 were this year's young. One of our SCA interns found a nice, large elk antler, one that many of us wish we had found.

Black bears were seen numerous times around Potter's Pond- both black and cinnamon color phases. They were also seen by Winslow Cabin, Happy Valley, Sampson Orchard (a black and a cinnamon colored bear) and a large black colored bear at Minnie Flats.

Many recent visitors tell me they want to see moose. A bull moose has been seen five times in the Beaver Ponds (from the end of May to the end of July) plus at the McDowell Lake Overlook and Pierce Lake. A moose and yearling were seen on Buffalo-Wilson Road and a moose with twins above River Camp. Jerry was driving past Cottonwood Campground one day and saw a moose on the road; one was seen along the bottom of Blacktail Mountain Road and another at the top of Blacktail Mountain Road. A cow moose was observed in Bayley Lake – a great

place to be with the hot weather we have been experiencing.

Other sightings were a river otter in McDowell Lake and 2 otters in Potter's Pond. Three snowshoe hare were seen around McDowell Lake in mid-July. Our Inventory and Monitoring SCA crew have seen two rubber boas and an alligator lizard. A single osprey has been observed repeatedly at Potter's Pond and our Maintenance Shop.

I've seen two different photos of Barred owls that members of our fire staff took; one on Webking Road, the other on Olsen Creek Road. Some of our staff regularly monitors trail cams. One site kept getting photos of bobcats with prey in their mouths- they think there was a den site nearby. Another camera got lots of cougar photos. An inquisitive black bear spent 3 hours sniffing and licking one camera- so much for clear photos after that visit!

We have two big projects that will affect visitor access: draining of McDowell Lake and Potter's Pond to install new water-control culverts.

Fishing is allowed until the remaining water is inaccessible. There are NO special fishing regulations in place; the normal fishing rules, as stated in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife fishing pamphlet, are still valid. We apologize for the shortened fishing season, but this repair is necessary to keep the lake and pond full of water and available for fishing in the future.

Walk in access to McDowell Marsh and Lake behind the gate, including the McDowell Marsh Environmental Education Trail, will not be allowed starting September 13, 2016. Camping at River Camp will not be affected.

The gate into Potter's Pond and Bayley Lake will tentatively be closed September 13, 2016. Camping and walk in access will not be allowed past the gate.

We expect the work to be completed by the middle of October.

Fall is a great time to visit the Refuge and enjoy the cooler temperatures and changing colors of the larch, aspen and cottonwoods. Just a reminder that hunting seasons start in September.

Barbara Harding, Refuge Staff

Newsletter Necessities

Number 58 - 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

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

Calendar

September

14th -- Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.
24th—Annual Meeting—9:30 a.m.

October

12th – Board Meeting –6:00 p.m.

November

9th – 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.



Box 215
Colville, WA 99114