



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Summer 2017

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

Number 61

### From the President

Over the years many people have asked me what is the Friends group and what does a Friends group do?

**Who are we:** The Friends of the LPONWR is just one of around 225 Friends groups, with over 40,000 members, supporting the mission of around 300 Refuges and Fisheries along with the National Conservation Training Center, in West Virginia. We, as Friends groups, are uniquely tied to the Refuge system allowing us to work closely with a refuge (and other refuges). The relationship also benefits Friends by the service providing training, a place to work and store our gear. Friends also benefit by getting to know each refuge in an intimate way and learn what the staff is up to and what are their goals. The refuge and staff benefit from Friends volunteer work and advocacy. Friends groups are all registered 501(c)3 nonprofits.

Every year Friends groups contribute around 1.4 million hour of volunteer work and raise about \$5 million per year for habitat restoration projects along with many other grants for special projects, trail building, environmental education and events.

**What do we do:** Our main goal is to support the mission of each refuge and the Refuge system. There are many ways in which the Friends help out.

Here is a list of some of what Friends do:

- **Community Outreach:** Friends offer the public opportunities to learn about their local refuge and the Refuge system through publications, public events and refuge activities.
- **Interpretation:** Many Friends groups help their refuge by leading interpretive hikes and tours, helping the staff with interpretive brochures and generally being a

good ambassador for each refuge and the Refuge system.

• **Environmental Education:** On the LPO we have environmental education days for all the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in the Colville School District, in partnership with the schools. Nationally, there are over 82,000 participants in various environmental education programs across the Refuge system.

• **Projects:** Examples on the LPO are all three of our main trails, in which the Friends were instrumental in securing the necessary grants and labor to get the trails built. We also use outside partners on these projects. For example, without the help of the Washington Trails Association these trails would not be completed.

• **Advocacy:** Friends groups advocate for the mission of their refuge and the National Refuge system. This includes letter writing, calling congressional Representatives and even testifying before congress in support of our Refuges and Public Lands in general.

• **Volunteering:** This can include office work, maintenance, interpretation, education, and citizen science.

D Dan Price, President

### Refuge Manager's Meandering

What a wet spring we've had this year. Countless times these last couple of months, while on refuge inspection tours (manager code for "I gotta get outta this office!") I've said to myself "I've never seen water THERE before!" Not only were the streams and rivulets flowing and the depressions full, water was just oozing out of the ground. How much water was there this spring? Several years ago we reactivated an old United States Geological Service stream flow gaging station on the

Little Pend Oreille River near headquarters. It's full of gizmos that measure and record the amount of water flowing by so it's easy to compare the river's flow this year with last year's. The peak flow last year occurred about April 1<sup>st</sup> with a discharge rate around 320 cubic feet per second. It again peaked about April 1 this year but this time moving 610 cubic feet of water per second. Almost double! The numbers don't lie.

I think it's time to share with you a little of the story of Rita Poe. Last November I received a call from a woman from Chimacum, Washington stating she was the executrix of Rita Poe's estate and that Rita had left nearly \$800,000 in her estate to be dispersed among eight national wildlife refuges and four parks scattered from Washington to Texas, including the Little Pend Oreille NWR. Who was Rita Poe? Nobody really knows. She lived in a 27-foot Airstream travel trailer with her dog I.G., parked in an RV park when she wasn't visiting refuges taking photographs. She asked the RV park manager, a casual acquaintance, to be the executor of her will. Not long after, she died in her trailer from colon cancer. None of the staff on the refuges or parks she left money to remember her visits, but something about these places impressed her enough she wanted to leave them each a generous gift. Last spring Nancy, the executrix, set off on a 4000 mile "trip of a lifetime" to visit as many of Rita's favorite places as she could, including the LPO. Nancy and I toured the refuge and I told her about the refuge Friends Group and your past accomplishments. Nancy agreed to give the \$48,275 Rita left the LPO to the refuge Friends so it might leverage additional matching grant funds for a project worthy of Rita's generosity. There's much more to Rita's story that our public affairs folks hope to tell through local and national media. I don't want to steal their story now but I'll have more to tell in the next newsletter.

After twenty years working on the Refuge, Dan Brauner, whose last formal title was Fire Operations Specialist, retired in April. Dan was involved in all the prescribed fire projects we've implemented over the last two decades to the tune of thousands of acres of habitat improvement. The next time you see a big, healthy ponderosa pine with a scorch ring around the trunk, thank Dan! On small units like this, we wear many hats. Dan was also the de facto hiking trails coordinator, working with the Washington Trails Association and your Friends group constructing Mill Butte,

Big Pine and the McDowell Marsh Environmental Education Trails. Not last and certainly not least, we'll all miss Dan's Elvis impression complete with hip shaking during staff birthday parties. Birthday celebrations are not the same around here since Dan left.

Finally, lube those chains and air up those tires for the Blue Goose Chase family bike ride coming on July 22. Fun will be had by all!

### Volunteer Spotlight

With shrinking budgets and smaller staff we depend more and more on volunteers to accomplish habitat improvement projects beneficial to the refuge wildlife and visitors. A good example of decade's long commitment to volunteerism is the ongoing work of the Inland Empire Fly Fishing Club to develop and maintain trout spawning habitat in the channel connecting Potter's Pond and Bayley Lake. The IEFFC's involvement in the channel began in October, 1991, with installation of five log weirs and gravel for spawning beds. New gravel was placed in the fall of 1992 following reports of "heavy use" of the spawning beds. Periodically since then the club has returned to clean out dense weed and grass growth and other debris from the channel, repair the log weirs, and replace gravel that has eroded away. While the extent of natural trout production is uncertain, there is a benefit to providing some spawning opportunity. Some fish, given the opportunity to spawn, will return to the lake to survive longer and provide an additional carryover of larger fish to be caught in the trout fishery.



**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

## Biologist's Report

Here we are coming into another summer. What a spring it has been. For those of us around Colville it has been a time of washed out roads and flooded highways. The more than double average rainfall the last couple of months makes for some interesting wildlife impacts. With flooded fields all around and water, water everywhere, it has been a good spring to be a duck. Presumably this is why we had record low count of waterfowl on the Kaniksu unit. With water in so many places there was no reason for waterfowl to concentrate in small areas. Ducks were pretty much everywhere this spring. It's not just ducks that have been of interest this spring. A Peregrine Falcon has been hanging around Bayley Lake, and time will tell how long it decides to remain on the refuge. Spring is quickly transitioning to summer. The first goslings were seen on Potter's Pond a few days ago and many birds are beginning to nest. With all the rain, this spring is shaping up to be a pretty good wildflower year on the refuge. I would encourage you to visit and take in some of nature's rainbow this time of year.

Bald eagles are once again nesting on the refuge. The nest at Bayley Lake has failed so we have lifted the closure and removed the marker buoys. The McDowell Lake nest is another story. At McDowell the eggs hatched sometime during the first week of May. The nest can be seen from the McDowell Lake overlook off Rookery Road, so if you stop by search the trees across the lake from the overlook and you may be able to spot them.

We will once again be doing the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Butterfly count on the refuge. The date is July 8 this year which is the Saturday after the 4<sup>th</sup>. We will meet at the office at 8:30 and will be heading out to look for butterflies by 9. This event has been a lot of fun in the past and if you have any interest in learning the butterflies of our area please join us. No experience needed just an interest in a beautiful but often overlooked group of wildlife.

My biological technician, Matt, is back to work for another season. Weed work will be in full swing as soon as the weather allows. I also received funding to hire another invasive species intern. He will be starting in mid-June and working into September. The focus of that project this year will be to continue working on the

weed map for the refuge. This year the emphasis will be on the satellite units and sites targeted for timber treatments as part of our ongoing forest restoration work.

We will soon be proceeding with grassland restoration efforts on some more of the old farm fields. If you visit you may see signs of work at Samson Orchard or at the Slide Creek Meadows. The refuge is primarily known for being forested but have you thought of our grasslands? These may be old farm fields, natural meadows or seasonally wet areas that can't support woody plants like trees or shrubs. These grassy areas are important--even essential--to many types of wildlife. Whether the majestic elk or often overlooked grass skippers (a type of butterfly), many types of animals live in these open areas. savannah sparrows, lark sparrows, and western meadowlarks all nest in grass. Meadow mice, ground squirrels and gophers all live in grasslands and in turn are hunted by hawks, owls, bobcats and coyotes. These grasslands are also great places to find many types of wildflowers. Lupines, balsamroot, milkweed, and many others that need to get full sun are found more often in areas with few or no trees. Some of our rare plants like adder's tongue fern or blue-eyed grass are only found in grassy areas. Our grasslands while small in acreage are important to so many types of wildlife found on the Little Pend Oreille. I hope you get a chance to enjoy these treeless areas and the plants and animals that depend on them the next time you visit the refuge. For more information on one of these species just keep reading.

## Critter of the Season



You have seen them running across the road or maybe standing at attention on top of mound of dirt but have

you watched ground squirrels? They are one of the most noticeable of open country species we have. The Columbian ground squirrel (*Urocitelles columbianus*) is named for the Columbia River and can be found throughout the Columbia River watershed except for the drier areas of sagebrush. They are the second largest ground squirrel exceeded in size only by the Arctic ground squirrel. Like all ground squirrels they dig complicated burrow systems. A typical burrow has three or four entrances. Only one of those entrances has the typically fan shaped dirt mound with the others a little more than a squirrel sized hole in the grass. Burrow systems will have multiple chambers including separate sleeping chambers and nesting chambers where the female gives birth and the young grow before going above ground the first time. The nest is lined with grass whereas sleeping chambers are typically unlined. Although the nest is only used by females and young, the burrow system is shared by the entire family group, including adult males and yearlings. Columbians hibernate longer than most species and typically will hibernate for 220 to 300 days. On the refuge they emerge in the spring in late April and will be going back to hibernation in late August or early September. In an unusually hot or dry year they may hibernate as early as July or they may estivate, reemerging in September for a couple more weeks of eating before winter. Estivation is similar to hibernation but the goal is to avoid hot dry weather in summer rather than cold wet weather of winter. They are the most vegetarian of all squirrels rarely eating other vertebrates and only occasionally eat insects. The pups are born in May and do not come above ground until they are weaned at around one month old. They will hibernate with their mother and do not disperse until the next year. They live in colonies which may contain numerous family groups. Within colonies both males and females aggressively defend territories around their immediate burrow. Although, they can be quite sociable in feeding areas between burrow systems. Ground squirrels have many predators including birds of prey and mammals including bears, coyotes, bobcats and weasels. They are quite vigilant which is why at any given time you see a few individuals in a colony standing at attention and keeping watch. They have a loud musical call which can be mistaken for a bird call.

Here on the refuge ground squirrels can be found in many areas but some of the most common are Chester Field and the area around the refuge headquarters. I

hope you get a chance to visit the refuge soon and when you do lookout for these common residents of our grasslands.

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

### **A Note from a Returning Employee**

Spring is always an exciting time of year as the natural world around us seems to renew itself. The early blooms of arrowleaf balsamroot, blue-eyed Mary, and yellow buttercups cover the forest floor and bring vibrant shades of blue, purple, and yellow back to our eyes that are, more than likely, tired of seeing so much white. For me, spring also represents a transition in work, as I continue to bounce from one seasonal job to another- gaining valuable field experience, viewing different parts of the country, and meeting friendly and unusual people all along the way.

This spring, I had the pleasant opportunity of returning to work at LPO for my second season as the Biological Science Technician; and whilst I am only in my first week back at the refuge, I already feel quite at home and quite at ease. There is something very therapeutic about being out here that I think anyone reading this can understand and relate to. It may be hard to imagine (as I clearly fit in to the high-paced, tech-savvy millennial lifestyle), but I thoroughly enjoy the chance to disconnect from social media and slow my pace, taking time to appreciate all the intricate details that surround me- the chirping of Robins, Swallows, and Bluebirds; the morning dew on springtime blossoms; and the continuous battle between cool and warm air against my face.

But there's more to returning to LPO than enjoying a renewed state of awe and simplicity. There is a lot of work to be done! Some of the projects that I am really looking forward to working on this year include: continued field restorations throughout the refuge to native grasslands; the second year of White Pine planting and forest restoration; breeding bird surveys and bird counts; and sorting through the sometimes ridiculous and surprising footage that comes out of the trail cams. Maybe this year we'll be lucky enough to catch a gray wolf or two, or maybe even a Canada lynx or American marten! Of course, there's also the seemingly never-ending battle with invasive and noxious plants. But

with every passing year comes further success in knocking back weed populations and eradicating them entirely from certain areas.

I am very happy to be able to say I have had a helping hand in some of the projects that make this refuge a magical place. I constantly brag to my friends about what an amazing job I have and how lucky I am to work with people who are dedicated to conserving and restoring some of America's most beautiful and most important wildlife areas. Hats off to all the employees, friends, and volunteers who help make the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge enjoyable for all!

**Matt Bollen, biological technician**

### **Barbara Harding Retires**

*Last issue, I inadvertently left off from Barbara's report a few paragraphs including her goodbye thoughts. So here it is. She has been a great supporter of the Refuge and Friends, and I think I speak for all of us in missing her observations in each issue. We wish her all happiness in her retirement.*

**Jim Groth, editor**

This will be my final wildlife column as I am retiring on March 31. Hard to believe I have been at LPO one month shy of 18 years! There is so much I want to do in retirement - gardening, hiking, camping, birding, reading, quilting, filing and seeing a cougar! I will also volunteer at LPO for some outdoor projects - I can't completely leave a place I love so much.

### **Mushroom foray 2017**

This year we decided to do the foray earlier, on Saturday, April 29. Two reasons for this were that morels on the refuge have often been a bit over the hill a week or two later (our usual target date) and May weekends are always packed with other events for everybody. Well, this was the wrong year to do this, considering the cool weather. But we did find some morels, albeit in a young stage, and the good news was that the group of 18 people were present more to enjoy the quiet and beauty of the refuge than to score lots of morels. They truly enjoyed wandering the woods and learning about all of the other mushrooms we found, only a few of which were edible. And we had seven youngsters (all from one delightful family from Addy). Some of these kids found most of the morels—they cheat, being clos-

er to the ground (and perhaps having better eyesight and more energy to move along).

We are considering doing the spring mushroom foray on alternate years, partly because we may have saturated the market. But having the toilet at headquarters has made the event much more reasonable. Thanks to the staff for this addition.

**Jim and Jo Ann Groth**

### **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 northeastern 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 2017 Friends of the LPO Photo Contest began last (2016) August 16<sup>th</sup> and extends until August 15<sup>th</sup> this year. Judging will take place soon and winners will be featured in, among other places, the Winter Pileated Post. Thank you for your submissions.

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

**Joel Anderson**



Sampson Orchard

## Newsletter Necessities

### Number 61 - 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](mailto:larchsavage@yahoo.com)

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

### Calendar

#### June

14<sup>th</sup> -- Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.

#### July

8<sup>th</sup> --Butterfly count --8:30 a.m.

12<sup>th</sup> -- Board Meeting --6:00 p.m.

22<sup>nd</sup> -- Family Bike Ride--8:30 a.m.

#### August

9<sup>th</sup> -- 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.**