



Volume 50 #5 February 2017

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

NCW Conservation Issues

Much has changed since we reported last May on the issues we're working on in support of birds in our region. All we were involved with then have moved forward, and we've added a couple more since. Taken together, they represent our efforts to protect and restore healthy natural habitats on a landscape scale. All are works in progress though, and much remains to be done. Below is a brief summary of where each stands now.

Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan – Weyerhaeuser is potentially open to selling approximately 38,000 acres (over 100 separate tracts) of forest lands in the upper Wenatchee Valley, which it recently acquired from Longview Fiber. A coalition of interest groups, including Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, Nature Conservancy, Chelan County, and The Trust for Public Lands, has established a process to assess these lands for possible purchase for a variety of activities including recreation, fish and wildlife, birding, etc.

In November 2015, North Central Washington Audubon Society (NCWAS) established a task force to prioritize these lands from the perspective of landscape connectivity and native biodiversity with a particular focus on birds. We subsequently identified several high priority parcels and in June 2016 submitted our

recommendations to Chelan Douglas Land Trust for inclusion in the overall process. We remain actively involved and are waiting for developments from the project team regarding potential lands acquisition negotiations with Weyerhaeuser.

Visit http://www.cdlandtrust.org/upper_wenatchee_community_lands_plan for a more detailed discussion of this effort, including a map of the lands involved.

Volunteers Needed

Are you interested in these and other conservation issues around our four-county region? Would you like to be part of the NCWAS Conservation Committee? Do you have suggestions for issues we are not currently following? There are always meetings to attend and research to do - both inside and out in the field. If you'd like to get involved with conservation issues in any way - big or small - contact Mark Johnson at s697striata@frontier.com.

Rock Island Ponds – Rock Island Ponds lie within the boundaries of the city of Rock Island a few miles south of East Wenatchee. The area, formerly a large natural gravel deposit along the Columbia River has been mined for several decades, continuing to this day as a large gravel mining operation by Central Washington Concrete

(CWC). One consequence of the mining activities is that the area now hosts a series of small lakes and ponds offering fish and wildlife habitats and the potential for development of various compatible recreational activities. However, studies in recent years of water quality and fish populations in the ponds indicate a number of serious problems requiring resolution if potential future values are to be realized and maximized.

CWC will be completing its mining operations on the site over the next several years and consideration is now being given to the future of the ponds. NCWAS is spearheading a proposal to establish a steering committee or advisory working group that would coordinate with the City of Rock Island and CWC in hopes of making the most of this opportunity going forward. To that end, we've met with CWC, Rock Island's mayor, and the City Council to begin piecing together a process for moving ahead with our proposal.

Also in support of the proposal, we've begun planning a multi-year bird survey to identify specific species and numbers currently using the ponds and to determine seasonal bird activity there. The survey team will be composed of Rock Island residents and NCWAS members.

Continued on page 4

The mission of the
North Central Washington Audubon Society
is "to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing
on birds and their habitats, for the benefit of people and
the biological diversity of North Central Washington."

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North Central Washington Audubon Society is on Facebook too

All phone numbers in the Wild Phlox are area code 509 unless otherwise indicated.



Mountain Bluebird on bitterbrush
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

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To join the National Audubon Society which also includes a subscription to the Wild Phlox, please see their website at www.audubon.org or drop us a note and we will send you a form for a special rate introductory membership.

This has been one of the least birdy winters I can remember at our house. The feeders mainly attract American Goldfinches along with two House Finches, maybe half a dozen Northern Flickers, ten or fifteen Mourning Doves and some Black-billed Magpies. Occasionally I see a Northern Pygmy-owl too. Flying up and down the river there are Bald Eagles and Common Ravens. I read a report that the finches had good seed crops in Canada so there was little migration this far south. Also, I have not heard any reports of Snowy Owls in Washington so there must also be a good crop of lemmings in Canada to keep them fed. It makes for a less interesting winter around here.

There have been a fair number of cougar sightings in the Methow Valley recently and I heard that two families lost all their chickens to bobcats. On our hill, I see lots of coyote tracks and there is a small herd of white-tailed deer. Normally the white tails don't often venture up here. We are more likely to see mule deer. I wonder what causes the changes.

This Golden Eagle was sighted on the Twisp Christmas Bird count. Based on the wing tag, the eagle was captured and banded on February 15, 2012 in Florence Montana (south of Missoula in the Bitterroot Valley)! The second time it was encountered was on Upper Beaver Creek Road, outside of Twisp on January 1, 2017! At the time it was banded, in 2012 this male was estimated to be four years old. According to the scientist that banded it, "Golden Eagles show winter territory fidelity. Interesting that this eagle appears to have switched its' wintering territory from the Bitterroot Valley of western Montana to north-central Washington. Perhaps it has secured a breeding territory in Washington, or simply switched wintering areas?" Rob Domenech of Raptor View Research Institute (Montana), provided information about Golden Eagle. If anyone else sees it, Rob would like to know. For more information about Raptor View Research, please see www.raptorview.org.



Golden Eagle
photo by Jennifer Molesworth, Twisp

My husband was recently hunting near Bridgeport and as he and his hunting partner approached their blind, at least two Red-tailed Hawks flew away from it. Behind the camouflaged area, they found a dead Virginia Rail. It's a pretty small animal for two large raptors to be fighting over. Do you think one of them caught and killed it? Or perhaps it died and they were scavenging? The victim was not badly damaged and has since been donated to the Slater Museum of Natural History.

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

compiled from the ncwabird email list
and eBird and Tweepers by Teri J Pieper

In Chelan County, Lesser Goldfinches are still being seen in Cashmere. A Lincoln's Sparrow continues at Beebe Springs Natural Area. A Peregrine Falcon was seen and photographed on Tarpiscan Road.

Very near Douglas County, a Long-tailed Duck was seen at the north end of Banks Lake. Harris and White-throated Sparrows along with White-crowned and Golden-crowned Sparrows were seen in Bridgeport. On the Waterville Plateau reports included American Tree Sparrows, Snow Buntings, one Lapland Longspur and a Prairie Falcon.

In Okanogan County, a Northern Saw-whet Owl was seen near Winthrop. Sharp-tailed Grouse were observed at Scotch Creek near Conconully. 600 Bohemian Waxwings were seen near the mouth of the Okanogan River. There was a Swamp Sparrow at Washburn Island. A Northern Saw-whet owl, Yellow-rumped Warbler and four Ruby-crowned Kinglets were at Bridgeport State Park. In the Okanogan Highlands, there were reports of Bohemian Waxwings, American Tree Sparrows, Gray Partridges, Northern Pygmy-Owls, Rough-legged Hawks and a Golden Eagle. Also, Ruffed Grouse, Great Gray Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owls, Black-backed Woodpecker, White-headed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls. A barn Owl was seen near the Omak Airport. A large flock of Gray-crowned Rosy-finches was reported on the Elbow Coulee Road between Twisp and Winthrop.



Northern Saw-whet Owl
photo by Libby Schreiner, Winthrop

Conservation Issues Update *continued from page 1*

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

Stemilt-Squilchuck Community Vision – The Stemilt-Squilchuck area is situated in the foothills of the Cascades southwest of Wenatchee. Several years ago, there was a proposal to sell approximately 2,500 acres there for development of a resort. To head this off, a coalition of entities including The Trust for Public Land, Chelan County, and the Stemilt Partnership (composed of a mix of interests such as local agriculture, wildlife, recreation, and conservation) stepped up to devise a plan that would protect the area for the wide range of natural values it offers.

The main goal of this process has essentially been achieved – consensus was reached on a long-range plan which is now being implemented. NCWAS was fully engaged in the first phase of this process, the overarching purpose of which was to generate a plan (and philosophy) of land use in the Stemilt region, which includes Wenatchee Heights and Squilchuck. The main agreement calls for development (houses, etc.) to be concentrated in the lowest portions of the basins, allowing cost-effective connections to utilities while preventing the blossoming of ranchettes in the upper basins. Meanwhile, the upper portions of the basins are largely to be reserved for mixed agriculture and recreation plus maintenance of migration corridors for wildlife (especially elk). NCWAS remains engaged in the second phase (implementation) of the process which is now underway. Visit <http://www.tpl.org/our-work/land-and-water/stemilt-squilchuck-community-vision> for a more extensive overview.

Icicle Creek Water Management Strategy – Icicle Creek, a tributary to the Wenatchee River near Leavenworth, faces the consequences of past over-allocation of water rights to a variety of users. The unfortunate fact is that the creek is simply unable to maintain adequate summer instream flows while supplying current and future demands on its water.

To address this, the Icicle Creek Water Management Strategy (IS) was devised over the last several years by Chelan County Department of Natural Resources in coordination with the various water rights holders and other stakeholders, including several environmental and recreational interests. The goal is to better manage the creek's water supplies to provide for current and future demands, while also seeking to avert potential legal challenges.

NCWAS supports many of the Strategy's suggested actions including improving domestic conservation and irrigation efficiencies, creation of a voluntary Icicle water market to increase agricultural reliability, enhancing water quality and conservation at the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery, and habitat protection and improvement.

We're concerned however, about a major component of the IS which seeks to enhance the ability to take water from seven lakes in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. They were dammed decades ago and have been tapped since then as part of system

of managing agricultural and domestic demands on the creek's water. However, rather than seeking to further harness these lakes, and thereby the Icicle drainage's waters shouldn't we instead recognize its natural limits and adjust our activities to them? In the long run, we feel this would be better for the natural landscapes and habitats that support our area's birds and wildlife and associated recreational opportunities. We believe this approach is preferable, and if followed will better sustain our region's livability and economy over the long-term.

In furtherance of this goal, in May 2016 NCWAS cosigned, along with 39 other environmental and recreational organizations, an Icicle SEPA Scoping Comments letter detailing our concerns. Among the many issues addressed, it suggested development of alternatives that would protect the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, pursuit of relinquishment of expired water rights, and enhancement of water conservation to accomplish the Strategy's goals while avoiding enhanced engineering of the lakes. The letter was submitted to the Chelan Department of Natural Resources during the official comment period for inclusion in the record. We continue to follow this issue closely and remain involved.

Okanogan Valley WDFW Wildlife Management Plan Update and Colockum Wildlife Area Advisory Committee – These are separate Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) processes we are involved with. WDFW manages extensive areas of land with high wildlife values lying within NCWAS's boundaries. Being involved allows us to bring some influence to bear on policy while keeping abreast of issues on WDFW lands central to our mission. To this point, we recently submitted comments to the update process for the Sinlahekin and Scotch Creek Management Plans. Our involvement with the Colockum Wildlife Area process is being handled as part of the Stemilt-Squilchuck Partnership which, as mentioned above, we are actively engaged with.

Horan Natural Area Rewatering Status - We've been involved with this effort for several years and are happy to report that the plan for bringing substantial water back into the area's wetlands is moving forward. The Chelan Public Utilities District is managing the project and is currently working on several difficult technical issues relating to sources for the new water. One source is drainage from #1 Canyon and the other from North Wenatchee. In both cases, there are pollution concerns including heavy metals content that need to be resolved. Also involved are some private property right-of-way issues. So, obtaining the water needed to make the project work is not as easy as might have been originally thought. Getting water from the Columbia River is not an option. The most recent estimate is that it may take two to three years to work through all this. The upside is that the various issues are being addressed and the project will likely get done. The expectation is that, when this project is complete, the area's value to birds and other wildlife will be significantly enhanced. *Continued on page 5*

The Genius of Birds

A Book Review

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

Watching voracious baby birds gulp down food their harried parents bring them and yet cry for more, we know that “eating like a bird” to describe a picky eater is certainly not accurate. Jennifer Ackerman in her 2016 book *The Genius of Birds* proves that another pejorative term, “bird brain,” meant to defame a person who does something that we think is stupid, is also inaccurate in an overwhelming multitude of ways.

In this highly readable book Ackerman lays out newly discovered research on the avian brain and then focuses chapters on the technical, social, vocal, aesthetic, spatial, and adaptive intelligences of birds. While many people are aware of tool usage in birds, especially in Galapagos finches and New Caledonian crows, she tells about white cockatoos who can pick locks, nuthatches who use twigs to lever bark from trees to locate insects, and Green Herons who use bait to lure fish.

While some birds excel in tool-making, others — especially flocking birds — show social intelligence in learning to get along with their neighbors (attention humans!). African Grey Parrots solve puzzles in tandem and share rewards. Corvids pass on information, remembering and recognizing and giving gifts. Flocks of birds on a wire space themselves out equally.

There’s the vocal virtuosity of mockingbirds, cat birds, thrashers, parrots and others; the artistic and engineering feats of bowerbirds, orioles, swallows, and hummingbirds; the spatial ingenuity of homing pigeons, migrating birds, and birds who stash food.

One of the more surprising intelligences for me was the ability of certain species to adapt. These birds might be voted “most likely to survive.” They are the “parking-lot birds,” the House Sparrows. In a study of 428 invasive bird species, the successful ones were brainy and inventive, the kings of innovation being the corvids.

This is a fascinating book. It is at once narrative and scientific with more than 50 pages of notes and references. I have more respect now for the tremendously varied ways that birds express intelligence. And these birds can teach us lessons about cooperating, solving problems and adapting. Even the obnoxious ones.

Calling All Bluebird People

by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee

NCWAS is a regular sponsor of a film for the Wenatchee Valley Environmental Film and Lecture Series. This year our film is *Bluebird Man*, the story of 91-year-old Al Larson and his bluebird trail (300 boxes!). The meta-story is about citizen science and passing along such caring, generation-upon-generation.

This is a short film (about thirty minutes), allowing time (about another half hour) for information on NCW bluebirds, bluebird nest boxes, and bluebird nest box trails.

Are you a bluebird person? Would you be willing to come to this event to share your knowledge and experience? A short talk after the film would be wonderful. Or maybe having a table with an example of a nest box, photos, and some informative handouts?

When? March 21, 7 p.m. Where? Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center.

If you are eager to help, please contact Mark Oswood (moswood@nwi.net : 662-9087)

p.s. Even if you can’t help at this event, it would be good to know about bluebird stewards in NCW, perhaps for a future Phlox article.



Western Bluebird pair on a nest box.
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

Conservation Issues Update *continued from page 1*

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

Global Warming - National Audubon Society has identified global warming and associated climate change as the primary threat to birds. Given this, Audubon Washington and NCWAS are actively working to address Washington State’s contributions to the problem. Most recently, both organizations endorsed I-732, which appeared on the ballot last November. Among other things, it would have implemented a carbon tax in Washington. If the measure had passed, it would have been the first of its kind in the country. It unfortunately failed by a margin of 41% in favor to 59% opposed. The battle against global warming remains however, and we continue to seek and support solutions that will reduce carbon pollution in Washington State going forward.

If you have Questions or comments regarding any of these issues, or would like to help move our conservation work forward, please contact NCWAS Conservation Committee Chair Mark Johnston at s697striata@frontier.com.

Fodder From the Feeder

by Karen Mulcahy, Winthrop

My feeders are pretty quiet this time of year - mostly Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers at the suet. I haven't seen a White-headed Woodpecker in over a year. Sigh.

So, during these increasingly dark and short days I find myself looking back fondly to this past spring when we were able to participate in the Sagebrush Songbird Survey. For those of you unaware of this project, let me fill you in on a little background. Audubon Washington and eastern Washington chapters developed a citizen science project focused on the shrub-steppe ecosystem and its bird life. This cooperative conservation program matched Audubon Washington chapters with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to "establish a long-term sagebrush avian census." The data collected will be housed in eBird and ultimately "inform large-scale conservation projects and help wildlife values become incorporated into multi-state land use, transportation, and energy and climate planning." And of course, the ultimate goal is to stabilize or increase the sagebrush songbird population. This is a lofty vision and, as is often the case, it takes a village to make it happen! This five to ten-year program will survey the Columbia Plateau public lands to establish bird distribution and verify bird occupancy.

My husband and I travelled to Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge near Spokane for our bird ID training last April. Training was in classroom and the field. Sadly, we learned that about fifty percent of shrub-steppe is already lost to agriculture and other uses. However, some of the best remaining habitat for sage obligate species is owned/managed by public agencies. We already know the populations are declining due to loss of deep soil shrub-steppe and fragmentation effects with agriculture use.

The field training was a hoot. We had to learn to identify several different songs as well as ID these elusive creatures from two-dimensional pictures of the sagebrush birds on sticks. I tried to focus on correctly identifying the umbrella species - the Sagebrush Sparrow, Sage Thrasher, and Brewer's Sparrow, as wherever we find them, that is the habitat we should protect for all the sage obligate species. In truth, there are ten species the survey is recording, but here in the Methow we found mostly Brewer's Sparrows, Vesper Sparrows, and Western Meadowlarks. We listened intently to the bird songs on the CD given us, but when it came time to do our surveys in the field, we were enormously glad to have Michelle Dewey and Art Campbell at our sides! Their eyes and ears were invaluable. It was all uphill on the learning curve for us, but they helped us climb it. I like to believe we were a little better by the end of the three outings, but I do feel we might need a refresher this spring.

Naturally, there are specific protocols to follow but basically as a volunteer you must be able to do a survey one day a month in April, May, and June and bring your ability to identify breeding birds in the area by sight and sound. Most of the birds counted will be singing males. Last year's effort was a success, with 100% survey completion of 50 different sites in all three months (150 surveys) and over 2100 volunteer hours documented.

I certainly hope we can participate again next year. Stay tuned to the Phlox for an update on this spring's upcoming surveys.

Winter Waterfowl Class at Wenatchee Valley College

Would you like to identify some of the ducks and other water birds that winter along the Columbia River? NCW Audubon Society's Jenny Graevell and Wenatchee Naturalist Susan Ballinger have co-designed a course to increase your observation skills in a collaborative setting. This hands-on course will use field guides, bird study skins, presentations, apps and optics. The course includes two classroom sessions and a half-day field trip that will be along the Columbia River where you will practice birding skills under the supportive guidance of the instructors. This course can launch you on your way to becoming a better bird watcher alongside a group of other enthusiasts. The course is designed for people with some birding experience, but beginners are also welcome.

Wenatchee Valley College, CED 526, February 13-18, \$69.00. Contact the WVC Continuing Education Department at ceinfo@wvc.edu or 682-6900 or see <https://www.wvc.edu/directory/departments/conted/> for more information

Chickadee

by Ken Bevis, Methow Valley

Chickadee huddles deep
in snow-covered spruce
Waiting, heart slowed,
feathers puffed,
for the deadly cold
night to pass.

Tiny claws, bare and reptilian,
clutch the small branch
legs bent perfectly
so warm feathers cover
his toes.

Bone chilling cold is
just a nuisance to us,
ducking quickly back into
our warm sanctuaries, but
is fatal business for
our tiny bird.

Yet
sunrise finally comes,
and stirs
the world.
The chickadee awakens
eyes ablaze
and takes
the world
for another ride
today.....

KB 1/16/17

Last Stand: Mountain Caribou and the Inland Rainforest

A Highlands Wonders Presentation

by Julie Ashmore, Okanogan Highlands

On Friday, February 3, David Moskowitz – expert wildlife tracker, photographer, and author – returns to Highland Wonders, bringing an evening of photos and stories exploring the world endangered mountain caribou and the last great inland temperate rainforest left on the planet. David and a small team of adventurers have been tracking down these rare creatures and documenting the stunning world they call home. Learn about the many challenges facing these beautiful creatures and globally unique ecosystem, and the shifting focus of conservation efforts in face of 21st century challenges.

Fewer than 15 caribou remain in the herd that crosses back and forth between the United States and Canada in the Pacific Northwest, while the entire population of this endangered population of caribou is now less than 1,500 across their entire range, which stretches north into central British Columbia. As their habitat is steadily altered and destroyed by human activity, herds across the entire range continue to decline despite a variety of conservation efforts. In the upcoming presentation, community members will learn about why this is, and what it has to teach us about carrying for our planet's natural heritage on both local and global scales.

David's extensive experience as an outdoor educator includes training mountaineering instructors for Outward Bound, leading wilderness expeditions throughout the western United States and in Alaska, teaching natural history seminars, and serving as the lead instructor for wildlife tracking programs

at Wilderness Awareness School. David holds a bachelor's degree in environmental studies and outdoor education from Prescott College. David is a certified Track and Sign Specialist through Cybertracker Conservation, as well as an evaluator for this rigorous professional certification program. Community members can contact David directly to inquire about his photography, classes and workshops or about hosting an evaluation in our region.

Event at a Glance:
When: Friday, February 3, at 6:30 pm.
Cost: Presentation is free; dinner is \$8 for CCC members and \$9 for non-members; desserts by donation
Where: Community Cultural Center (CCC) of Tonasket, 411 S Western Avenue

More info about this and other upcoming events: www.okanoganhighlands.org/education/hw. Questions? julie@okanoganhighlands.org or 476-2432



A bull mountain caribou in fall, Hart Ranges, British Columbia. photo by David Moskowitz

Grizzly Bear Restoration in the North Cascades

Your Chance to Comment

The National Park Service (NPS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) invite the public to participate in a series of informational open houses regarding the proposed alternatives for the restoration of grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem. The alternatives are described in the draft Grizzly Bear Restoration Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (draft EIS), released today by the two agencies. The meetings are one part of the public's opportunity to comment on the draft EIS.

The purpose of the EIS is to determine what actions, if any, should be taken to restore the grizzly bear to the North Cascades Ecosystem. Although there are six populations of grizzly bears in North America, the last-known sighting of grizzlies in the United States portion of the North Cascades Ecosystem was in 1996. The goal of the public comment period is to gather comments regarding the draft EIS; public comments received on the draft EIS will be evaluated and

considered in the identification of the preferred alternative, which will be published in the Final EIS. The full draft EIS is available at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis>.

In order to maximize opportunities for public input, webinars are scheduled for Tuesday, February 14 from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Pacific Time and Sunday, February 26 from 5 p.m.-7 p.m. Pacific Time. For more information about the open houses and to register for the webinars, visit: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis> and click on the "Meetings" link.

The public open houses in our region will be held from 6-8 p.m. at the following locations: Cashmere – February 14 at the Riverside Center, Winthrop – February 15 at the Red Barn, Omak – February 16 at the Annex Facility at Okanogan County Fairgrounds.

For more information on grizzly bear recovery, visit <http://bit.ly/NCEgrizzly> or www.nps.gov/noca/grizzly.htm.

February Wild Phlox

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February 4	Waterville Plateau Field Trip	With Dan Stephens. See the December Phlox
February 18 & 19	Birding the Okanogan Highlands and Beyond	Joint field with NCW & Seattle Audubon. See the December Phlox
February 17-20	Great Backyard Bird count	Plan now! See http://gbbc.birdcount.org/
February 22	Morning Birding in Wenatchee	with Susan Ballinger. See www.cdlandtrust.org
March 9	Learn about Insect Galls with the Native Plant Society	7:00 pm at the Wenatchee Valley Museum
March 21	The Bluebird Man	A film about a bluebird trail. At the museum. See page 5
March 22 OR March 23	Free eBird Workshops	At Wenatchee OR Leavenworth. See www.cdlandtrust.org or next month's Wild Phlox for more information
May 18 - 21	Spring Bird Fest	In Leavenworth. Save the Dates!



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Visit the NCW Audubon Society website for updates on these and other events
www.ncwaudubon.org