



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Summer 2021

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

Number 77

From the President

Spring has arrived on the refuge. Goslings are growing bigger, baby ducks are starting to show up, our migratory songbirds are back, and deer, elk and moose will be having babies any day now. Let also not forget peak flower season is coming up. It an exciting time of year.

Some reminders. If you come across a baby deer or elk, please leave the area immediately without disturbing the baby. Leave the same direction you came from. Mom is nearby and will come back. If you find yourself close to a baby moose, she is near, and she will charge you. Please stay clear of all young one as moms are very protective.

A short update on what is happening with the Friends. We were able to hold our first in person meeting since before the pandemic. We were fortunate it was a nice day and we met outside. We are hoping to be able to have our annual membership meeting this fall and our community presentation from the “Beaver Believers” this fall or early next year.

We also were able to have our first volunteer activity in over a year. I would like to thank the small, hard working group that helped at the McDowell Lake trail cleanup.

We will keep you updated on upcoming volunteer activities. In late June or July, we hope to continue our annual butterfly count. It is a fun day. We will keep you updated on our website and Facebook page.

The Refuge has been remarkably busy the past year with many new visitors and we are always happy to show off our great Refuge. Come out and enjoy a day or come out and camp. There is always lots to see and do at the Little Pend Oreille!

As always feel free to contact me.



New interpretive signs

Dan Price, President

Refuge Manager's Meandering

During the course of 11 years writing this column for the Friends newsletter I've assiduously avoided re-plowing old ground, striving to make every "Meandering" fresh and relevant. I beg your leave as I break that rule in this issue, but with an explanation. The National Wildlife Refuge Act of 1997 was the long needed organic legislation that standardized uses and activities on national wildlife refuges. The main tools accomplishing this are the determination of the appropriateness and compatibility of uses allowed on any individual refuge. Way back in 2000 when the LPO NWR's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (think refuge operator's manual) was written and blessed, it included formal determinations of appropriate and compatible refuge uses. But those determinations have a life span, and must be revisited every 15 years for the priority uses (hunting, fishing, interpretation, wildlife observation, photography and education) and every 10 years for all others (camping, firewood cutting, etc.). Do the math; add 10 or 15 years to 2000 and you can see we are tardy reevaluating refuge uses on the LPO NWR. It's a time consuming task with many hands involved, and I need to get back to it. So with your indulgence I submit this rerun of an article I wrote in 2012 describing the determination of appropriate and compatible uses. I think it holds up.

Over the last few months I've been asked several times about what activities are allowed on the refuge and how we determine those. I'd like to describe some of the agency policies governing allowable uses or activities

on national wildlife refuges. To people more familiar with policies on other federal lands, U.S. Fish and Wildlife policies will seem significantly different.

Legally, refuges are closed to all public uses until officially opened through a process known as a compatibility determination. I'll describe just what a compatibility determination is in a moment, but let that statement sink in for a minute. Most people think any activity is allowed on public land unless specifically forbidden by law, regulation or policy. Not so on refuges; nothing is allowed until officially allowed. That seems logical for some activities; obviously things like livestock grazing, off-road vehicles and even hunting should be scrutinized before being allowed, if at all. But that also means some uses that on first blush seem innocuous and harmless are also prohibited unless formally allowed. Examples might include sledding, ice skating or camping.

Why so rigid? Quoting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Manual: "Refuges are first and foremost national treasures for the conservation of wildlife. Through careful planning, consistent Refuge System wide application of regulations and policies, diligent monitoring of the impacts of uses on the wildlife resources, and preventing or eliminating uses not appropriate to the Refuge system, we can achieve the Refuge system conservation mission while also providing the public with lasting opportunities to enjoy quality, compatible, wildlife-dependent recreation." The Service takes the stewardship of wildlife resources very seriously.

When this refuge's comprehensive conservation plan was adopted in 2000, public uses already occurring

were examined to determine if they were “compatible.” Again, I’ll quote the manual: a compatible use is “A proposed or existing wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a wildlife refuge that, based on sound professional judgment, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the National Wildlife Refuge System mission or the purposes of the national wildlife refuge.” The list of recreational public uses deemed compatible on this refuge is fairly short (many have specific restrictions): hunting, fishing, environmental education, interpretation, wildlife observation, photography, camping, picnicking, horseback riding, snowmobiling (very limited area), cross country skiing, snowshoeing, dog sledding, hiking, youth scouting activity, berry picking, mushroom gathering, antler collecting, mountain biking, and jogging. No other recreational activities are currently allowed.

“What if my favorite activity (rock climbing, pine cone shucking, etc.) isn’t currently allowed?” The procedure for determining if an activity is compatible is fairly involved. The refuge manager’s first step is to determine if it is an “appropriate refuge use”. An appropriate use must meet one of the following four conditions: it’s a wildlife-dependent recreational use as identified in the Refuge Improvement Act (hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation), the use contributes to fulfilling refuge purposes, it involves the take of fish and wildlife under State regulations, or the refuge manager has evaluated the use using procedures in the manual and found it is appropriate. I won’t bludgeon you with the ten item decision criteria checklist I would use to reach an appropriateness

decision, but one item on the checklist is often the deal-breaker; does the use contribute to the public’s understanding and appreciation of the refuge’s natural or cultural resources, or is it beneficial to those resources? Sledding and pine cone shucking might be fun, but do they contribute to the participants understanding of refuge resources, or is the refuge just a convenient place to play?

Assuming a new public use passes the “appropriateness test”, it still must be scrutinized to determine if it is “compatible”. Our manual provides a procedure for making that decision, but there are two important steps I’d like to point out. First, all proposed refuge uses require some level of public review and comment. And secondly, all refuge manager compatibility determinations require review and concurrence by the Regional Chief of Refuges. Point being, compatibility determinations are a big deal! I hope this little peek into the inner workings of refuge management helps explain the process for making decisions about seemingly simple requests for recreational activities. Although the procedure seems excessive, tightly screening recreational uses is necessary to insure national wildlife refuges remain “national treasures for the conservation of wildlife.”

Jerry Cline, Manager, LPO

Biologist’s Report

Here we go, another summer and another field season is upon us. After all the craziness of last year, I am sure many of you are probably looking forward to this summer as well. We have both bald eagle nests active and a lone peregrine falcon has once again

showed up at Bayley Lake. A female is on the osprey nest as well. Numerous other birds are or soon will be nesting on the refuge. I will get to that a little more later. Most of my spring has been spent dealing with contracts for planting. Projects include the riparian strip at the Kaniksu Unit, as well for planting more western white pine in the Prospect habitat unit.

On the weed front we will be treating Bayley Lake for Eurasian watermilfoil this summer. We have dealt with this in McDowell before but never Bayley. Unfortunately, this weed spreads rapidly and is often moved between water bodies by boats and other watercraft. If you are using a boat, float tube or even just waders in refuge waters please look over your gear and clean any plant material from it before leaving and moving to another body of water.

It has otherwise been a slow spring for me. June means bird survey season. The Breeding Bird Survey is back this year following cancellation of the program continent wide last year due to COVID 19. For those who may not know, the North American Breeding Bird Survey is the largest bird survey program on the continent. It is managed by the US Geological Survey and the Canadian Wildlife Service with thousands of points surveyed every year across the US, Canada and Mexico.

May is bird migration season. I have written before about migration in this column but this time I want to look at a different type of seasonal movement of birds. Have you ever heard the phrase “nomadic finches”? What this refers to is that many finch species do not migrate south but wander widely during the non-breeding season in search of food. The wanderings may

be but are not necessarily south or to warmer weather. Many species like crossbills and grosbeaks may move down in elevation to get away from deep snow. A lot of these same species are dependent on particular types of seeds for food. They will wander widely in search of those seeds. When there is widespread failure in the production of their preferred seeds they may move in mass to different areas in search of those seeds. When this happens, it is what we call an irruption. Many other species flock up and wander around the general area they nest in search of food. Flocking benefits the birds by having many eyes to seek out food and avoid predators. In fact, of the 10 finch species that occur on the refuge only adult America goldfinches migrate large distances on a yearly basis. Even then only the adult birds migrate. The young birds typically spend the winter near where they hatched. They often flock with other finches especially pine siskins in the winter.

I hope you are able to visit the refuge this summer and if you do keep an eye out for our various finch species.

Critter of the season



Evening grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) is the largest finch to occur in our area along with the rarer

pine grosbeak. It is a year round resident of our area but numbers can vary widely from year to year or place to place. Despite the name they are active throughout the day. Some people think the name refer being grotesque or gross in the vernacular. The word gros (pronounced like grow) is actually French for large. Thus, the name just refers to the fact that the birds have a very large beaks. They are a rather stocky (some might even say plump) bird. Males are a very attractive yellow, black and white pattern. They are one of my favorite birds (although my wife says that I say that about a lot of birds). Females show a similar pattern with most of the yellow replaced with gray. During nesting season they are found in the Northern Rocky and Cascade Mountains. They are also found across southern Canada from British Columbia to the Maritimes and Maine. When conifer seeds production fails, they can be highly irruptive and can be found in most states except for the deep south. Although primarily thought of as a conifer associated species, they readily use deciduous trees especially quaking aspen.

Compared to most other songbirds they are a very long lived species. One banded bird was found to have reached at least 15 and ½ years in age. I use “at least” because it is unknown how old the bird was when it was captured and banded. As the heavy crushing beak would suggest they are heavy seed eaters. However, unlike most other finches the adult readily eat insects. Research has shown that evening grosbeaks prefer to eat spruce budworm when it is available. Enough so that some researchers feel that declining numbers of grosbeaks range-wide has had a significant impact on forest health in the spruce region in Central Canada.

These finches are unique among not just finches but songbirds as a whole. They very rarely sing. Rare enough that there are no good recordings or detailed description of their song, song being defined as usually complex vocalizations associated with territorial display or mate selection. The grosbeaks are quite vocal though. Flight calls are particularly common year-round. Because there are little to no breeding-specific vocalizations and their tendency to nest in dense branches near the highest points of the tallest trees around, very few nests have been recorded and little is known about their nesting behavior. Grosbeaks flock even in the breeding season and are not known to defend territory from other non-predatory birds. One of the records of nests found eight active nests in a single tree. Once they fledge young birds join feeding flocks of adult birds.

At LPO I have seen or heard them just about anywhere there are trees. They can be sporadic in their occurrences. I have gone a couple of years without seeing one, only to see them almost every day for several months. Because of the erratic nature of both spruce budworm and most conifer seeds it can be hard to predict when or where they will show up. If you want to find them on the refuge or anywhere else in our area, listening for flights calls is the most effective ways to locate them. To hear them, do an internet search for Evening Grosbeak flight calls and you should be able to find several examples.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Newsletter Necessities
Number 77 - 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

9th -- Board Meeting--6:00 p.m.

July

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

August

11th -- 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

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