



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Winter 2016

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

Number 59

From the President

Note: Our new president is Dan Price.

I have been reflecting on the years that I have been involved with Friends groups and Refuges at both the local and National level. With continuing staff reductions, limited budgets, and groups who question the value of our Refuges and public lands one could get a little depressed and wonder; What's next? What going to happen to these special places? Instead of feeling down and depressed I chose to look for the positive and the Hope for a future where are wild lands and critters are free to live as nature intended. Why do I have hope for the future? It's really quite simple. Over the years I have worked with and seen the passion and dedication that the staff and Friends across the country have for our Refuges. Next we need to be able to pass along our passion, for our Refuge(s), to other groups, families, individuals, and especially our youth.

What can we do and what can you do as an individual? Here is just a couple of ideas:

First, be an advocate for the Refuge. I do not necessarily mean being a political advocate (although that can be helpful) but being an advocate by getting to know the Refuge and bringing people out and show them what make the Little Pend Oreille (or any Refuge) special to you and why it is a special and important place for everyone in our community to enjoy. Is it a special place? The animal and plant life? A hike? Or just a nice quiet spot to sit and enjoy the outdoors? During your travels is also a great time to be an advocate for the Little Pend Oreille by telling people why it is a great place to visit. Lastly when you are visiting the Refuge make yourself available to answer questions. If you see someone looking a little confused help them out. If you see people at the main Kiosk by Headquarters they usually have a question. Don't be shy!

Second, get involved with getting youth outside. Many kids today are suffering from what Richard Louv calls "nature deficit disorder" because they spend so little

time in the natural world. It's hard to get people interested in protecting the wild places if they have never been there. This tends to be a larger problem in large metropolitan areas but it also effects the rural areas especially where there are higher rates of poverty which makes it difficult for families to get out to enjoy the outdoors.

There are a number of ways to get involved with youth. One of the best and easiest is to get involved with the Friends and Refuges education days. In May and June, we have 4 education days that involves bring out all of the second and fifth grade students from the Colville School District. We are now entering our 16th year of the program and we are always looking for volunteers and ideas on how to improve upon this already great program.

Bring your children or grandchildren to the Refuge. The younger the better. The young ones are often the most curios and most willing to learn new things. The older one can be a bit more difficult but with effort you can even get the most unwilling teenagers interested.

Teenager can be difficult but they can also surprise you. Last Summer I had the pleasure of Supervising the Youth Conservation Program at the Refuge. Being a lifelong bachelor with no kids I was interested, intrigued and slightly terrified. As it turned out I nothing to worry about with the exception that my crew got most of their work done a lot faster than I (and the staff) expected. So I was always looking for more to do. It was not all work as we also did many habitat projects (with our staff and other agencies) and took and number of educational trips throughout the area. Not only were they handworkers but they also showed a willingness to learn about the Refuge and what all the staff were involved in their work. Our staff was great in showing the YCC what they were doing and were able to get my crew involved in many different aspects of work and conservation on the Refuge. Lastly I was happy with the interest that the crew showed in being involved in conservation and/or natural resource work in their future. I

hope they went away with a better understanding of why we all find the Little Pend Oreille and special place.

Remember your passion is what drives us to do the best that we can do at protecting our wild lands and the plants and animals that call those wild places home!

If you wish to learn more about our Refuge or Friends group feel free to contact me. I am always willing to show you around the Refuge.

Dan Price: bigdan65@yahoo.com

Membership! It's that time of year again when we ask for your continued support of our mission. Please think of us while giving your yearly donations. I also hope that past members enjoyed their new magnet with their membership notice.

Annual retreat and yearly planning. Saturday, January 21 starting with coffee at 9:00 AM at the house across from Refuge HQ. This is your time to get involved. Learn what we do and are planning to do in the upcoming year. It is your chance contribute input and ideas. After coffee we get started about 9:30. After the meeting we enjoy a potluck lunch. Optional outdoor activities follow.

As always if you have any questions about anything going on at the Refuge feel free to contact me. Dan Price: bigdan65@yahoo.com.

Refuge Manager's Meanderings

Let's get the unpleasant business out of the way first. The verdict rendered in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupation trial was incredibly disappointing. Most of us watched the occupier's press conferences where they clearly stated their purposes while strutting around in their militia costumes bragging about holding the refuge hostage. Yet the seemingly unimaginable occurred and they were found innocent. An apparent slam dunk bounced back out of the hoop. Now the whole refuge system is on edge wondering if this will empower some other individual(s) to attempt a more violent anti-government act.

On Inauguration Day we will have a new boss. President-elect Trump hasn't announced his selection for Secretary of the Interior yet. But whoever is confirmed to that post, and that of Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, will set the course for the agency and the national wildlife refuge system for at least the next four years. Stay tuned.

This fall we've experienced a few setbacks as well as some accomplishments. Due to some permitting issues, we postponed replacing the water control structures at McDowell Lake and Potters Pond until early next summer. On the accomplishment side, 2,500 western white pine seedlings were planted on the Blacktail Mountain Wildlife Habitat Management Unit through the combined efforts of refuge staff and volunteers. Western white pine was once an important component of the forest on the refuge, but was significantly impacted by the introduction of the white pine blister rust fungus a century ago. The Blacktail Mountain site still supports a few remnant white pines, making it a good site to try reestablishing the species using rust-resistant nursery stock. We're working with the Forest Service forest pathologists in Wenatchee to establish a monitoring protocol for this project. We plan to plant another 2,500 seedlings in the Blacktail Mountain unit this spring and we're prepping another area near Prospect Creek for a similar planting. We're very excited about reestablishing significant numbers of this species on the refuge and welcome help when planting day comes.

I recently received an inquiry from a Friends member regarding elk habitat management on the refuge. I've fielded similar questions before so I'll take this opportunity to address that excellent question. Several of our current habitat management techniques benefit elk as well as several other wildlife species. For the past 15 years we've been selectively thinning the forest to establish a more natural species diversity, stocking density, and age class mix. This also encourages more shrub growth thus improving cover and browse for deer, elk and moose. Aspen is a key habitat for many species including elk. We're currently mapping the location and condition of aspen stands, and gradually improving aspen stand health through conifer removal. On the several hundred acres of old farm fields within the refuge we're replacing the weeds and tame grasses with native grasses and herbs, like Idaho fescue and yarrow, that are more desirable forage for elk and deer. We use prescribed burning where appropriate to reinvigorate both forest shrubs and field grasses, resulting in healthier vegetation and improved browse and grazing for elk. Since implementing these management practices we've observed a noticeable increase in the number of elk using the refuge.

I'm excited about a couple of upcoming events. A tradition on the LPO is the annual mid winter bird count. We started this count back in 2001 to learn more about what species of birds were using the refuge during the "off season". Loosely modeled on the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, it's a "count all you see and hear" type sur-

vey confined within the Refuge's boundaries. But it's more than just a bird count; it's evolved into a social mixer bringing refuge employees and volunteers together to spend a morning chasing birds before flocking together (sorry, I just couldn't resist) for a hot lunch of soup and desserts. We team bird nerds with non-birdy nerds so everyone has a chance to learn a thing or two and have fun. This year's count will be on Thursday, January 12th starting from Refuge Headquarters at 8:00 AM.

If you have questions about winter events please give us a call.

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Refuge Biologist's Report

Wow is it really winter already? Another fall has come and gone. Fall was once again busy. My biological technician and one of the interns were here until just before Thanksgiving. So they were able to keep up on several projects. If you have been to the refuge lately you may have noticed several barrels to collect wings from grouse hunters. We have been cooperating with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to collect information to assess forest grouse populations in the northeast corner of the state.

We recently wound up the forest monitoring for the year. This year we started a project to look at the succession in the various thinning projects. The protocols were tested in the field and a few kinks were worked out. We should be continuing this project next summer. We installed a temporary fence around an aspen clone in the Durlan Springs area last fall. The growth in those trees is very promising so two more small fences were installed this year. In these stands almost every one of the young aspen trees was being eaten by browsing animals. Fencing out the animals like this for a time allows the young trees to grow tall enough to survive the constant eating by large mammals. Aspen is an important habitat for many species and this project is generating noticeable improvements in just the first year.

I have written here before about the changing of seasons and all that is happening with the animals. Yes bears, chipmunks and others are hibernating. Many of the birds have headed south just as they always do. But, have you ever thought about what the staff does on the refuge in winter. The seasonal workers have all gone home or to other jobs. Most of the fire crew is laid off for the winter. Snow should be piling up soon, making

access more challenging in many areas. Then there is the wildlife, hunkered down for the winter. So there is still plenty to do. For those of us that are still working, winter can be a very busy time. There are year end reports to get out, there are grants to submit, staff to hire for next summer. There is project planning, permits to obtain, and more. Sometimes there are even newsletters to write. Some projects continue throughout the winter and some other start up. Wildlife cameras remain out and need to be checked throughout the winter when we can. We have been doing winter track surveys when conditions permit. There is also the winter bird count.

Winter is a great time to visit. Once the snow accumulates snow shoes and cross country skis are a great way to see the refuge. Even if you don't see animals, snow is a great tracking medium and you can enjoy our wildlife even when you don't see them. Tracking is like a detective on the search for clues. Which way was the animal traveling? Are the tracks far apart from a running animal or are they closer together from an animal walking slowly? Is that track rounded with little or no claw marks visible like a bobcat or is it more elongated with prominent toenails like a coyote? Is it bounding like a squirrel or running like a deer mouse? The web footed tracks of beaver often have drag marks from the tail in the snow. It is not just tracks you can look for. Have you ever seen the wing imprint in the snow where an owl captured a mouse? River otters will often use regular slides to enter the water. These can be quite noticeable when you come across one. So the next time you get outside in the snow take a look around to see if you can figure out what sort of wildlife passed your way. For more information on one of the more common of these winter encounters, just keep reading.

Critter of the Season

One of the most noticeable animals here in the winter is the red squirrel. Red squirrels (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) are the native tree squirrels in Northeastern Washington. In spite of the name very few red squirrels in the Rocky Mountain Region are actually red. Most of the individuals in our areas are more dark brown. Even these typically have a very dark red strip down the back although that is hard to see even up close. They are active during the day when we tend to be out and about, so we tend to see them unlike so many other rodents which come out at night. Also they are one of the most vocal of all North American mammals and their frequent scolding makes them noticeable to even the beginning nature observer. How often do you think about squirrels? Did you know they collect dozens or even

hundreds of pine cones in large caches? They will then feed out of these caches throughout the winter and spring waiting for cone to ripen the following summer. These caches contain so many pine nuts that bears routinely raid them when they are preparing to hibernate. Squirrels are creatures of habit often sitting at the same spot to feed for years. The resulting piles of pine cone scales are referred to as middens. Although the bulk of their diet is pine nuts, squirrels have a highly varied diet. They are also fond of mushrooms and many other plants. They regularly eat species of mushrooms than can be deadly to people. The generally do not eat the mushrooms fresh but rather clip them off placing them among the tree branches to let the sun dry them out. They also will feed on bird's eggs and sometimes even baby birds. They are highly territorial and you may have seen them chasing interlopers out of their territory. Although territories are small (they average a little over a half acre) they are vigorously defended from their neighbors. Nest are constructed of grass and built in the forks of trees. They also may be in cavities in trees and even in buildings. Females will have up to 5 young. The young remain with the mother for about 5 months before setting out on their own before their first winter. Although only about 20% of young squirrels make through the first year, those that do typically live 5 to 8 years. So the next time you are out to the refuge keep your eyes and ears open for this high energy resident of our forests.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Fall Wildlife 2016

Winter will come as a shock after all the rain and warm temperatures in October and November. By the time you are reading this, snow will be a reality.

On August 29 at 8:15 am a young couple came into the office; most visitors don't get that early of a start. They had camped at River Camp the night before and had driven the Auto Tour Loop early this morning but had not seen any wildlife. The woman really wanted to see a moose since she had never seen one. They were from Lithuania and touring the USA for 2 months. How did they ever find this Refuge? The man said he had done a lot of research. They had visited the North Cascades National Park and were on their way to Glacier National Park. They had questions about bear safety and if we had any dangerous snakes. They decided to hike the Mill Butte Trail and try driving the Auto Tour Loop again just before dark. I sure hope they got to see some

wildlife on the Refuge before they left. On October 4th a couple from Russia stopped by Headquarters. They were very interested in our skins and skulls and told me they did not know about cougars since none live in Russia.

November 3rd we had visitors from Australia. The woman really wanted to know where she could see some wildlife. Quite the international visitors, eh?

September 14 was another beautiful fall day. I walked down to the Little Pend Oreille River on the asphalt path. Cedar waxwings were everywhere eating berries, along with evening grosbeaks and American robins. As I approached the bench I noticed a large bald faced hornet's nest that was now visible since leaves are starting to drop. I sat on the bench enjoying the sunshine and could hear and see waxwings buzzing about. Suddenly birds were sounding agitated and a small hawk flew into the cottonwood and perched almost directly overhead. I dared not move to lift my binoculars to my eyes. As expected, it did not stay long. Based on the flight characteristics, I'm calling it a Cooper's hawk.

On the 15th of September, Matt, our Bio tech, saw a great gray owl at Lenhart Meadow. The next day the rest of the biology staff went back to try and find this bird but were unsuccessful.

The evening of September 11 provided quite an experience for our volunteer Bob. He and he wife were camped at Winslow Cabin in their RV for the summer. Bob was outside by his RV at 6 pm and heard 3 distinct cougar screams across the river from Winslow Cabin. Try as he might, he never could see the animal. To confirm he heard a cougar he listened to cougar and bobcat vocalizations and had no doubt in his mind.

Our Fire crew conducted a prescribed burn in the Log Barn Meadow on September 27. Lots of white smoke, with some tan colored smoke, billowed up with a moderate NE wind. The crew was laying a drip torch line about three quarters of the way through the meadow when a red-tailed hawk flew directly to the line of smoke. It flew around as if looking for escaping rodents, then perched at the top of a pine tree just across the road from the flames. I lost track of it so don't know if its hunting was successful.

On September 28 a co-worker at the Fire Cache called me to say a small bull moose was heading my way across Chester Field. I hung up the phone and rushed outside to see this moose on the edge of the hillside. I watched him as he trotted towards the draw then came up on the other side in the trees. He stopped there and I got a good look at him through my binoculars. He con-

tinued up the hill in the trees then I saw him cross Bear Creek Road and go down the steep bank. By then Jerry came out and caught a glimpse of him going down the bank. We waited and watched then walked up the road but never saw him again. I like it when wildlife comes to me.

The next day I was told a woman and her kids were hiking on the Mill Butte Trail and saw a bear with 3 cubs around 6 pm. Other bear sightings were at Shumaker Meadow, Samson Orchard, Buffalo-Wilson Road and Durlan Springs.

The beavers have been quite active behind the Christianson Homestead. Our biology seasonal workers put a trail camera on the pond they created but never got a photo of one. Dan Price often checks on their activity and saw 2 out there on September 10th.

Otters were seen in the Little Pend Oreille River by the Christianson Homestead and the Gorge
Our water control replacement projects at Potter's Pond and McDowell Lake have been delayed until next June. Potter's Pond was completely drained and will remain drained until the project is completed. During the process of draining it we got to see some shorebirds including spotted sandpiper and Wilson's phalarope. I heard a report about yellowlegs but don't know which species. Other interesting bird sightings have been a varied thrush on Olson Creek Road mid-October, chestnut-backed chickadees on Blacktail Mountain Road early November and a blue jay on October 2 at Headquarters. Julie, one of our SCA Interns actually got a blurry photo of the bird. Clark's nutcrackers were seen early November and a late yellow-headed blackbird November 2. Mid-November I learned a pair of bald eagles was seen at McDowell Lake and one of the birds was perched by last year's nest. It sure would be great if they nested there again.

As I'm sure most of you know- mushrooms cropped up everywhere after all that rain we received. I saw one mushroom placed 4 feet off the ground in the fork of a tree root. The tree had fallen over- not sure if a human or some species of wildlife placed it there. Another day I saw a squirrel with a large mushroom in its mouth ran across the trail in front of me.

Just a reminder that the main hunting seasons are over; archery hunters will still be about as well as turkey hunters. December 31 is the day any remaining hunting seasons will end and our main gates will be closed for the winter.

We are planning a timber harvest this winter. It will be south of McDowell Lake and west of Rookery Road Cutoff along Bear Creek Road. Watch for logging trucks coming out on Bear Creek Road.

Winter is a great time to visit the Refuge especially when it is clothed in snow and quiet. You are welcome to walk, ski or snowshoe behind the gates- enjoy your visit.

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 for the 2015-2016 contest.

They are:

Public Use Category: Tricia Woods for "What's That Bug?"

Scenic Category: Trudy Koop for "Visit to the Orchard"

Animal Category: Trudy Koop for "Garter Greeting"

Plant Category: Bertha Kamstra for "Bluebell Flower" (Large-flowered *Triteleia*)

Thanks to everyone who entered. We had a total of 53 photos sent in. and I am glad I wasn't the judge. (Thanks, Scott Price.) There were many excellent photos that could have easily won.

Remember the new 2016-2017 contest has already begun, and will run into August 15.

For more information about the contest, one can contact Joel Anderson at onionjoel@gmail.com.

Joel Anderson for the FLPO Photo Contest



Newsletter Necessities

Number 59 - 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

14th --Board meeting, 6:00 p.m.

January

11th-- Board meeting, 6:00 p.m.

12th--Winter bird count, 8:00 a.m.

21st—Planning meeting, 9:30 a.m.

February

8th – 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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