



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

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From the President

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA): Who are they and what do they do?

Simply put the NWRA is the leading advocate for the National Wildlife Refuge System along with being the “umbrella” group for most of the Friends groups that represent the majority of our 565+ refuges. The majority of the NWRA’s funding comes from Friends groups, foundations, and individual donors.

Advocacy and the NWRA. The NWRA works the “Hill” and has one registered lobbyist. The NWRA also works to get Friends to testify, about the budget, in front of congress, which I was able to do a few years back.

Supporting the refuge system budget and trying to secure increased funding is a main priority. While the NWRA and Friends have been able to keep current budget levels the system is far from fully funded. Today the refuge systems operations and management budget is just over \$500 million per year, it would take about \$1 billion. Other issues that the NWRA is currently working on are protecting the Arctic refuge from oil drilling. Protecting Izembek refuge from irresponsible road construction which threatens the wilderness that is Izembek, along with harming migration routes. Protecting our border refuges and keeping connectivity of the sensitive habitats along our southern border (we are not against border safety we just want it done responsibly). Locally the NWRA is working to

restore and improve that habitats of the refuges in Central Washington such as Hanford Reach National Monument (part of our refuge system). Both funding and advocacy are important aspects of what we do as a Friends group.

The NWRA and Friends. The NWRA is a very big help in training both Friends and refuge staff in everything from running a board, how to work with staff, how to interact with politicians and leaning what you can and cannot do as a 501©3 non-profit. The association works with the refuge system to offer and help pay for and organize local, regional and national training sessions. Training can include (along with what is already mentioned), interpretation, how to conduct different events, friends fund raising, how to work and restore habitats, working with youth and outdoor education in general. Needless to say but one last thing is the NWRA and Friends are working to mitigate the effects of climate change. Possibly our most important issue ever.

The work of the NWRA is critical to the future of our refuges and wild lands. Along with Friend the NWRA can help to secure and preserve our natural wonders for future generations.

For further information on the NWRA check out their website and annual report: refugeassociation.org

Dan Price, President

Refuge Manager's Meandering

We are in the waning days of summer with autumn creeping up fast. An informal poll of my co-workers, casual acquaintances and grocery store cashiers unanimously declare 2019 the "greenest" summer in recent memory (the only kind I have any more). We've so far survived the obligatory hot, windy summer days with only one very small (0.3 acre. Or was it 0.2 acre? There's that memory thing again...) caused by a lightning strike on Cliff Ridge. Our fire crew, with an assist from the WA Department of Natural Resources, had it controlled within a few hours and declared out in a couple of days. That's how I like'm!

One of our major projects this summer was installing a new visitor kiosk on the Kaniksu Unit, the 750 ac satellite unit near the east end of Deer Lake. Formally the Pinto Ridge Ranch, the Kaniksu was purchased by the U.S Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2000 and is managed by us. The majority of the property is valley bottom wetland surrounded by about 250 acres of a mix species conifer forest. The valley has long history of agricultural use. There were several homesteads established in the area, in fact there was once a one-room school house on the property to educate the local kids. Over time the homesteads were gradually consolidated in the Pinto Ridge Ranch with summer-long cattle grazing the main activity.

Beginning in 2000 cattle grazing ended, fences were removed, and several projects implemented to improve wildlife habitat. Earlier farming practices included ditching much of the valley to speed spring runoff and provide more dry pasture and crop land. We've plugged most of the ditches to retain the annual snowmelt water longer. Since then we've counted upwards of 5000 ducks, mostly pintails, using the shallow water covering the valley in spring for resting and feeding during their northward migration.

Several permanent shallow ponds were dug. The area is used by a variety of wildlife, and I recall walking the perimeter of one pond and finding tracks of deer, moose, elk, coyote, cougar and bear. In 2006 we completed an extensive project to reroute the creek in the north valley, moving it from the deeply incised channel that had developed over the decades of agricultural use and reestablishing the flow on the meadow surface where it could spread across its flood plain in spring, providing a more natural valley bottom habitat. Not all projects have been successful; much of the native species of shrubs we planted in that valley failed to thrive. But we keep trying new things. This fall 18 beaver dam analogs (man-made dams using wooden poles and brush that act like natural beaver dams) will be installed in the east end of the main valley. These structures will reduce the speed of water moving down the incised stream bed, cause sediment to be deposited, and over many years raise the stream bed up to the level of the valley floor to provide better riparian habitat. We've learned a lot about establishing native vegetation in that valley since 2006. In 2020 several hundred native shrubs of several species will be planted near the new dams to improve stream channel and flood plain plant diversity.

Although it's been surrounded by blue goose signs for 19 years, information about what it was (a national wildlife refuge), who owned it (you do!) and what people can do there (more than some people think, less than some people want) hasn't been readily available. The new information kiosk provides visitors a map of the unit, a little history and biology of the area and some basic do's and don'ts regarding public use.

The 6th annual Blue Goose Chase Family Fun Bicycle Ride is in the books. Although the weather was ideal for a morning bike ride, participation was down slightly from previous years, possible due to some unforeseen conflict's with other area events. As in previous years, attendees were a mix of new riders and

veterans of previous Chases. A good time was had by all.

Just this week the fish biologist from the USFWS Mid Columbia Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in Leavenworth arrived to sample fish populations and measure water quality and streamside vegetation as part of a long term project monitoring climate change impacts. Using electro shocking (no fish were harmed during the making of this project) they found brown, rainbow and brook trout, along with native sculpins. In the past they've also turned up green sunfish. Not a good species to find in this river, fortunately none were found this year. This year they are utilizing a new technique; taking a water sample and analyzing the DNA in the water to identify the fish species in the river. Cool!

Friends member Rick Moore works annually with the refuge staff to participate in the North American Butterfly Association's 4th of July Butterfly Count, a national effort to count butterflies loosely based on the Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count. The public is always encouraged to participate in the butterfly count, but this year it was especially well attended because it coincided with the Washington Butterfly Association annual meeting held this year in Colville. Forty-three WBA members joined staff and local butterflyers to record 33 species of butterflies on the refuge, including 2 not recorded on the LPO NWR before. Thanks to citizen science like this we're learning more about what lives on the refuge.

Thanks to the Friends group for hosting the staff to an "appreciation" cookout again this summer. While we appreciate the fine backyard cuisine, we really appreciate the Friends support of refuge programs like the Blue Goose Chase, annual Earth Day trash pickup and environmental education days. Don't forget the Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR annual meeting on September 21st at the fire cache building.



A photo of the controlled burn on Starvation Flats late last spring

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Refuge Biologist's Report

Here we go heading into another fall. One of the things I love about fall on the refuge is color that comes to the leaves of many of our trees and shrubs. I have lived other places around the western US but have not seen such a prolonged fall color period as we have here. Ninebark starts to turn red in mid-August most years. Western Larch will likely be golden well into October. Willows, aspen, maples and others will peak somewhere in between. Now I know we are not exactly New England, but I do think fall color in the northwest is often unappreciated. Fall is also a great time to get out and enjoy bird migration. Many birds are not as colorful as they are for the northbound journey in spring but still the show can be quite nice. Fall can be a great time to visit the refuge. Besides who wouldn't prefer to be outside at 75 degrees compared to 95-100 degrees we are often having in August.

This newsletter though is not just about the coming fall but a recap of the closing summer. Another great summer at LPO it was. I had three people on my crew again this year. My bio tech Nate is leaving early as he has been offered a permanent year-round job with the Forest Service. He is leaving tomorrow as I write this so good luck Nate with your career. Fortunately for me one of my SCA interns would like to stay and we are hiring her to fill out the rest of the bio tech position.

We were able to complete the forest monitoring plots this year. The last couple of years we have been doing field trials with the protocols and working out some of the kinks. These sampling plots were put in all of the habitat management units where we have done forestry work over the last 20 years. We are looking at whether we are moving toward the conditions we specified

in the refuge Habitat Management Plan. So in this project we looking at the number of trees and what species occur at a given site. We are also looking at the sizes of those trees. We are recording how many dead trees or snags at the site. This has been a fun project and should begin to tell us how we are doing with our management of the forest habitats on the refuge.

It has been a good summer wildlife wise. We had quite a few moose sightings in July. We had nice big bull moose that hung out in McDowell Lake just below the overlook for a couple weeks at the end June to the about the 4th of July. The bald eagle nest on McDowell once again successfully fledged 1 eaglet in July. The osprey nest on Minnie Flats also fledged young again this year as well. The bald eagle nest on Bayley Lake had two young in it but they died when the nest was severely damaged in a thunderstorm. The bright side was that in July the pair built a new nest closer to the lake. We are optimistic they will return in February or March to nest in the new location.

The wildlife highlight of the summer for me would have to be the yellow-billed cuckoo that was documented during a survey on the Little Pend Oreille River. This a very rare bird this far north. They are found in dense riparian woodlands. So cottonwoods, willows, and alders along streams are the place to find them. These birds are so rare that there are only about 6 documented records in all of Washington State since 1980. The exciting part of this is that 3 of those were on the Refuge since 2012. Look for more on cuckoos in future newsletters.

Several members of the Friends of LPO helped us plant showy milkweed back in 2015-16. Milkweed does not flower until it is about 3 to 4 years old. In June and July we found plants blooming at 3 of the planting sites. Milkweeds spreads not just through seeds but through

shoots popping up from the extensive root system these plants grow. Every site we found growing at we also found smaller plants coming up from these roots. So while we did not find a lot plants in any one area that survived it is wonderful to know that those that have survived are thriving and now are spreading naturally.

Once again as I close I encourage our readers to get out this fall land enjoy your refuge. There is a lot to do here whether you are bird watching, photographing wildlife, fishing, hunting, or simply enjoying some fall color.

Critter of the Season



actually the Phlox family: Polemoniaceae. They grow in well drained and often poor soil areas. That deep throated trumpet shape to the flowers provides an important role in seed production for the plant. A rather strong smell from the glands on the leaves is the reason some people have used the nickname skunk flower. All this serves to attract pollinators to the flower. The flowers is uniquely designed to be pollinated by hummingbirds. Most insects are unable to reach the nectar wells at the bottom of the flower. Hummingbirds with their long bills and tongues have no problem reaching them. The anthers are in the perfect position at the top of the flower to rub pollen on the forehead of the birds when they are feeding. Unlike many other types of birds, hummingbirds have an excellent sense of smell and the odor from those leaf glands is like a dinner bell to the little birds. Deer and elk are quite fond of the plant and eat a lot of them. The plant in turns just puts up more shoots. These are fast growing and quickly replace any flower stalks that are eaten. They are short lived and die after they have flowered and set seed. They live from one to 3 years in the rosette stage, with a cluster of leaves near the ground. This allows them to store energy in the roots which enables them to have that quick growth spurt of the flowering stalks to overcome grazing from elk and other animals. They bloom in early through late summer, so they will provide a nice burst of color in mid July thru mid-August. So next time you get to the refuge in the summer look around for the red trumpets of scarlet gilia.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

It has been a while since I looked at a plant in this column. So I thought it was time to do another one. Have you seen the red trumpet like flowers growing in the road banks and other places along the auto tour route? These are scarlet gilia (*Ipomopsis aggregate*). It also sometimes called scarlet trumpet or skyrocket. Any similarity to penstemon is superficial as they are