



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Fall 2018

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

Number 66

From the President

Get ready for our **annual membership meeting**, Saturday September 22nd, 9:00 AM at the Refuge Fire Cache

9:00 – 10:00 Coffee and snacks and visiting

10:00 General Meeting and Board elections

10:30 Year in review (with Refuge manager Jerry Cline)

11:15 Guest presentation by Lauren Satterfield, Lauren is a PhD student at UW working on predator research in Northeast Washington.

12:00 Lunch — Pizza and beverages provided by the Friends. Please bring a salad and/or dessert to share.

1:00 Hike on the Refuge led by Dan Price

Please come join us and if you wish to be more involved we could use some new board members.

In June I had the opportunity to attend a Friends and Staff training workshop in Medford Oregon. Twelve Refuges and Hatcheries, from Regions 1 and 8 (1 – Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Pacific Islands. 8- California, Nevada and part of the Klamath Basin in Oregon) were represented including all three refuges from our complex (LPO, Turnbull and Kootenai). The main focus was better communications and understanding between Friends and staff and between Friends groups.

There were a variety of topics discussed from liability insurance to advocacy to board recruitment and retention. One of the more interesting topics was storytelling and how to tell **your** own personal story about what got you interested in the refuge or just your interest in nature. The purpose of your story is to inspire people to visit and protect our Refuges and public lands. In the future you will hear my story.

We also took so time to visit the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics lab in Ashland. A rare opportunity to tour the only wildlife forensic lab in the world. The science they do is amazing and cutting-edge and they are on the front line of forensics involving wildlife crimes. It was a very interesting tour. And, no, they do not have Bigfoot.

At the end of the workshop we got together to see what our takeaways were and what we would do at our own Refuges. Takeaways for the Friend of the LPO were as follows. Board and other Friends members to develop their own story, increased advocacy, and increased board and membership involvement. There were many other takeaways and there were many other topics discussed. Feel free to contact me about the workshop or anything about the Refuge or Refuge system and Friends groups.

Want to attend Friends workshops and Trainings? First you need to be an active board member willing to put in the time now and in the future. If you are interested in joining our board, feel free to contact me or any of our board members.

Thanks for your continued support,

Dan Price, President

Refuge Manager's Meandering

We've been fortunate the last few years not having any wildfires on the refuge. Our luck ran out on August 10th when a lightning strike started the Cedar Creek fire. That incident provided a textbook example of how we deal with wildfires, and a chance for me to describe it for you. The story begins with a report of smoke observed from Highway 20 Saturday evening coming from somewhere in the northeast part of the refuge. Most of our wildfires are caused by lightning strikes, and we had a brief but intense lightning storm the day before. All lightning strikes are recorded on a map viewable on a website, so we confirmed that lightning had occurred in the vicinity of the report of smoke. We had a crew of four fire fighters looking for that fire beginning the next morning. They spent over half that first day looking for a fire they suspected but had yet to be confirmed. Finding these smoldering fires is a matter of not only seeing smoke; often smelling smoke is the first clue there's a fire nearby. Finding this fire was complicated by smoke drifting in to the area by the rapidly expanding Boyds fire near Kettle Falls. Finally about mid-afternoon, as air temperature increased and with it fire activity, they located a faint smoke plume coming from a ridge over a mile's distance from any refuge road. Using a compass bearing and their noses they set off from their vehicles toward the suspected fire carrying 50 pound packs, hand tools and a chainsaw. Keep in mind they aren't seeing flame or a smoke column, just dispersed smoke coming from a general area. After hiking cross country about a mile, they knew they were close but the dense timber and swirling air currents made it difficult to pinpoint the fire. Fortunately a wildfire observation aircraft in the area could see exactly where the smoke was coming from and guided them the last quarter mile into the fire.

What they found was a one acre ground fire in dense timber creeping down an east facing slope. They sized up the fire and then called the exact location into the combined agency fire dispatch center in Colville, reporting its size, fuel type, flame length and other pertinent information along with what resources they had on the fire and an estimate of additional resources needed to adequately contain the fire. That initiated the process of finding and assigning appropriate resources to the fire. It became Incident 1913, and since they found the fire, naming it was their reward, and they chose the nearest drainage, Cedar Creek.

Fire fighter safety is always the highest priority, and they immediately realized the large number of snags in the area posed a significant safety hazard. It was immediately apparent that four people wouldn't be enough to deal with the fire. They had enough time before dark to dig a short length of fire line in the most critical area, and then backed off far enough to be out of reach of any falling trees and hunkered down for the night. The next morning they resumed digging fire line and cutting down hazard trees while waiting for reinforcements.

Help was on the way. Due to the dense forest and terrain, this fire could only be fought with hand crews wielding Pulaski's, shovels and chainsaws, with air support. By noon Monday the four person initial attack crew was relieved and a USFWS incident commander was on site with hand crews from Washington Department of Natural Resources, Airway Heights Correctional Facility, and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. A helicopter was assigned and kept busy all day dropping buckets of water. By Tuesday the fire had only grown to about 10 acres. The arrival of a 20 person contracted hand crew increased to 50 the number of fire-fighters digging line, supported by a helicopter with a bucket wetting down the hotspots. By Thursday the fire was completely encircled in a fire line, declared controlled, and the various crews were released so they could be assigned to other incidents.

Once the initial flurry of suppression activity was over the long mop up phase began. We developed more efficient access to the site and plumbed in a series of pumps, temporary tanks and hose lays to provide water for cooling down the smoldering stumps and logs about 50 feet in from the fire line. The fire is now in patrol status meaning our fire crew use infrared devices to detect any lingering hot spots along the fire line and they put them out. They'll continue to visit the site over ever increasingly long intervals until we receive a significant rain or snow event this fall before declaring the fire officially out. The final phase will entail digging some water bars along the fire line and spreading native grass seed to reduce erosion.



Hose lay to the burn site

The Cedar Creek fire is a textbook example of efficient wild land fire management. The lightning strike ignition was located relatively quickly, adequate suppression resources applied effectively, and the incident was controlled with no injuries to personnel or loss of property. In fact we are anxious to visit the burned area over the next few years; we expect the fire actually caused some vegetation changes beneficial to wildlife.



Typical effects of the burn



Typical unburned forest in the area



Leo Gootee mopping up Cedar Creek Fire

I want to end this month's meanderings by inviting everyone to the Friends Annual Membership Meeting on Saturday morning, September 22, at the Refuge fire cache. In addition to the brief organizational meeting and annual refuge update, our guest speaker will be Lauren Satterfield, a PhD student at the University of Washington. She's spent the last two years radio tracking wolves and cougars in northeast Washington, studying their interactions with each other and learning what it means for Washington's deer. I'm looking forward to her presentation.

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Refuge Biologist's Report

I see ground squirrels again outside my office. That must mean Autumn is at our doorstep. I for one am looking forward to it as we have had another unusually dry July and August. We are already starting to see fall color in some of the shrubs like ocean spray. By the time this is printed fall color should be picking up.

Once again the summer has been really busy. My bio tech Michelle and SCA intern Brittany have been busy as well. They have been making regular checks of the various milkweed patches to look for monarch butterflies. It has been a pretty slow year for monarchs. I recently spoke with a professor from Washington State University who specializes in monarchs. Apparently that trend has been the case throughout the inland northwest with few sightings throughout Eastern Washington as well as Oregon and Idaho. The various butterfly species were hit and miss this year. I only recall a single painted lady sighting this year. But many other species were doing well. We had good weather and great turnout for the annual 4th of July Butterfly count in July. We had 21 observers (highest we have had yet) and we tied our previous high count with 23 species observed during the day.

Thanks again for those who participated and we hope to see you again this next year.

Some of you have been out this summer and have been asking about the low water in Potter's Pond. First I would point out the dam is not leaking. We think it is because it has been dry for a couple of years while the dam was rebuilt and it is simply taking time for the ground to re-saturate to the point it can hold water. This, combined with a high evaporation rate resulting from another unusually hot dry summer has resulted in unusually low water level in the pond. This has been a two edged sword so to speak. On the one hand the water is low and much of the waterfowl has moved to Bayley Lake. On the other side of the sword, so to speak, is the exposed mud along the edges. This has been quite the boon to a number of species of shorebirds. We have been seeing killdeer, spotted sandpipers, several Calidris sandpipers, and lesser yellowlegs just in the last week. Shorebird migration is just picking up as I write this in mid-August so I expect to see even more species by the time migration is done. For more information, keep reading the species of "Critter" below.

Some other highlights this summer include our breeding birds of various kinds this year. Both the McDowell bald eagle nest and the osprey nest on Minnie Flats successfully fledged young once again. Dozens maybe hundreds of young hummingbirds swarmed the feeder at headquarters for much July and August. The Say's phoebe again nested in the eaves at the headquarters and had at least 3 young with them in July. We once again assisted Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists with banding several dozen young Canada geese on Bayley Lake. Many other songbirds were seen with young in nests throughout the refuge this summer. Mountain and western bluebirds, house wrens, tree and violet-green swallows all successfully nested in the nest boxes on our bluebird trail. One highlight for me was finding a chipping sparrow feeding young in a nest during the butterfly count. These nests well hidden in dens shrubs so

finding one is special treat even for such a common bird. This was all just a great reminder that the Little Pend Oreille is for the birds.

Since this is the fall newsletter I will also add that autumn is still a great time to see birds on the refuge. For many songbirds September thru November is migration time. A lot of birds that nested farther north in Canada and Alaska will migrate through here in the fall. Even our resident birds like chickadees and kinglets will soon be bunching in feeding flocks that travel together throughout the fall and winter as they look for food. Flocking behavior like this has great advantages for both finding food and avoiding predators. However, I am running out of space and will need to save that discussion for later.

Once again I will say that I hope you are able to get out this fall and enjoy your National Wildlife Refuge.

Critter of the Season



As I mention above this summer has been a great time for shorebirds on Potter's Pond. One of the more common of those migrating sandpipers has been the lesser yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*). They nest at the edge of the boreal forest from Hudson Bay to northern Alaska. They winter along the Gulf Coast from Texas north to North Carolina and throughout Central America. They can be found in migration almost anywhere in North America. They are one of the most regularly seen migratory sandpipers to

pass through the refuge. Although they have been documented in flocks of a thousand or more in prime migration sites most of the time they are in groups of 10 or so. When seen on the refuge most groups are 10 or less. Solitary birds are not unusual.

In fall, when we typically see them, they are grayish brown with white underside. Their bright yellow legs (which give them their name) are quite noticeable in decent light. They can be difficult to distinguish from the slightly larger greater yellowlegs in fall plumage. It is not unusual for greater and lesser yellowlegs to migrate together, making the size difference apparent and much easier to distinguish. In size they are a little larger than a robin but have the typical sandpiper long legs. When you see them they will be likely walking about the edge of the water looking for an assortment of insects and crustaceans to eat. This is the reason they stop on the refuge: to eat and refuel for their continued journey south. Once they replenish their fat they will be able to continue their journey south. The best times to see yellowlegs on the refuge is from Mid-August to about Labor Day during their southward migration. Most years a few can be found in the vicinity of Potter's Pond during this time period. The next time you visit the refuge in late summer check out the edges of the ponds and lakes for Lesser Yellowlegs and other sandpipers fueling up.

Newsletter Necessities

Number 66 - 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

12th - Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.
22th - Annual Meeting—9:00 a.m.

October

10th - Board Meeting -6:00 p.m.

November

14th - 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

Friends of the LPO

Membership Application

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Annual Membership

____ I would like my newsletter emailed to me
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Please mail, along with a check to:
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October is membership renewal month