



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Spring 2019

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

Number 68

From the President

2019 Activities, Events and Education:

Annual Community Program: Friday March 29, 6:30 p.m. at the Rendezvous Theater / Community College. Join us for a night of fun and education with Ken Bevis: biologist, speaker, singer and entertainer. As always event is Free and there will be door prizes.

Earthday Trash Pickup and Chili potluck: Saturday, April 20th, 9:00 AM. Spend the morning walking the roads and picking up trash. More fun than it sounds. Good time to spot wildlife and meet other Friends. Bring a can of chili for our lunch

Annual Trail Maintenance Day: Saturday April 27th 9:00 AM. This is the time we get the McDowell trail ready for the year. Bring boots, long pants, bug repellent, gloves, water and lunch. Work all day or just a short time and then enjoy the refuge.

Education Days: Dates are not finalized but the 2nd grade day is generally mid May and the 5th grade early June. Please think of volunteering. We can always use the help. Direct question to Dan Price (bigdan65@yahoo.com).

Butterfly Count: Saturday June 29th, 8:30 AM. A great family event. You do not need to be an expert. You just need to net butterflies and one of our experts can identify them. Bring, plenty of water, food (for lunch), sun screen, bug repellent. Join us for the day or just half a day. For more information, call Refuge Headquarters: 509-684-8384

6th Annual Blue Goose Bike Ride and Family Fun Event: Saturday July 20th 8:30 AM. Great Family event. Ride the auto tour loop or take a hike and then join us for food and music and a few prizes.

A Thank You:

Many of you might not know that we have a National Friend Coordinator. The National Friends Coordinator is the only employee of the Refuge system whose job deals only with Friend Organizations.

For almost the last decade this position has been held by Joanna Webb. After 30 years of service with the USFWS Joanna will be retiring at the end of March. She will be a hard act to follow. For the past 8 years I have had the pleasure of working with Joanna. I consider her a colleague, mentor and friend. Her dedication has inspired me also to be a dedicated volunteer and advocate for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The first day I met Joanna, at Friends Academy, I thought "what an intense person," and I was not sure what to think of her. By the end of that first day I realized it was her dedication and drive in wanting us to learn as much as possible about Friends and the USFWS. By weeks end her dedication had rubbed off on me and I became much more involved in working with Friends and staff of the Refuges.

Since that first week learning from Joanna, and many others, I have worked on or commented on the new Friends Policy, Conserving the Future (a document that give the ground work for the Refuge system moving forward for the next 20 years

or so), Moving Friends Forward Training (the single largest training of Staff and Friends – about 200 participants and a snow storm), some regional training and what I may have found most rewarding is representing Region 1 on the National Friends Committee. Joanna has left a great group of people to lead Friends into the future and we will continue with the same hard work and dedication she has shown us.

So to my good friend, Joanna, and a friend of Friends I wish you the best of luck in wherever your life takes you next! Keep it Wild and don't forget to visit. Good luck my friend.

Dan Price . President

Refuge Manager's Meanderings

Thirty five days of furlough gave me a taste of what retirement will be like. Frankly, I liked it. I started some new projects, worked on some old ones, but never finished any. Well, except for a woodworking project for my wife's sewing room. I know what side my bread is buttered on! Mostly I read some books, spun some vinyl on my 40 year old stereo, and wondered how long the whole thing was going to last. Most of the staff were off the entire time. My role as an "excepted employee" was to visit the office a few times a week, make sure the heat was on and the pipes weren't frozen. The shutdown didn't really affect the LPO too much. We locked the gates on December 31 as usual, and put a sign on the door explaining the office was closed indefinitely. Most winter-time refuge users are self-sufficient, parking either at the HQ kiosk or the Blacktail Mountain Road gate and hiking, snowshoeing or skiing into the refuge. Based on the number of vehicles I saw parked in these places, I don't think we experienced any reduction in visitorship. However, the shutdown caused us to cancel the annual winter bird count for the first time. Single digit temperatures, rain, fog and snow failed to cancel it in the past, but it couldn't survive a political stalemate. We'll do it again next year if the government is willing and creeks don't rise.

The shutdown required rescheduling the Friends annual planning meeting, usually held in mid-January, to mid-February. This is when the Friend's board and other members work with me to plan Friend's and refuge events and projects for the upcoming year. The next refuge event is the annual Earth Day! trash pickup on Saturday, April 20th. We'll meet at refuge HQ at 9 AM, break up into teams, and walk the most popular refuge roads collecting trash for recycling. We ask trash picker-uppers bring a can of chili (any brand, any flavor) that will be added to the communal chili pot for our post pick-up lunch. Bringing bread and other snacks is encouraged. Honest, this is really fun! The next Saturday, April 27th, Friend's members will be meeting at 9AM at the McDowell Marsh Environmental Education Trail for trail maintenance and general sprucing up. Sorry, no chili pot. Other events scheduled this summer are the annual 4th of July Butterfly Count on June 29th, and the 6th Annual Blue Goose Family Fun Bike ride on July 20th. More about those in the next newsletter.

This summer we hope to begin developing a new interpretive site at the Little Pend Oreille River gorge using the money left to us in Rita Poe's estate. The initial work will involve improving the road access to a new trailhead and building the short, accessible trail to the overlook. Hopefully we can also begin design and fabrication of interpretive signs for the site and be ready to install those and a safety barrier next summer to complete the project. More to follow.

Jerry Cline, Refuge Manager

Refuge Biologist's Report

Well it certainly has been a very unusual winter for us on the refuge. The season seems to have been dominated by the government shutdown. Once we got back to work it seems like only then did winter start. With nearly all of the snow for the winter falling in February. It is snowing outside even as write this in late February. I know many of you look forward to the winter bird count results in this column. Unfortunately, the

count was canceled this year as it would have taken place during the shutdown. We have managed to get quite a bit of work done this winter. A number of interesting things are taking place. The Washington Department of Wildlife is doing some bobcat research on the refuge late winter and spring this year. They are looking into population densities and movement of the cats, so if you see one with a radio collar or other markings please let us know. With all the recent snow we have been seeing a number of bobcat tracks as well as abundant deer tracks. As we often see this time of year quite a few white-tail deer are being seen along Bear Creek Road. Elk and moose have been showing up occasionally. Tracks of many smaller species have been seen around headquarters as well. Some of those include mice, red squirrels, coyotes, otters, turkeys, California quail, and various songbirds. We had a nice flock of common redpolls for a while in early February. The usual bald eagles have been sitting in the cottonwood behind the office too. I had my first red-winged blackbird at the office on February 12. Dan Price saw one even earlier elsewhere on the refuge. By the time this comes out in March we should be seeing additional migratory birds starting to show up. For example we usually see our first bluebird in March or even late February some years.

Have you ever thought about migration? Why is it that some birds migrate south and others don't? Some go to South America while others may only go to the southern United States? While we can never read a bird's mind and know why any individual chooses one behavior or another we can make assumptions based on data. Most ornithologists believe it has to do with food and not temperature. While temperature or day length may be the trigger to start migration it appears that to have a full stomach is the purpose. For example bald eagles eat a lot of fish and water birds, with some scavenging thrown in. So they generally only migrate as far as necessary to find open water since grabbing a fish with your feet can be a little difficult through ice. Chickadees feed on insects and spiders during the summer but switch to seeds during the winter. They do not migrate per se but do bunch up into foraging flocks in winter. Then when one bird finds a

food source they announce it to the whole flock. That is why if one bird finds your feeder you often have 8 or ten within minutes. Pine siskins and several other finch species do the same thing. Most warblers feed only on insects and fly to Mexico or further once cold weather causes most of the insects to die or hibernate. So how far or even if a bird migrates depends a lot on what they eat and how they find food. For more on one of our long distance migrant insect eaters check-out the Critter of the Season below.

Although most of our birds migrate out of the refuge for the winter, some come here from even farther north or from high elevations. Both species of redpolls, American tree sparrows, rough-legged hawks, and longspurs are all arctic or boreal species that come from Northern Canada or Alaska to find food. Some, like snowy owls, only come south when food is scarce. Also, it is not just birds that migrate. Hoary and silver-haired bats spend the summer here but head for Mexico in winter. Like birds they are likely driven by the search for food. Other mammals, like white-tailed deer, summer throughout our area but migrate to valleys in the winter to find food. The Little Pend Oreille River Valley is one of those areas they go to in winter. For me one of the exciting things about spring is looking to see what kinds of wildlife are returning each day. Birds especially use winds to assist their long flights so right after a storm is a good time to look for new species to show up.

Critter of the Season



Townsend's warbler is one of 11 warbler species to nest on the refuge. Like the other warblers they migrate south for the winter. Look for them to return in April. They are a beautiful little bird with a striking black and yellow pattern in the head. Females are similar to males in appearance but much paler. Their song is often described as a buzzy trill. It distinctive and often how you first notice the bird in the forests it lives in. For sample of the songs as well as calls you can check out Cornell University's bird song library at:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Townsend's Warbler/sounds](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Townsend's_Warbler/sounds)

The scientific name is *Setophaga townsendi*. The species is named for John Townsend who collected the first one in Oregon in 1834. The genus *Setophaga* is Greek for "eater of moths". They do eat small moths as well as a variety of other small insects. You can find them gleaning for insects in the upper reaches of conifers. They are particularly fond of spruce budworms both the moths and the caterpillars. You can often see them hovering as they grab insects from the tree tops.

For nesting they will build a nest cup from grass and twigs which is placed on a branch in a well concealed location in the tree. Most nests have been found in spruce and fir trees. They prefer areas with denser tree tops and a lot of shrubs. These will provide cover for the nest and lots of spots for insects they feed on. They will lay 3-4 eggs and incubation takes about 14 days. The young will start to fly in another 10 to 12 days after hatching. After spending a couple of months putting on fat for migration small flocks will head south around Labor Day. Most birds winter from central Mexico to Cost Rica.

As spring approaches be on the lookout for Townsend's and other warblers as they return to Washington and the LPO. Townsend's can be found along the auto tour but one of the best places to find this warbler is on Cliff Ridge Road and Bear Creek Road above the turnoff to Bayley Lake. As always if you do get out to the refuge to watch these or other birds feel free to stop by headquarters and let us know what you saw.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

The article below is written by Ken Bevis, state biologist, for the Small Landowners' Newsletter. The second half will appear in the Summer Pileated Post. It is reproduced here with permission

A Rotten Story: Forest Decomposition

The woods can be pretty messy, with all of those leaves, branches, twigs and logs falling over and cluttering up the forest floor, making it hard to walk around.



Douglas fir log subject to fungal work in Eastern Washington

What is Mother Nature thinking? Oh wait, now where does soil come from? Do these organic inputs actually help fuel the amazing and rich forest ecosystems we nurture, exploit, and enjoy?

According to U.S. Forest Service research, one acre of managed conifer forest in Washington averages around 107 tons of above-ground organic material at any given time (Campbell et al. 2010). In the lush, west-side timberlands Douglas-fir and hemlock/spruce forests often contain 300-450 tons per acre, and this doesn't even count what is below ground!

Photosynthesis and growth are continuously adding material to this system by pulling carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and creating tissue through this amazing, miraculous process. This material continuously builds up, and we might wonder, why aren't we simply overwhelmed with old tree and plant parts? A

complex ecosystem under our feet breaks all of this material down and turns it back into basic components that recycle and feed the system.

Most of the essential break-down work is done by fungus. Yep, good old fungus.

In fact, the moist forests of the Pacific Northwest are a great kingdom of fungus, with enormous biomass of fungal life all around us. Kneel down and pull apart some of the forest duff and rotting wood. See the white threads of fungal mycelium down there? These tender “roots” are the main body of fungi, and move through the downed material, breaking it down to basic components using enzymes and other chemicals. The fungi use some as food and nutrients, processes it again, and releases further broken-down material that is picked up by the next organism in the soil ecosystem.

There is a zone called the “rhizosphere,” which refers to the immediate area around roots and root tips, where a high degree of the biological activity in the soil occurs. Here, fungi, bacteria, nematodes, spring-tails, worms and many other organisms interact with each other and the plants to support the forest (Molina & Amaranthus, 1990). Sometimes, nitrogen (a limiting nutrient in soil) is pulled from the atmosphere and “fixed” by nodules of bacteria attached to the roots of plants, including alder. The alder doesn’t do it, the bacteria do. An amazing example of symbiosis.

It gets even more complicated ...

There are also mycorrhizal fungi. They form an essential symbiotic relationship with plants by attaching to root systems with fungal hyphae (threadlike fungal “roots”). These help the plant by absorbing moisture and nutrients. In return, the fungus gets sugar from the plant’s photosynthesis. This is an amazing relationship that is being rigorously studied, and is now known to be critical element of a healthy forest.

And don’t forget the mushrooms. Most of a fungus is in the form of hyphae, invisible above the ground, performing the quiet, unglamorous work of digesting organic material. But when conditions are right, the fungus needs to reproduce, mix genetics and spread their growth around, the mushrooms appear.



Mushrooms on the forest floor near Sequim, Washington.
(Photo: Ken Bevis)

(to be continued)

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 2019 and thirteenth Friend of the LPO Photo Contest began last (2018) August 16th and extends until August 15th this year . Judging will take place soon after 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 68 - 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

13th --Board Meeting-- 6:00 p.m.

29th—Community Program—6:30 p.m.

April

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

20th—Earthday Trash Pickup—9:00 a.m.

27th—McDowell Trail Maintenance—9:00 a.m.

May

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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