



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Summer 2020

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

Number 73

From the President

A thank you and a call to action:

Before I get to the main part of my letter the Friends board would like to thank everyone for the patience and understanding with the situation that Covid 19 has put us in. Staff has been brought on at a slower pace than normal and we have not been able to have our usual volunteer activities. Staff and volunteers are getting the trails cleared but it will take a while to get everything back to where we like it. As I write this camp grounds are still closed and the staff is working with Regional HQ on how to proceed.

Please come out enjoy the refuge and we will all get through these strange times together.

The Arctic Defense Campaign:

Friends organizations across the country are concerned about the ongoing efforts to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling. The Arctic Refuge is one of our nation's most majestic public lands, home to the Porcupine Caribou Herd, denning polar bears, musk oxen, wolves, and nearly 200 species of migratory birds. Its biological heart, the coastal plain,

is no place for oil and gas development.

Oil and gas drilling in the Arctic Refuge would industrialize one of America's last wild places, and exacerbate climate change. It's also bad business. The remote nature of the Refuge, combined with a global appetite to limit climate pollution, make drilling in the coastal plain an expensive risk that's not worth taking.

Banks and oil companies should listen to the overwhelming majority of Americans who do not want to see drilling in the Refuge and pledge not to invest in drilling there. The days when financial institutions could quietly support dangerous and destructive projects without consequence are over. Five of the Six largest in the US have already refused to finance oil operations in the Arctic. Bank of America is the only hold out and we are putting pressure on them daily to do the right thing.

Some oil companies are even having second thought. Just last year oil giant BP announced it would be selling off all its Arctic assets.

The public is watching where they put their money and will be holding them ac-

countable if they don't do the right thing and stay away from the Arctic Refuge.

If you would like to learn more about the Arctic NWR and how to help please go to the Arctic Defense Campaign website: <https://www.arcticrefugedefense.org/>

Dan Price, President

Refuge Manager's Meandering

Every newsletter article deadline finds me struggling with the question "What is there new to write about?" For this issue I would have happily settled for reporting a new bird observation or even a record number of Keystone Light beer cans picked up during the annual refuge road cleanup. I surely didn't plan to address how we are coping with a global pandemic. Before I write these articles each quarter I reread the previous essay, not only for inspiration but to make sure I'm not repeating myself in my ongoing senescence.

In the spring edition I innocently talked-up the upcoming Earth Day! trash pickup and the spring trail spruce up; both now cancelled due to a non-living chunk of protein sprouting little prongs. That bit of reality was shot to shaving cream seemingly overnight. How did that affect the Fish and Wildlife Service and especially this little piece of heaven? Probably 90% of the Fish and Wildlife workforce in this region were asked "Have you ever thought about teleworking from home? No? Well, get used to working with your dog, kids, significant other (or fill in the blank) as your office mates." Here, about half the staff converted to teleworking full time. Teleworking was not practical for maintenance and fire employees so those folks worked alone in the shop and cache, respectively. I still came to the of-

fice every day to the answer phone and keep an eye on things. We closed the office to walk-in visitors and it remains closed for the foreseeable future. We also closed the outdoor restrooms since they are a nexus for covid transfer by visitors, and we could not clean them to the standards recommended by the CDC (how many of you knew that acronym 5 months ago?).

During the early weeks of stay-at-home the refuge was quite busy. The gates didn't open until the usual April 15 date. But any sunny day, especially between 1 – 4 PM, there would be numerous cars parked at the HQ kiosk. Individuals, couples and family groups would be hiking the short paved trail, Mill Butte Trail or Bear Creek Road behind the gate. I'm glad the refuge could provide people a safe place to recreate even during the lockdown, especially getting those schools kids out of the house for a while.

We opened the gates in mid-April allowing all the usual recreation opportunities except that the campgrounds and toilets were closed as they were on all the surrounding public lands. If I ever doubted that camping was popular on the refuge I know better now, I must have fielded 6-10 phone calls each day asking when camping would be allowed. On June 3 the campgrounds reopened, but because we don't have the resources to clean the restrooms they remain closed until further notice.

The staff is all back to work, with some changes due to covid-19. We all practice social distancing in the office, we drive separate vehicles even when we are going to the same destination, and we spend a lot of time wiping down surfaces and sanitizing our hands. We have some hand sanitizer spray from Dry Fly Distillery; smells like we've been washing our hands in gin! Protecting the fire crew presents some unique challenges; we can't

send three people to fire in three separate trucks. For those folks we adopted a “family” concept. They live and work together with minimal contact with the other staff and the outside world. Concerns about employee safety and future uncertainty discouraged us from hiring a temporary clerk and maintenance worker as we’d planned. We were also funded for a Youth Conversation Corps crew this year but we cancelled that crew and adult leader because we were uncomfortable placing 4 youth and an adult leader in a truck cab every day. We were able to re-hire Morgan Bucher as a biological technician and brought on Carly Ahern as a Student Conservation Association intern to help Mike with our numerous biological projects. Like the rest of society, we’re adapting.

It was with great pride that we found out that the work preserving the Harnett-Sampson Barn and interpreting the refuge’s logging, homesteading, and rail-roading history using the auto tour signs was recognized by the Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System via presentation of the 2019 National Wildlife Refuge System Historic Preservation Award. Although the refuge’s primary purpose is protecting and enhancing wildlife habitat, the Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes that the cultural history of the refuge is also important.



Last fall we installed several Beaver Dam Analogs (BDAs) in the stream on the Kaniksu Unit using cooperative funding

we received from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. They function as a man-made version of a beaver dam where there are no beavers, slowing the flow of water to create small, shallow ponds that will slowly restore the degraded stream bed. This is the year they’ve been tested by spring runoff and are performing as designed. It will be a slow process but the early results are encouraging.

It’s probably no surprise that two of the refuge’s popular summer events won’t be held this year due to concerns with participant safety. The annual 4th of July Butterfly Count and the 7th Annual Blue Goose Family Fun Bicycle Ride are both casualties of the Corona pandemic. Maybe next year?

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Biologist’s Report

Wow. This has been the most unusual spring we have seen in my lifetime. I have been working at home since mid—March and the refuge office has been closed to the public. This has certainly been an unusual way of doing my work. One benefit of working at home though is that I have my computer set by the window and I have not spent so much time near my birdfeeders in a long time. But it is not just at my house, birds are still arriving at the refuge and are still building nests and producing young. Thanks to Dan Price for cleaning all the bluebird boxes on the refuge just before COVID 19 hit Eastern Washington. Dan also replaced some of the broken and damaged boxes. I have only been able to get out to the refuge a handful of times in April and May but the last time I was there it looked like most of these boxes were in use. Bluebirds, swallows and wrens are benefiting from Dan’s labor. So on behalf of the birds a big THANK YOU. Dan.

In spite of the very skeleton staff at the refuge there have still been some interesting things happening. Both eagle nests have chicks. The usual McDowell nest has at least one. That nest is getting so big it is hard to see into, so there could be a second chick yet to be seen. The Bayley nest was damaged in a storm last year. The eagles then built a new nest farther north on the lake. That new nest has one chick being fed as I write this in mid-May. Another interesting bird sighting has been the several sightings of a peregrine falcon on the cliffs above Bayley Lake. Our law enforcement office who has worked throughout the pandemic has seen the bird several times. It has been three years since a peregrine was seen on the refuge but as with past sightings, only one adult bird has been seen. I keep hoping one of these years it will be a pair that will nest in those cliffs.

It looks like by the time you read this we may be resuming some field operations. The safety of our staff is of primary importance so we have reduced the size of my crew this year in order to observe appropriate social distancing. In spite of the smaller crew size we are looking at some great project work this summer. I will be continuing to look for yellow-billed Cuckoos and counting other birds. The artificial beaver dams we installed in the creek on the Kaniksu Unit have held up well and we will be continuing that project by doing a lot of tree and shrub planting later this year.

You may have visited the refuge many times or not at all, but have you ever thought about the trees that live here? Forest soils tend to be very poor with most of the nutrients locked up in the trees and other plants. So how do such large plants like trees survive in such poor soil? Well there are a variety of ways of doing that but for several hundred species of trees and other perennial species in North America their

strategy is to form an alliance with mushrooms. Mycorrhizal fungi are a group of fungi that grow in the roots of many trees and other plants. The fungus sends fibers into the surrounding soil and collects various nutrients as well as water from that soil. In turn they deposit much of those nutrients in the tree root they are anchored in. It is a truly beneficial relationship that goes both ways. The trees need nutrients in much larger quantities than their own roots can collect and the fungus needs food carbohydrates which the tree then supplies. These are so important that most of our trees species in the northwest are unable to survive without the fungus. Numerous species of fungus serve this role Many of our familiar mushrooms are simply the fruiting bodies of a much larger fungus that is anchored in a trees roots. If you have seen mushrooms in a circle around a tree, sometimes called fairy rings, what you are seeing is mycorrhizal fungi. Even if not forming rings, nearly all terrestrial, large mushrooms seen in the forest are mycorrhizal. For a look at one of the smaller plant species dependent on fungi, see my species profile below.

Regular readers know I frequently end this column with a comment about getting out and enjoying your refuge. While I did just write that, this time I will close with: I hope you and you loved ones are all safe and practicing appropriate social distancing this spring and summer. Stay healthy everyone we will we get through this.

Critter of the season



It has been a while since I wrote about a plant in this column. Many people don't realize that we have several native orchid species in eastern Washington. One those is the fairy slipper or Calypso orchid (*Calypto bulbosa*). It is a small plant that only reaches to between 4 and 6 inches in height. A plant produces a single egg-shaped leaf 1 ½ to 2 inches across. It grows in shady areas and in moist soils under conifer trees. It has a single small pink and white wildflower. Researchers have recently found that it is pollinated

by bumblebees and that slipper shape of the flower fits like a glove over them. The bee fits just inside and the flower is just the right size and shape for the anthers to brush the bee and collect and distribute pollen. In our area it blooms around mid-June. Because of its preference for areas with deep shade and their small leaf structure they are dependent on mycorrhizal fungi that grow in their roots, much like the trees they generally grow under. All native orchids depend on mycorrhizal associations, but with fungi that do not form mushrooms. Speaking of roots, the plant grows up from a corm each spring. A corm is similar to a bulb and, as a storage structure, is how the plant survives much of the year. These plants are very fragile so if you do see one please do not try to pick it or touch it. The flower can easily break off from the corm. The loss of the stem and flower not only means that the plant cannot reproduce that year but with that single leaf, loss of the above ground plant parts means it loses all its ability to make food for the rest of the year.

One of the best places to look for it is the spur trail off the Big Pines Trail that goes up to the Beaver Ponds Overlook. This plant blooms in mid May through early June. Look for them right next to the trail. Please do not try to pick them or walk on them.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Newsletter Necessities

Number 73 - 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 sent to all *Friends of the Little Pend Oreille National Wildlife Refuge*.

Calendar

June

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

July

8th -- Board Meeting --6:00 p.m.

August

12th -- 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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