



# The Pileated Post

## Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Fall 2017

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

Number 62

### Refuge Manager's Meandering

This summer's big project was installing the long delayed new water control structures in Potter's Pond Dam and McDowell Lake Dam. These L-shaped, culvert-like metal pipes maintain and control the water level in these impoundments. No water control structure, no lake. The old ones rusted out and leaked after 40 or 50 years. After a year of design, purchasing, permitting, then six long, hot weeks of 10 hour work days, both are now installed. This was an "all hands on deck" project with maintenance employees from Kootenai and Turnbull National Wildlife Refuges rotating through on week-long details to help Kelly Connall with the heavy lifting. Kelly is still working on some final pieces of the project but after next spring's runoff both McDowell Lake and Potter's Pond will be full again.

I'm going to cut my meanderings short this month to leave room for the article Brent Lawrence in our public affairs office wrote about Rita Poe, the woman who left the LPO a generous gift. You may have read or heard a version of this story in national news outlets last spring, but here's Brent's original article.

Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup> is the Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR annual meeting at the fire station. I'll present a review of last year's projects and accomplishments with photos of the dam projects as well as other cool stuff we've been doing. I hope you can make it. Refreshments will be served at 9:00 am

**Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO**

### **No obituary. No tombstone. Only a shining legacy.**

*Reclusive woman donates \$800,000 to National Wildlife Refuges, parks across the West*

**By Brent Lawrence**

Nobody really knew Rita Poe until she died.

She moved through the final years of her life with little apparent interaction with others. Few people could recall the tall, thin woman with salt-and-pepper hair and brown eyes. She died at age 66 in her home – a 27-foot travel trailer parked in the shadows of the Olympic Mountains – of colon cancer on Nov. 16, 2015.

Though Rita's life came to a close, her legacy will live on for generations thanks to her final act of astonishing generosity.

With no known friends or heirs in her final years, Rita's closest connection was Nancy Zingheim, the manager for SKP RV Park in Chimacum, Washington, where Rita had parked her Airstream during the summer of 2015. Their only encounters were when Rita would come in to pay her lot rent or an occasional wave on the street when she walked her dog, an Italian greyhound/basenji mix named I.G.



Nancy Z.

Then in September, Rita showed up with a question for Nancy: "Will you be the executor of my will?" Nancy agreed.

Rita died a few weeks later, and Nancy got her first look at the will. It was as generous as it was surprising: give almost everything -- nearly \$800,000 -- to eight National Wildlife Refuges and four parks across the West.

On the list were three U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refuges from her home state of California, with one refuge in each of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah and Texas. The four others recipients were state and national parks from Texas and Wyoming.

Rita's legacy started Nancy on a path that culminated with a 4,000-mile "trip of a lifetime" during which she learned about wild spaces and public lands, and what made them meaningful to Rita.

Between December 2015 and April 2017, Nancy researched each refuge and park online. She called them with questions, intent on making sure that each refuge and park would live up to Rita's expectations.

A big obstacle for Nancy was fighting to collect \$374,000 owed to Rita from a long-ago inheritance. Once Nancy won that battle and the money came in, she could have considered her work nearly done. Someone else might have simply written the checks.

But not Nancy.

Over the months of searching through Rita's paperwork and photos, Nancy started to understand Rita on a deeper level. The last photo Nancy found of Rita was from a 1981 Texas driver's license. Nancy discovered that Rita was born on October 20, 1949, in California and that she was once a nurse. Nursing may have been what Rita did at some point, but it was clear that it wasn't what fulfilled her. There was an empty spot in Rita's soul that could only be filled on public lands.

Rita's devotion to the places that left a mark on her was infectious, and Nancy was determined to see firsthand where Rita's final act of generosity was going. "I had never heard of a (National Wildlife) Refuge," Nancy said. "I wanted the money to go to what Rita would have wanted."

So in April 2017, Nancy took two weeks of vacation and headed south in Rita's truck to visit six of the National Wildlife Refuges. It was a final trip that Rita would have loved, Nancy said.

First stop was Merced and San Luis Refuges in central California. Next up was Tule Lake Refuge in northern California, then Malheur Refuge in Oregon, followed by Camas Refuge in eastern Idaho. Nancy's final stop was northeast

Washington at Little Pend Oreille Refuge, her personal favorite.

At each stop Nancy asked what the refuge needed and how they could best use the money. Most refuge managers suggested giving it to their respective Friends of the Refuge group, which would enable the money to be used on specific local projects per Rita's intent. Malheur requested it go to the High Desert Partnership, a grassroots organization that brings together disparate groups to work collaboratively in the best interest of the refuge and the local community.

The possible projects are numerous. At Camas, for example, they need to replace dying trees around the visitor center for nesting and roosting birds, as well as finishing a pollinator garden. At San Luis and Merced, they need family picnic areas.

At Little Pend Oreille Refuge, they could leverage the money as matching funds for a bigger grant. "Maybe an overlook/observation point with an accessible trail," refuge manager Jerry Cline said. "We want it to be something a visitor like Rita would benefit from."

Nine days and thousands of miles later, Nancy arrived back home from her solo trip. She was exhausted, but happy to see her husband and new dog -- I.G., which she took at Rita's request in her final days.

Nancy finally had a true understanding of National Wildlife Refuges, public lands and, perhaps most importantly, Rita. On the open roads of the West, Nancy discovered how the enigmatic Rita could find her peace on public lands.

"Only one person at any of the refuges remembered Rita, and it was because of her Airstream" Nancy said. "She'd go to the refuges and spend all day taking hundreds of pictures. There weren't any (photos) of Rita; just the birds and animals she loved."

And Rita passed that love for wildlife and wild lands on to Nancy. The nondescript stranger in lot #412 at the SKP RV Park changed her life for the better.

"She made me realize that we live in nature and there are animals all around us," Nancy said. "How often do we take time to sit and watch them? I never stopped to realize the little things like when the birds arrive. I do stop and watch the animals now. ... Your refuges are quiet and peaceful. If you've never been, you should go to a refuge and spend some time there for Rita."

Tracy Casselman, the project leader for the Southeast Idaho Refuge Complex that includes Camas, didn't know Rita. But he knows a lot of people like Rita visit the refuges.

"Rita's relationship wasn't with people," Tracy said. "Her relationship was to the refuges and public lands. She found her peace out there. Her generous gift will ensure that more people will enjoy our refuges in her memory."

Nancy keeps her memory of Rita and her love of nature close. Rita asked that she be cremated and that her ashes spread in nature away from people. Nancy held on to her ashes for months before finding the right spot near her home.

"A friend found the spot on a hike, and the next day we hiked a mile into the woods and scattered her ashes and some flowers on a hillside overlooking a lake, the mountains and trees. She can hear the birds she loved. I say hello to her every time I drive past."

No obituary. No tombstone. Only a marvelous, shining legacy.

Please, carry on the spirit of Rita with a visit to your public lands.

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- Camas NWR (Idaho) - \$96,551.48
- Little Pend Oreille NWR (Washington) - \$48,275.74
- Malheur NWR (Oregon) - \$48,275.74
- San Luis NWR (Calif) - \$48,275.74
- Merced NWR (Calif) - \$96,551.48
- Tulelake NWR (Calif) - \$72,413.61
- Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (Utah) - \$48,275.74
- Laguna Atascosta NWR (Texas) - \$48,275.74
- Hueco Tanks State Park (Texas) - \$72,413.61
- Choke Canyon State Park (Texas) - \$48,275.74
- Mammoth Hot Springs Campground, Yellowstone National Park (Wyoming) - \$120,689.35
- Wild Birding Center (Texas) - \$48,275.74

## Refuge Biologist's Report

Wow has this been a crazy year. At the time of the last newsletter the talk was all about water, water everywhere. We have now followed that up with one the driest summers I have seen. As we come to the end of an-

other summer, I have to say "what a summer is has been though". In spite of the heat we got a lot of work done. One of the more unusual things we did this year is the Poo Poo Project. I can hear the comments now, yes he just wrote poo poo. What in the world is the Poo Poo project. You may have seen news reports or maybe something online about cavity nesting birds getting trapped in vault toilets (that's a fancy word for out-house). We have been working with the US Forest Service to install screens on all of our toilet vent pipes. Yeah this may hardly seem exciting but it can make a real difference for a lot of bird species More than 10,000 of these screens are in service in all 50 states. For more information just do an internet search for poo poo project.

I had my biological technician Matt back this summer as well as Eric the invasive species intern. We were able to fill in a lot more of our weed map this year. We also were able to conduct a record number of weed control projects this summer and fall. Thanks guys for all your hard work repelling these invaders.

Moving on to something a little less smelly. It has been a great summer for raptors on the refuge. The McDowell bald eagle nest fledged one eaglet in July. Also, fledging in July was a single osprey chick. The osprey nest is along the Little Pend Oreille River. We found it in 2015 after the breeding season. So, 2015 use was unknown, 2016 the nest was unused, and 2017 had the first confirmed fledgling we have documented on the refuge in many years. We don't know when the last time an osprey nested on the refuge but it has been at least 20 years. If you are interested in learning a little more about osprey see below as they are the subject of this issue's species profile.

It's been a great year for snowberries ripening up and as a result there have been a lot of bear sightings in late summer. As I write this Cottonwood Camp is closed due to a high level of bear activity. As always when you are around berry patches this time of year, be on the alert. You do not want to surprise a bear. Our sister agency the National Park Service has a lot of good information on bear safety. I would encourage you to check out some of their information at [www.nps.gov/subjects/bears/safety.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/bears/safety.htm). While on the subject of safety around wildlife, fall and early winter are good times to see deer, elk, and moose. These are big animals which can be dangerous when approached. So give them space. The recommended safe distance is a minimum of 25 yards or 75 feet. I hope you get a chance to come out to the refuge and enjoy wildlife-- just be safe doing it.

We tend to look forward to migratory birds in the spring as new migrants arrive, many start to sing, several are at their most colorful. However, fall can also be a great time to look for birds and other wildlife. South-bound migration is already underway. About the time this comes out in September is a great time to find flocks of birds on their way south. For example mid-September brings flocks of bluebirds to the refuge. You may know them from breeding pairs in summer but fall brings migrating flocks when you can see 40 or 50 bluebirds at a time. Large numbers of robins, sparrows, Clark's nutcrackers and many others can be seen in the valley as well this time of year. Some of my personal favorites are large flocks of common nighthawks and big kettles of turkey vultures when they start passing by my office at refuge headquarters. That is when I really know that fall has arrived. As I often close my column: I hope you are able to get out to the refuge and enjoy the wildlife as we once again move through the changing of the seasons.

### Critter of the Season



Note that an osprey's wings are bent while soaring. Also, their usual song is a most unhawk-like chirping.

No it's not a bald eagle; that big brown and white bird catching fish is an osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*). They are occasionally called fish hawks or sea hawks. Some of you sports fans reading this may have noticed a certain football team in Washington that has used one of

those nicknames and has a stylized version of an osprey as their logo. Like the bald eagle and peregrine falcon, Osprey populations plummeted during the use of DDT in the 1950's and 60's. Populations are continuing to grow and expand in range after DDT was banned in the 1970s.

Many people confuse the osprey and the bald eagle. So let's look at some differences. Adult bald eagles are brown-bodied with the white only on the head and tail. Osprey, by contrast, have a brown back and a white belly. The tail is a series of white and brown bands compared to the eagle's all white tail. The osprey's head is white with a brown stripe through the eyes. Also you can tell male and female birds because the female has a brown "necklace" across her chest. The male lacks this being all white underneath.

Osprey are found worldwide on coastlines and inland on freshwater in North America and Europe. Northern populations migrate long distances with Pacific Northwest birds flying as far as Argentina for the winter. Young birds migrate with their parents then find a mate on the wintering grounds. The new pair then moves north together. This is how birds banded as nestlings here in the Pacific Northwest have been found nesting in New England and visa versa. They typically arrive here in Northeast Washington in late March or April. Osprey nests are made of sticks and are typically at the very top of tree or pole. In early to mid-May 1 to 4 eggs are laid with the young hatching about 30 days after. Birds fledge another 40 to 50 days after that. Young birds stay with their parents and typically migrate south as a family.

Although osprey are primarily fish eaters they will capture all sorts of aquatic prey. They will eat frogs, snakes, and other animals. While not common, I even saw one with a muskrat several years ago. They are known to fly as high 600 feet above the water then hover while they spot fish. When fish are spotted they come in closer to fine tune their approach and diving from a hundred feet is common. Unlike eagles osprey regularly go under water to get larger prey. When this happens they have to stop and dry their feathers after a couple of dives. When you see them just sitting around with their wings spread, this probably what is happening.

The next time you come out to the refuge between April and September look for them around Bailey Lake, McDowell Lake and the Little Pend Oreille River.

**Mike Munts, Refuge Staff**

It's hard to believe I'm already more than halfway through my second season here at the refuge. My time here has flown by and it's difficult to determine whether that is a good or a bad thing. Good in the sense that I am clearly enjoying the adventures of the daily "grind." (My father-in-law often scoffs when I refer to my line of work as any sort of a "grind," so it has become a phrase I like to throw around). Bad in the sense that I'm just not ready! This time of year always brings the added stresses and insecurities of "what's next?" There are so many projects that I would love to see through in the coming years but the changing of the autumn leaves means a change in my work location, work duties, and possibly a change in work agency. It brings about a whirlwind of emotions, both positive and negative, while giving me a chance to update my résumé and reflect on this year's accomplishments.

The past few months on the refuge have been quite productive. We have continued to prepare the field near Samson Orchard for restoration to native grassland. We have sprayed and pulled noxious weeds in many of our areas of concern. We have continued to map weeds throughout the refuge, focusing on the ongoing thinning project along the auto tour route near Rookery Cutoff Rd in an effort to gauge the impact thinning has on weed populations. We have continued to run game cameras and monitor many wildlife species in remote areas of the refuge, including many videos of black bears, cougars, and bobcats. We have carried out breeding bird surveys and bird counts as well as participated in NABat (North American Bat Monitoring Program). We have surveyed forest stand conditions in commercially thinned areas to assess tree growth response and general forest health in relation to thinning projects. These are just a handful of examples of the work that a biological science technician may find themselves doing.

This year also allowed me to participate in some new endeavors. I was able to travel to Curlew for a career fair at the local high school, with students from Curlew, Republic, and Northport. Mike and I put on a short presentation as students rotated through various booths to gain insight into the typical day-to-day work of several careers and agencies, as well as the mix of education and qualifications required to land these jobs. The career fair was quite impressive in both the overall organization and the number of participating groups. If we're lucky, we may have sparked the interest of some of these high school students into pursuing a career in wildlife, conservation,

and/or natural resources! I was also able to help with the environmental education field trips for local 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. I had a lot of fun with these younger students as I led them along the McDowell interpretive trail and pointed out interesting plants and animals along the way. It was also a great learning experience for myself! I always find it both inspiring and humbling to learn from children. They have so much to offer with their unique and unfiltered views of the world around them.

I would like to end my column with a brief overview of one of the more exciting wildlife observations I had this year-- black bear Eric (this year's invasive plant SCA intern) and I saw in mid-July down at Long Lake. Eric and I were at the eastern edge of the lake, which is quite full this year, to deploy one of our ultrasound bat detectors. We heard a loud splash and looked around to see what was going on. Upon seeing only ducks out in the lake, we figured the loud splash must have come from them landing on the water. So we continued with our deployment. Less than a minute later, we heard the loud splash once again. This time we knew there had to be a large animal somewhere out in the lake and Eric was keen enough to spot a small bobbing head in the water, that of a fairly large black bear. The two of us became giddy at the sight of a black bear swimming and we watched as the bear splashed through the shallow edges of the lake and climbed ashore. After reaching the shoreline, the bear snooped through the grasses and shrubs and seemed to be heading our direction. We thought to ourselves, "how cool would it be if this bear came closer and we could get a really good look at him?" Sure enough, within a couple minutes, the bear was about 30 feet away heading right toward us. At that point, we decided it had come too close and yelled "HEY BEAR," clapped, and hollered to alert the bear of our presence. He was truly surprised and startled and immediately ran off in the opposite direction. It was nothing short of a magical experience!

**Matt Bollen, biological technician**

## Newsletter Necessities

### Number 62 - 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

### September

13<sup>th</sup>-- Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.  
23<sup>th</sup>—Annual Meeting—9:30 a.m.

### October

11<sup>th</sup>— Board Meeting –6:00 p.m.

### November

8<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.



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