



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Spring 2018

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

Number 64

From the President

Who do we as a Friends group cooperate with to further our mission? The refuge, the complex, the regional office, National HQ, other Friends groups and the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

First and foremost, we work closely with the refuge and the staff. The refuge (indeed all that work with Friends groups) provides a liaison between the Friends and the refuge. In our case we work closely with our manager, Jerry Cline, when developing activities and projects on the refuge that help to further support the mission of the refuge. At the LPO we are also fortunate to have a staff that enjoys working with and helping out our Friend's organization.

The Little Pend Oreille is part of the Inland Northwest Complex along with Kootenai, and Turnbull NWR. The latter also serves as Complex HQ. With our refuges being so far apart it has been a long slow process to work together with Turnbull Friends, but we are moving forward. The Friends of The LPO have participated in the Turnbull auction and the annual Flower, Flood's and Feathers Festival at Cheney and Turnbull. In the future we hope to work more closely and at least get together to tour each other's refuges and projects to learn what the other Friends group is up to.

We also work closely with the Regional Friend Coordinator, Chelsea McKinney. Currently our most exciting opportunity regionally is a three day training session with Friends board members and staff from about 20 Refuges across Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, and Nevada.

The regional office is also a big help in working with us on our Friends Partnership Agreement and many volunteer issues and training.

Some of us also work closely with the National Friends Coordinator, Joanna Webb, on a variety of issues, policy and training. Training is where the national office shines. Friends groups and members have a variety of training and learning opportunities. First off there are many online courses and many different types of resources at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) located in West Virginia and online at <https://nctc.fws.gov/>.

The National office also provides onsite training opportunities at NCTC. Every year 24 Friends Board members are selected for the Friend Academy at NCTC. It is a full week where you learn about Friends, the Refuge system, the FWS and how nonprofits work, and more.

Every few years the National office also tries to hold large scale National Training sessions such as the latest, called Moving Friends Forward, held in January of 2016. This was the largest training for Friends and staff ever put on by the refuge system (over 200 attendees!). I am proud to say it was a success since I was one of the organizers. We hope to do similar trainings in the future.

Lastly I would like to point out the importance of our cooperation with the National Refuge Association. Our Friends groups and a few of our Friends are also members. The Association is the "umbrella" groups for the 235 plus Friends groups across the nation. The association is the advocacy arm for Friends. They lobby for the

Refuge system and policies that help to protect and preserve our refuges and public lands. Today this is a very important group for the future of our refuges.

The association also provides information and training on a variety of specific issues concerning Friends and refuges.

I must also point out that our most important group to cooperate with is you: our members. Please let us know if you have any suggestions or ideas for future activities that benefit our mission.

Programs, Activities, Projects and Volunteer Opportunities this Spring and Summer:

The Friends and staff of the refuge strive to have a diverse range of activities and volunteer opportunities each year at the refuge. We also use activities and programs to help highlight, not only the refuge, but also all of the wild and natural places along with the plants and animals of N.E. Washington. History of the area and its effects are also an important aspect of the refuge and surrounding area. Come out and help us out by volunteering or just come out and have some fun.

Here is a brief description of some of the year's FUN!

1. Annual Community Program: This year the Program, "Healing The Columbia River" features author and speaker Eileen Delehanty Pearkes. The Program will be held Friday March 30th at the Rendezvous Theater at the Community College. Door open at 6:30 PM with the program beginning at 7:00. The program is free to the public and there will be snack and door prizes!
2. April 14th (Saturday) will be McDowell Trail cleanup and maintenance day. We have lots to do this year so we would really appreciate the help. More details will be on the website and FB page.
3. April 21st (Saturday) is our Earthday Event. Trash pickup along the refuge roads. It's a lot more fun than it sounds. It is a morning project followed by a chili lunch. Meet at Refuge HQ around 8:00 AM.
4. May and June we have 4 Education days with the 2nd and 5th graders from the Colville School District. We do not have the dates yet but if you are interested in helping about please email Dan Price at bigdan65@yahoo.com.

We always need extra help so come out and help our kids get interested in the natural world!

5. Late May or early June we will be having a tour and hike of many of our old homesteads. Should be a fun and interesting day. Details and routes are being worked out so stay tuned.
6. Butterfly Count. A great family event. Come out and learn about and help count the butterflies of the refuge. Date is tentatively set for Saturday June 30th. Start time and other detail to come.
7. Annual Blue Goose Chase and Family Fun Bike Ride on Saturday July 21st at 8:30. Enjoy the auto tour followed by food, music and prizes. More details to come.

If you interested in helping please contact Dan Price at bigdan65@yahoo.com.

Dan Price . President

Refuge Manager's Meanderings

The most exciting news to report this winter is that your national wildlife refuge increased by about 60 acres to 42,654 acres with the purchase of an adjoining property along our northern boundary. The area has been grazed and logged in the past, but it contains a very nice, relatively healthy aspen stand and a perennial spring. We plan to hand-thin most of the sapling sized lodge pole pine invading the aspen clones to reduce shading competition so the aspen can breathe and multiply in full sun.





The Potter's Pond and McDowell Dam projects are almost finished. Both control structures are holding back water and we expect both lakes to fill rapidly with spring runoff. There's still some dozer and dump truck work required on Potter's emergency spillway, but it will only affect visitor access for a few days. Most of the heavy lifting at McDowell is done; we're still replacing some of the pieces of the trail disturbed by the excavations. We plan to use this opportunity to reroute the trail immediately west of the dam to reduce the grade and make access easier for mobility-challenged visitors. Look for a new interpretive sign near the boat ramp; we delayed installing that one until the final dam work was completed to protect it from accidental damage.

This spring we'll install route markers along our newest recreational trail. The Bear Creek Trail is currently a 2 mile loop with a trailhead on Berg Lane. The route utilizes an existing, retired road bed already used occasionally by horseback riders and hikers. The trail route is very flat, and will be a multiple use trail open to horses and mountain bikes as well as hikers. We are scouting the potential to connect it with a trail from Cottonwood Campground, and there's potential for lengthening it in the future.

Improvements to the 750 acre Kaniksu Unit are also planned for this summer. That isolated refuge unit is located near the eastern end of Deer Lake, and is accessible from North Deer Lake Road. We'll be installing an information kiosk with advisory signs, a map and natural history information to help visitors identify the refuge property and enjoy it responsibly. Kaniksu provides the lion's share of LPO's waterfowl habitat, with a couple thousand pintails resting there for a short period most springs.

One of the few advantages of being mostly office-bound in the winter is the opportunity to keep an eye on the visitor traffic to the headquarters kiosk and the paved trail leading to the river overlook behind the office. It's a rare day when there's not at least one vehicle parked at the kiosk, even in winter. Sometimes it's visitors new to the area using the short paved trail to get a taste of the place. But often, if it's a sunny day, the parking lot is a jumping off point for visitors hiking, snowshoeing or skiing in the refuge, enjoying a dose of winter solitude. It's great that people take advantage of the Refuge 365 days a year!

Our next refuge outreach event is the annual Earth Day! trash pickup. Yeah, I know--how much fun can that be? Don't knock it until you try it! Formally held on a weekday, this year the event will be on Saturday, April 21. We'll meet at the fire cache at 8 AM, and reconvene there about noon and share a lunch while comparing our found "treasures". Participants are asked to bring a can of chili of any flavor that will be added to the communal chili pot. Bread, deserts, etc. are always welcome.

Jerry Cline, Refuge Manager

Refuge Biologist's Report

Spring is back. But before we get into that let's look back at the winter. First I would like to thank the 17 people that came out for the winter bird count. That is a record number of counters. Doing the count on Saturday was a success and we are planning on doing a Saturday count again next year. We saw 197 birds of 21 species. Some folks were able to see elk and moose as well as the birds. Speaking of birds did you know that we have bird feeders at refuge headquarters? During the winter two sunflower feeders are kept up. The most frequent visitors include Black-capped and Mountain Chickadees. Other species include 4 different types of finches. Even some woodpeckers will come to seed feeders. A list of species seen at our feeders this winter include:

Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Mourning Dove
Black-capped Chickadee
Mountain Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Northern Shrike
House Finch
Cassin's Finch
Pine Siskin
Common Redpoll
Song Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Red-winged Blackbird

In addition to these species some predatory birds have shown up to hunt the smaller birds. These have included northern shrike, sharp-shinned hawk, merlin, and northern pygmy-owl. The feeders are also a welcome seed source for chipmunks when they awake from their winter sleep around the first of March. As usual bald eagles have been hanging around the office lately. The big cottonwood snag at the River Overlook has continued to attract a variety of birds. This winter I decided to keep track of what birds I have seen using that tree. So far the list is:

Bald Eagle
Red-tailed Hawk
Mourning Dove
American Kestrel
Merlin
Northern Pygmy-owl
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
Belted Kingfisher
Northern Shrike
Steller's Jay
Clark's Nutcracker
Black-billed Magpie
Common Raven
Pine Siskin
Common redpoll
Song Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Red-winged Blackbird

That is a rather impressive list for a single tree. Have you ever heard the term patch birding? Over the last several years writers in various birding magazines, websites, and blogs have written about the concept of patch birding. The idea is to spend time watching in a single location. This works for birding but also other wildlife watching, wildflower photography and many other outdoor pursuits. The idea is to spend the time to get to know a place throughout the seasons and over multiple years. This can be a very rewarding way of to watch wildlife. Whether your primary interest is photography, hunting, fishing, listing or just watching (or some combination of all of these) look around while you are doing that. For getting to know a place is one of the best ways to learn to appreciate a place. A wildlife refuge like Little Pend Oreille is a great place to get to know and appreciate, but so is your own back yard. Who knows that pesky weed in your yard may even turn into a beautiful wildflower once you take a closer look. One of the privileges of working at a refuge is the chance to get to know the place over several years. I hope you will get a chance to go outside and start "getting to know the place" whether it is here at the refuge or your own back yard.

One of the nice things about getting to know the place is the chance to see the same animal over and over again. A good example of that is the long-tailed weasel that has been hunting mice around the refuge headquarters this winter. Like short-tailed weasels they also turn white in the winter so with snow on the ground about all you see at first is the black tip of his tail bouncing across the snow. With the early melt off he really sticks out with his white coat against the brown grass. For more about the weasel check out the profile below.

That's enough about winter. Are you ready for spring? As I write this in February we are experiencing record high temperatures. I even saw my first butterfly of the year yesterday. By the time you are reading this in March, be on the lookout for buttercups which are usually the first wildflowers of spring. Chipmunks and bluebirds should be returning any day now as we once again go through the changing of the guard from

winter to spring. I hope you are able to get out to your refuge this spring to find and get to know your special patch.

Critter of the Season



The long-tailed weasel, like most members of its family, can be a feisty predator. The scientific name is *Mustela frenata*. *Mustela* is Latin for weasel. *Frenata* is also a Latin word that means to stop suddenly. As you may know Italian descended from Latin and *frenata* in Italian means brakes like on your car. If you have ever watched a weasel hunt you can see where the name came from. They run around darting here and there then suddenly freeze (applying the brakes). They get a good look at the mouse or other prey then just as suddenly pounce. We have seen this stop and go hunting style play out many times this winter from the weasel that has been around headquarters the last few weeks. The name long tailed is appropriate as the tail is one of the best identifiers of the species. This is especially so where other weasel species may occur. For example the other weasel on the refuge is the short tailed weasel

and has a tail that is a third or less of the body length. By contrast the long-tailed weasel has a tail that is about 75% of its body length. At 12-15 inches they are also about a third larger than short-tails. They have one the largest ranges of any weasel ranging from Canada to the South American country of Bolivia. Like their cousins the short-tailed weasels or stoats in Europe they turn white in the winter. The only color left is the black at the tip of the tail. They hunt year round but nursing mothers will cache food for the young. I once found a weasel cache in Idaho that had a pika, a chipmunk, and several deer mice in it. Although the bulk of their diet is mice they will take larger prey like rabbits. A cottontail is nearly twice their size but the weasel's speed and agility allows it to hunt the much larger rabbit. Although terrestrial they are agile climbers and good swimmers allowing them to pursue a variety of rodent prey. The elongated body enables them to enter rodent tunnels and burrows while hunting. While weasels can occur pretty much anywhere on the refuge, most sightings have been near the edge between forest and grassy areas. So the next time you visit the refuge keep on the lookout for the stop and go hunting style of the long-tailed weasel.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

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 2018 and twelfth Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last (2017) August 16th and extends until August 15th 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. Next time you visit the Refuge, don't forget your camera!

Joel Anderson

Newsletter Necessities

Number 64 - 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

March

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

30th—Community Program, 6:30 p.m.

April

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

14th--McDowell trail cleanup, 8:00 a.m.

21st—Earthday trash pickup, 8:00 a.m.

May

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.



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