



Fall E-news

November 2011

You Can Help Plant Trees and Shrubs on Steigerwald Lake NWR

-- By Jim Clapp

After last year's highly successful planting of over 8,000 native trees and shrubs along Gibbons Creek, we will be putting 3,200 plants in the ground this winter, expanding our planting south of the creek to the east.

Native trees and shrubs to be planted include cottonwood, willow, dogwood, spirea (hardhack), ninebark, twinberry, and wild rose. These plants will continue our efforts to provide shade to the creek (salmon habitat), and feeding/nesting places for birds and other wildlife.



Volunteers bring tubes to protect newly-planted trees and shrubs.

– Photo by Joan Durgin

Team Leaders from the Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards, refuge volunteers and the Lower Columbia River Estuary Partnership (LCREP) will be guiding volunteers the first two Saturdays in December and all Saturdays in January, February, and March.

Come as an individual, family or group (groups, please call Refuge Manager Jim Clapp at 360-835-8767, for more information). All ages are welcome, but kids under age 18 must be accompanied by an adult. Meet at the Gibbons Creek Trailhead at Steigerwald Lake NWR located at mile post 18 off SR14.

Please wear waterproof footwear - we work in wet/muddy conditions, so rubber/rain boots are best if you have them. Please bring gloves, a hat and drinking water. Winter weather in the Gorge can be wet and windy, so please dress appropriately!

All work days are from 9 am to 12:30 pm, rain or shine. Snow or frozen ground will result in a cancellation for that day. *(Continued on page2)*

Saturdays:

- **December 3 and 10**
- **January 7, 14, 21, and 28**
- **February 4, 11, 18, and 25**
- **March 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31**

Please be prompt (arrive 10 minutes early) and prepared to stay for the entire time.

For additional information, you can go to our website at www.RefugeStewards.org and click on links to our announcement or on the calendar, where you can get more details for a particular workday.

-- Photo by Joan Durgin



Y-E-S! Steigerwald Lake NWR Environmental Education Begins

After a lot of hard work by USFWS staff and dedicated volunteers, the Steigerwald Lake NWR Environmental Education (EE) program is underway. Prior to the first set of visits, the EE Committee developed a natural resources field guide that provides information about the Refuge and meets State-mandated science learning requirements.



Guided by LCREP staff member Sam Johnson, students from Dorothy Fox Elementary School studied the environment at Steigerwald Lake NWR November 4th.

– Photo by Gay Leslie

Fifth grade students from Prune Hill, Dorothy Fox, Grass Valley and Gause Elementary Schools visited the Refuge for the first time during November. At the Refuge, they were divided into teams of 3 and loaned binoculars, duffel bags (in lieu of backpacks yet to come), and clipboards with study guides to record their observations as they headed out on their tours. *(Continued on page 3)*

***E-news from the Columbia River Gorge Refuges:
Steigerwald Lake, Franz Lake and Pierce National Wildlife Refuges***

Jennie Klein, a second guide from LCREP, leads students down the Gibbons Creek Wildlife Art Trail.

-- Photo by Harry Leslie



Guides told the students about the roles that different Refuge inhabitants play and how they provide services to each other such as primary and secondary food sources, waste processors, etc. The students recorded their observations in the study guides, which they took back with them to their schools to continue learning based on what they saw.

Most of the visits were categorized as “service learning”. In those cases, half the groups toured the Refuge, while they other half planted trees, and then they switched places.

EE Volunteers Needed

Volunteers interested in environmental education and working with students are needed to assist with the EE program at Steigerwald Lake NWR so that we can reach out to additional schools. Training will be offered before the next round of EE visits next spring. Please contact Refuge Manager Jim Clapp at (360) 835-8767 or jim_clapp@fws.gov if you are interested.

On the Refuge: White-breasted Nuthatch

By Wilson Cady

White-breasted Nuthatches are year-round residents of North America that are found from coast to coast. In the Pacific Northwest, we have two subspecies, *Sitta carolinenses tenuissima*, which is common in forested areas east of the Cascade crest, and *Sitta carolinenses aculeate*, a bird with the common name of Slender-billed White-breasted Nuthatch.

The Slender-billed White-breasted Nuthatch is now a rare species in Washington with a declining population in Oregon. These small, black-capped, gray and white birds are noted for their ability to creep headfirst down the trunks of trees while using their long bills to probe into bark crevices for the insects that comprise most of their diet during all seasons of the year. They do eat a small amount of seeds during the winter, especially those of sedges, a plant that looks much like a grass.

In Washington State, Slender-billed White-breasted Nuthatches are most closely associated with woodlands dominated by large-diameter Oregon White Oaks. These mature oaks have highly furrowed and fissured bark which provides more spots for insects to hide, making them prime feeding areas for nuthatches.



*A Slender-billed White-breasted Nuthatch on Steigerwald NWR
-- Photo by John Broughton*

Clark County has the largest remaining stands of native oaks left in the State. The Washington Department of Natural Resources' Washougal Oaks Natural Area, which borders the Steigerwald Lake NWR, is the largest oak forest left in western Washington.

Although oaks are the preferred habitat for these birds, they also utilize Oregon White Ash and Black Cottonwood forests, where they also hold year-round territories. Slender-billed White-breasted Nuthatches are cavity-nesters, usually using a hole excavated by a woodpecker. Nesting has been observed as early as mid-April, but most nesting activities peak during June.

On Steigerwald Lake NWR, there are at least three nuthatch territories in the cottonwoods along the Gibbons Creek Art Trail. For your best chance of finding these birds, listen for their loud "yank, yank" call and look for movement on the trunks and branches of the cottonwood trees.

Preparing for 2012 Youth Photo Contest

The Refuge Stewards and Pro Photo Supply are preparing for the 2012 edition of our Youth Photo Contest.

Announcements will go out in January, with entries due in late April or early May.

In addition to Camas and Washougal High School students, the 2012 contest will be open to photographers 18 and younger from other parts of the metro area.

The first contest in the spring of 2011 was very successful. Twelve students entered 40 photos in the contest. Three winners and 7 runners-up were selected.



Photo by Evan Liddle, Camas HS

Community support has been very encouraging. Winners were announced at a lunch meeting of the Camas-Washougal Chamber of Commerce. For the past *(continued on page 5)* 6 months, the 10 winning photos have been exhibited at the Washougal Town Center, the Camas Public Library, Camas Days, the Firstenberg Center and the Marshall Center in Vancouver, and Columbia Credit Union in Washougal.

A Brief History of Steigerwald Lake NWR

Drawn from Wilson Cady's "Not-So-Brief History of Steigerwald Lake NWR"

Many people looking at Steigerwald Lake NWR today may ask: Where's the lake? Historically, Steigerwald Lake was a floodplain of the Columbia River where it exited the Columbia River Gorge. One clue to its past can be found in the rows of cottonwood trees along the Gibbons Creek channel on the south side of the Refuge. The yearly flooding of the Columbia River created sandbars, ideal for the germination and growth of the cottonwood trees still visible on the Refuge. *(Continued on page 6)*



Steigerwald Lake Area circa 1918

***E-news from the Columbia River Gorge Refuges:
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Steigerwald Lake draws its name from Allen Norman Steigerwald, whose family owned a dairy in NW Portland. The Steigerwald family kept a dairy herd in the Steigerwald Lake floodplain. Row crops including Blue Lake Pole Beans were grown on the land by Cas Roberts, and this area was locally referred to as Roberts' Bean Farm. Roberts lived in the house that is now used as the Refuge headquarters.

The field west of Gibbons Creek and south of Highway 14, today part of the Refuge, was owned by the Kerr Canning Jar family. They had a large home along Gibbons Creek south of the Old Evergreen Highway but north of Highway 14.

The Port of Camas-Washougal moved into the Steigerwald Lake area when the dike around the floodplain was completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1966. The rerouting of Gibbons Creek into an elevated channel carrying it across the lake to the Columbia River was a solution to flooding problems on Port lands.

In 1984, Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield introduced legislation to create the Steigerwald Lake NWR as partial mitigation for habitat lost in the construction of the second powerhouse at Bonneville Dam. His reason for introducing the bill was that he did not want visitors at the Vista House at Crown Point looking down smokestacks on the Washington side of the river. The Refuge was officially established in 1987.

Gibbons Creek and the challenges faced by anadromous fish will be the subject of a separate article in the next issue of the E-news.



Steigerwald Lake Area during spring flood, circa 1930

Become a Member of the Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards

We invite you to join us in our efforts to support the Columbia Gorge Refuges. By joining the Refuge Stewards, you support the fish, wildlife, plants, and public-use activities which occur on the Gorge Refuges, assuring that they can be enjoyed by future generations. If you have any questions, please visit our website at www.refugestewards.org or contact us at volunteer@refugestewards.org. To join, see below.

Member Benefits

Members receive periodic news about the Refuges, Stewards' activities, and special opportunities to visit the Refuges. Providing your email address helps us save money in distributing this information. Members also are invited to go on special members-only tours, attend board meetings, participate in committees, run for office and vote at the annual meeting.

Choose Your Membership Level

___\$15 Individual

___\$25 Family

Donation (please indicate amount \$_____)

All dues and donations are fully tax deductible. Just send your check to *Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards, P.O. Box 827, Washougal, WA 908671.*



Pacific Chorus Frog, Steigerwald Lake NWR 11/10/2011

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