



The Pileated Post

Quarterly Newsletter Friends of the Little Pend Oreille NWR

Winter 2021

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

Number 79

From the President

Manager, Jerry Cline, retires:

Long time LPO employee and current manager, Jerry Cline, will be retiring and the end of December. He will be missed by both staff and Friends. Jerry's willingness to sit down and listen to his staff and the Friends members, I have always considered one of his best attributes.

Over the years Jerry has overseen many projects including the auto tour, most of our trails and the beginning of our next trail. Along the way he has always considered suggestions from both his employees and the Friends on ways to improve a project or ways to better engage the public. Overall, he has been very easy to work with and we always managed to have some fun along the way. I also enjoyed going out to look at and discuss different project with Jerry. I learned a lot about his service on these excursions and I will miss them.

On a personal note, I first started working with Jerry a little over a decade ago as a Friends member, Friends president and as an employee when we ran a Youth Conservation Corps. During that time, we have learned a lot about each other and respect each other's views and ideas. Jerry was also great around my YCC crew. They all thought he was a lot of fun and easy going. To my friend, Jerry, who has done some much for our refuge I wish you a happy retirement and go enjoy more time with the grandkids. Thanks for everything!

Dan Price, President

Refuge Manager's Meanderings

We have two bird feeders behind refuge headquarters for our avian viewing pleasure. Last winter three California quail, two males and a female, habitually visited those feeders once or twice a day to collect their government handout; the first Ca. quail I've seen on the refuge in 20+ years. This year, the morning after the first snow fall, eight quail showed up. My bad, I hadn't filled the feeders yet and they left with frowns on their beaks. I hurriedly deposited some of last year's stale left over black oil sunflower seed in the dispensers, but I've not seen them since. I hope they get over their disappointment and forgive my tardiness. But the take-away is there were now eight quail! I want to believe they are the progeny of last year's trio because they had the corporate knowledge to hit Uncle Sam's feeders at the first dropping of snow.

The change from fall to winter forces the ending of some projects, continuation of a few, and preparation for others to come. The deer hunting season ended recently, bringing quiet time to the refuge after that last spike in visitor activity. Hunters reported a low deer harvest, but saw more turkeys than ever. The Noman commercial thinning project continues; the new snow and frozen ground create ideal conditions. Cutting trees means lichen laden branches on the ground where deer can reach them. And with the surge of deer there's an increase in predators seeking prey. It's the textbook forage/prey/predator relationship. The snow is also providing much needed moisture for the shrubs planted this summer at Kaniksu and the western white pine seedlings planted this fall on Blacktail Mountain. Finally, it's charging the soil for the planned white pine planting at Spruce Canyon this spring. Unfortunately, not all of this fall's plans fell into place. I thought we were on track to have the River Gorge

overlook construction completed and be opening the site next spring. While we succeeded in installing that trailhead and the Homestead trailhead, the construction contractor failed to construct the overlook. Hopefully, we can reset the project and complete construction next summer. Meanwhile, the development of the interpretive panels for the gorge overlook and the homestead site continues so they will be ready to mount when the sites are finished.

There are some comings and goings to report. Alice Hanley, my boss and Project Leader for the Inland Northwest National Wildlife Refuge Complex for the last 6 years retired on October 31. Alice grew up in California and came to us from a refuge in Minnesota, rising through the ranks from temporary employee to managing the coolest refuge complex in the Region. Her support made the conservation projects on the LPO possible. I appreciate her wisdom, humor and friendship.

Mike McClellan joined the staff in December, filling a long vacant forester position. Mike worked for us a decade ago on the fire crew, and besides being WSU trained, Mike was a Navy Seabee, Stevens County jail guard, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife habitat biologist and forester for Hancock Forest Management. I'm very pleased Mike has joined the crew and expect him to guide the forestry program for decades to come.

This is my last Manager's Meanderings; after 24 ½ years on the LPO I'm retiring on December 31. Adding those to 6 years in the Air Force and almost 8 with the Forest Service encourages me to move on to a different phase of life. Although the uniform has changed from blue to green to tan and brown, that's over 38 years of knowing just what I'm going to wear to work every day. I'll need to start waking up 10 minutes earlier every morning so I'll have time decide what to wear, and budget for civies. A highlight of my tenure on the LPO has been to opportunity to meet and work with many Refuge Friends. Thanks to all of you who've provided direction for refuge management and worked to make the habitat and visitor enhancement projects happen. And although it always made my head hurt, I've enjoyed the opportunity to share my pride of this place by writing these Meanderings.

A Fond Farewell

In early 1997 I was working at my desk in the ranger station on the Cimarron National Grassland in southwest Kansas when the phone rang; it was my friend Cam from our days together on the Sullivan Lake Ranger District in northeast Washington. "You remember the refuge we tried to find that time driving back to the ranger station from Colville, the one we couldn't find? They're advertising for a wildlife biologist. You should apply." In 1991 I'd moved my family from Metaline Falls to Elkhart, Kansas to assume a permanent job with the Forest Service on the prairie straddling the Cimarron River. I grew to love the prairie, but missed the northwest. After 6 ½ years, Dolores and I were ready for change, and an opportunity to move back to one our favorite places was too good to pass up. We packed up 2 teenagers, 2 preschoolers, a cat and dog and caravanned 3 vehicles and a boat back to the Inland Empire.

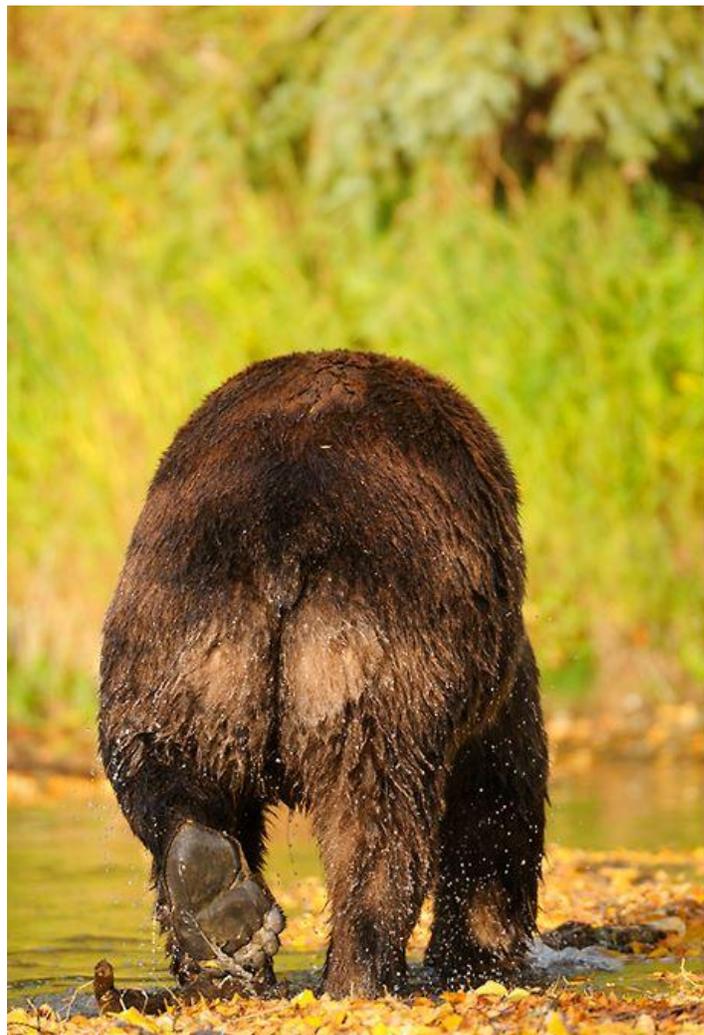
In '97 the refuge was transitioning from 30 years of state management back to federal control. Lisa Langelier was the manager, with Steve Fowler, Jim Lillie, Dan Brauner and Karl Mallory filling out the staff. We were all kinda learning the refuge back then, writing a management plan that was finally completed in 2000 after resolving a few contentious issues. I'm the "last man standing" from what I think of as the original crew. As the biologist for 13 years, I had the best job on the refuge! I recall watching Lisa and later Steve doing their refuge manager thing, thinking "I'm glad I don't have that job." Yeah well... I've had that job the last 11+ years and it's been great too. I was getting a little bored after 13 years and going to the "dark side" of bureaucracy was refreshing and rejuvenated my enthusiasm. Plus I got to stay here and continue the work we'd started. But now it's time to turn that page and I welcome that change too.

There are three questions people ask me: what am I most proud of, what will I miss about working here, and what am I going to do now? The "proud of" list is long, and I've really only contributed a small fraction to their existence and success. I'm proud when visitors say what a nice place this, that is their favorite place to spend time, and that the refuge looks great. Some mention forest management, the streams and lakes, the auto tour or the hiking trails; the list is long and varied. I'm proud of the relationship we have with the staff in the

regional office and how they all like to visit this refuge. And I'm proud of the friendships we've nurtured with our neighbors and other resource agencies. I'm proud to drive on the refuge and see the positive changes we've made: the dense ceanothus understory on Starvation Flat ready for deer to dig through snow to browse, fly fishers slinging line on Bayley Lake, or kids walking the environmental education trail on a safari to McDowell Lake.

I'm going to miss the view from my office window; the spring's first yellow warbler singing in the alders, the golden larches speckling the mountain side each fall, and the snow coming and going on Cliff Ridge. I'll miss a job where it's perfectly acceptable to climb into my government furnished truck and make an impromptu "inspection tour" of the 'fuge. A lot of ideas and plans came from those tours, and some even worked. I'll miss talking to visitors, answering their questions and asking them where they're from and why they're here. But most of all I'll miss the great people I work with. Sappy, but true.

What am I going to do when I retire? I've given this one a lot of thought. Like a lot of guys of "a certain age" I have hobbies galore. An old car, and old boat, lots of old rock and roll vinyl to spin on my turntable (I know, dating myself), the list goes on. But I really want to spend my retirement learning more about things that interest me. I've spent much of my adult life trading my time for money, leaving little left over for exploring new things. Now time is worth more to me than money and I want to use it learning to cook ethnic dishes, reading about military history and understanding jazz (that might be a bridge too far!). I'll never be a good bluegrass guitar player, but with more practice time I think can get better. I want to buy a telescope and teach my grandkids about constellations, the names of moon craters, and watch the next comet that buzzes the earth. I can't think of a better way to spend my golden years.



Jerry has left the refuge

Jerry Cline, Manager

Refuge Biologist's Report

Here we go into another winter. This will be a different winter as Jerry will be retiring at the end of December, but I am sure he probably wrote about that in the column just before this one. Jerry is a great boss and refuge manager. I will only tell one Jerry story at this time. I remember back in 2011 when I called him to ask about the biologist job opening. One key thing I remember was his infectious enthusiasm for the refuge and the wildlife that live here. It was that enthusiasm that convinced me to apply for the position. The refuge will benefit from his dedication for many years to come. So to Jerry, I say thank you and I wish you

well and hope you enjoy a much deserved retirement.

One of the highlights of biological work this fall was planting 4000 white pine trees on about 22 acres near Cedar Creek Road. This is just the latest chapter in our attempt to bring back a tree that dominated the mid-elevation forest 125 years ago but has been all but lost due to white pine blister rust being accidentally being introduced from Asia in the 1930s. This fungus has decimated white pine and its close relatives like limber, whitebark, and bristlecone pines. It is one of many invasive species that we combat on the refuge.

Some readers may be aware of the Spruce Canyon fire that burned on the Northeast part of the Refuge this summer. We have been working on a grant to plant the most severe part of the burn with western white pine. This is a part of the refuge that was most likely dominated by white pine in the days before blister rust and the fire did a lot of what we would have done to prepare the site for planting. If the funding comes through, the site will be planted sometime in 2022. While we may view forest fires as a bad thing many wildlife species do not. I heard reports from fire crews that black-backed woodpeckers were already being seen in the burned area even before the fire was out. This is not unusual. From the research I have read, the woodpeckers respond to the sight of smoke plumes. Some types of bark beetles are attracted to the smell of smoke. It is these same beetles that are the primary food source of black-backed woodpeckers. So, the beetles respond to the smell of smoke because it means dying or injured trees to feed on. Then the woodpeckers respond to the site of smoke because it means beetles to feed on. I look forward to seeing how the situation with woodpeckers progresses next year. We had a significant wildlife highlight in November. There were four trumpeter swans on McDowell Lake. While they have been seen within a few miles of the refuge this is the first record we have of them on the refuge. We often see tundra swans in small flocks during either Fall or Spring migration but have not recorded their larger cousin here before.

The coming winter can be a difficult time for wildlife. Food can be scarce or difficult to reach and it takes a lot of energy for warm blooded animals to survive the cold. On the other hand, I look forward to the rest of winter after the hustle and bustle of spring and summer or the franticness of fall. I hope you can get out to the refuge and enjoy the quiet of winter this year. Maybe enjoy some snowshoeing or maybe some animal tracking in in the snow. Keep reading to learn about one the birds you might see on the refuge this winter.

Critter of the Season



Many birds fly south for the winter. But for a few types of birds this is south. One of those is the common reppoll. Also known as *Acanthis flammea*. These small finches nest throughout the boreal forest of Canada, Alaska, Greenland, Scandinavia and Russia. Boreal forest is the forest of mostly smaller trees that grows in the far north just below the arctic tundra. Redpolls feed largely on the seeds of various tree species. When seed crops fail in the far north these birds may come south in the thousands. In good years it is mostly the younger, less experienced birds that fly south. The appearance of males and females differ primarily in the amount of red. Males typically have a bright red breast and belly. Females being tan or white on the front side. Both have brown streaks on the

sides. The back is a streaked pattern of various shade of brown. Both males and females have the red forehead and cap or “poll” that gives the species its name. Immature birds look a lot like females for the first year. Both genders are about 5 inches long and weigh less than half an ounce. They are most often seen in small to large flocks and they tend to be quite active and vocal, especially when they are feeding.

Although they nest primarily in conifers like spruce, when they come to our area during winter they are typically found feeding in deciduous trees. They are particularly fond of birch, alder, and willow. They are also known to frequent bird feeders when available. Like the related siskins, they are highly acrobatic when feeding. They often use the very tips of branches and can be seen upside down or sideways, whatever it takes to reach the seeds of interest. During winter they will eat half their body weight a day to keep they activity levels up. Here on the refuge most sightings are in alder and willow trees along the river. Because their migration is affected by seed availability their arrival on the refuge is highly variable from year to year. Some winters they may only be seen a few times or other winters a flock may spend most of the winter along the river by refuge headquarters. Although unpredictable most sightings tend to be in heavier snow winters with majority of sightings on the refuge in the Little Pend Oreille River Valley. Like many migratory birds one of the best opportunities to see them is on a sunny day right after a big snowstorm. Sightings have been from mid-November to the first few days of March. With most in December and January.

Mike Munts, Refuge Staff

Editorial

I have been editing this newsletter for quite a while, and will continue until someone comes along who might want to take it over. Any takers?

During the time I have done this job, and even before, I have seen the permanent staff of the Refuge dwindle down to two, Jerry and Mike. Hardly enough to manage such a large area.

I realize that there are refuges that have no on-site staff. I can't agree that this is a good policy. But I think this refuge needs more permanent people to manage and maintain it.

Jerry has been a delight to deal with. I cannot blame him for occasional tardiness in getting his contribution—it was always good stuff once it arrived, and he was very busy with mindless Gummint stuff. I have some experience with such.

We have a lot to offer the local people. Much more than the old “Game Range” days when hunting and shooting and driving around wherever was kind of the norm. This refuge deserves more respect. Jerry is the latest manager, following from Lisa and Steve. All have contributed to making the refuge a safe and sane destination. I hope we can get a new manager with similar goals and an equally pleasant demeanor.

Jim Groth, Pileated Post Editor

Newsletter Necessities

Number 79 - 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

December

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

January

12th--Winter bird count—8:30a.m.

February

9th – 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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Friends of the LPO

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