



Summer Issue

August 2009

Gibbons Creek Trail Now Open

The long-anticipated Gibbons Creek Wildlife Art Trail on Steigerwald NWR is now open to the public. More than 275 people turned out for the opening celebration on June 14th.

Attendees were greeted by Refuge Manager Jim Clapp. Welcoming the crowd and applauding the volunteers were Camas Mayor Paul Dennis; Washougal Mayor Stacey Sellers; Ken Hash, Local Programs Engineer for Washington DOT; Clara Conner, Division Engineer from the Western Federal Lands Division of the Federal Highway Administration; and Robyn Thorson, Regional Director for the Pacific Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



Photo courtesy of Dave Olson

The willow switch is cut by Allison Morris (with her back to the camera) and Brendan Casey (on the right), both local youth while (l-r) Camas Mayor Paul Dennis, Steward Wilson Cady, FHA representative Clara Conner, Washougal Mayor Stacey Sellers, and WSDOT representative Ken Hash (partially hidden) hold the switch.

Although the trail itself is complete, interpretive artwork rather than the usual flat interpretive signs, is being planned and will be installed later this summer. By providing interpretive elements along the trail that rely on non-verbal impressions, Refuge staff hope to deliver messages through a memorable experience that will engage the visitor on a personal, emotional level.

Upon finding that people didn't see or ignored the sign telling them that bicycles, dogs and jogging are prohibited, a more prominent sign was installed at the trailhead. Horses are also not allowed on the trail. Violations should be reported to refuge manager Jim Clapp at 360/835-8767.

In order to protect wintering wildlife, a portion of the trail will be closed October 1 through April 30th.

Volunteer Honor Roll

Five special volunteers were honored at the opening of the Steigerwald Lake Wildlife Art Trail June 14th. They are:

- Roger Durgin
- Gordon French
- Julie Singmaster
- Cyndi Soliz
- Sherry Spencer

The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex, of which the Gorge Refuges are a part, held a Volunteer Appreciation barbecue July 18th.

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

What do you call?

What do you call a group of ducks?
See page 3 for the answer.

Invasive Species, a Threat to Refuge Habitats

Invasive plant species are one of the most serious threats to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Invasives are everywhere. Most escaped from yards, unsecured loads on vehicles, or were illegally dumped along the side of a road. Seeds are dispersed by birds, wind, water, tractors, and mowers.



Photo courtesy of Dave Olson

Stewards board member Rick Jones discussed the battle against invasives at Steigerwald Lake NWR with people attending the trail grand opening.

Some of the species here in this region that you may not have guessed are invasive are:

- English ivy
- Butterfly bush
- Scotch broom
- English holly

The worst of the bunch as far as the Columbia Gorge Refuges are concerned are:

- Himalayan blackberry
- Reed canary grass
- Canada thistle
- English ivy
- Yellow flag iris

Stewards board member Dave Miller and volunteer Gary Fuquay have been mapping the location and coverage of certain invasive plants, such as Canada thistle and yellow flag Iris at Steigerwald NWR. Much more of the refuge and more species are still to be mapped.

About two-thirds of Franz Lake refuge has been mapped for yellow flag iris. Most of Pierce NWR has been mapped for Himalayan blackberry and Canada thistle. This has enabled the FWS to get grants to treat blackberry and thistle at Pierce. About 40 acres were treated last year, but there are hundreds of acres yet to be mapped and treated.

What you can do?

- Educate yourself and your friends about invasives - e.g. [2009 Washington State Noxious Weed List](#)
- Volunteer at the refuges. Contact volunteer@refugestewards.org if you can help with: cutting, pulling or spraying invasives on the refuges. This is the greatest need.
- If you are comfortable using a GPS receiver, using maps with GPS coordinates, and hiking off-trail through brush, volunteer to help with the invasives mapping. This is a great way to see the entire refuge.
- If you have grant writing experience, help write grant applications to get funding to combat invasives on the refuges.

(continued on page 3)

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

(continued from page 2)

- Remove invasive plants from your yard and neighborhood.
- Use native plants in your yard - e.g. <http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=pacific+northwest+native+plants>

Amphibian Surveys Conducted at Steigerwald NWR

Three amphibian surveys conducted at Steigerwald Lake NWR in early spring, found egg masses of red-legged frogs, northwestern salamanders, Pacific tree or chorus frogs, and long-toed salamanders.



Photo courtesy of Dave Miller

A volunteer holds a Pacific chorus frog.

The surveys were conducted by volunteers under the auspices of the Community Amphibian Monitoring Project coordinated by Peter Ritson of Clark College. The volunteers searched the north shore of Straub Lake and the entire shoreline of Redtail Pond.

This was the first year that Steigerwald Lake NWR was included in the survey.

Learn More about the Refuge Complex

The Columbia Gorge Refuges are part of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge complex. Visit www.ridgefieldfriends.org for information on the Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, their activities and upcoming events. You will find information about the Cathlapotle Plank House at this website, too.

NOTICE TO VOLUNTEERS:

Third Saturday Work Parties Scheduled Through November; New Meeting Location

Third Saturday work parties will continue at Steigerwald NWR. Work parties will go out rain or shine from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. They may involve planting, removing invasive species or other hands-on habitat restoration projects.

Come dressed for the weather and bring your work gloves and water bottle. We will provide all the tools and materials.

Starting in August, the Third Saturday work parties will meet at the new Gibbons Creek Wildlife Art Trail parking area at Steigerwald NWR. This is located just east of the "Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area" sign on Highway 14.

You can sign up by using the calendar on our website, www.RefugeStewards.org. For information about the month's particular projects, call Carol Kohler at 360/834-4344.

What do you call a group of ducks?

A brace (a pair), flock (in flight), or paddling (on the water).

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

What We are Seeing on the Refuge

By Wilson Cady

This summer with the opening of the new trail there have been better wildlife observation opportunities on the refuge for the public. While summer is one of the slower times of the year for seeing a large variety of birds, the nesting species on the refuge have been cooperative. Steigerwald Lake is one of the easiest places in Clark County to see an American Bittern. This medium-sized member of the heron family is often seen flying low over the wetlands and can be identified by its brown color and dark tipped wings. Sora and Virginia Rails are also numerous in the flooded grasses but are heard more often than seen.

The fence posts in Red-tail Pond usually have the beautiful Wood Duck perched on top of them. These colorful ducks nest in cavities in the cottonwood trees. One of the more conspicuous birds in the main ponds has continued to be the non-native Mute Swan that arrived on the refuge in February of 2006 and has remained ever since then.



Last year we lost a large number of the Purple Martins that use the nest gourds on poles along the dike. The death of these birds from starvation during the cold

wet spring set back the growth that our colony had been experiencing for several years. There seem to be fewer of the gourds occupied this year but the number of Purple Martins nesting in the cottonwood snags along Gibbons Creek has increased. This is one of only about five locations in Washington State where these large swallows nest in natural cavities. From the walking trail downstream of the bridge, you can easily view these birds entering the old woodpecker holes in the snags there.

Birds of special interest that nest in the cottonwood forest include House Wren, White-

breasted Nuthatch, Yellow-breasted Chat and Bullock's Oriole. With a little listening and searching from the trails you have a very good chance of seeing these birds.

By the end of July most species have completed their nesting and will be moving around more accompanied by the juveniles. This gives you the chance to spot both local nesting birds and some early migrants including southbound shorebirds. By mid-August the species that migrate to the far south for the winter will become more numerous and provide excitement for those people willing to take the time to spot them.



Photos courtesy Dave Miller

Purple martin family – parents up top, babies poking their heads out of the nest cavity.

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

Refuge Buildings to Receive Maintenance Funds

By Jim Clapp, Refuge Manager

Refuge staff has been fortunate in receiving funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for two important building projects. These projects will provide funding to local businesses and, at the same time, correct some long-standing deficiencies in refuge maintenance. The first project will replace the remains of a 50-year old barn at Steigerwald Lake NWR, currently used for storage of refuge equipment and supplies. A new storage building will be constructed with a gravel parking area. The old building will be torn down and removed. The second project is actually two parts – energy efficiency projects at both Steigerwald Lake and Pierce Refuges. Major tasks include removing old insulation and/or placement of new insulation, sealing leaks, replacing old leaking doors and windows, and replacing light fixtures with new, energy efficient ones. These green energy projects will immediately begin to reduce our carbon footprint, and also reduce annual operational and maintenance costs for these facilities. Target completion time is within the next year, although we hope to get it done by next spring.

At the same time, we received other funding to be used for replacement of the siding and, if funds are sufficient, for reroofing of the Steigerwald office. The shingles on the outside of the office were painted with lead paint. The paint has been flaking off for the last several years. At the same time, the roof appears to be made of aluminum, and is probably the original roof installed on the building when it was constructed 50 years ago. Target completion time is the same as above.

Celebrate the Fall Bird Migration at Ridgefield Complex Refuges

By Eric Anderson, Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex

Fall is just around the corner, and with it comes the arrival of migrating birds to Ridgefield, Pierce

and Steigerwald Lake National Wildlife Refuges, all part of the Ridgefield Refuge Complex. The birds use the refuges to rest and refuel on the way to their wintering grounds, or sometimes stay throughout the summer to nest and raise their young. Waterfowl such as the omnipresent mallard and the colorful wood duck can be seen using the wetlands. Late departing wintering or migrating Canada geese will be resting or feeding in the lake waters. Riparian woodlands can provide sightings of songbirds, including examples such as western tanager, purple martins, Swainson's thrushes, Bullock's orioles, and cedar waxwings. Unusual sightings can surprise and excite birders at any of the refuges.

Birdwatchers, both novice and experienced, are invited to come out and get a closer look at these refuges and the nature show created by the changing of the seasons. Join our refuge volunteer/avid birder for a trip through one any or all of these refuges past wetlands, grasslands, and riparian forests. Your tour guide will share with you why habitat areas on the refuge are vital to providing resting stops for migrating songbirds and valuable nesting/rearing habitat throughout the summer. Bring your binoculars, bird guides, good walking shoes, and some drinking water. As is always the case in this area, bring raingear if the weather is predicted to provide showers. All hikes will begin at 8 a.m. and end between 10 and 11 a.m.

Hikes at Steigerwald Lake NWR will occur on Sunday, September 20 and Saturday, September 26, 2009. September hikes are being planned for Pierce NWR. Please check our calendar (www.refugestewards.org/calendar.html) or call Eric Anderson below for dates.

The guided walks are free and open to the public; however, space is limited to 15 people per hike. Please contact Eric Anderson at (360) 887-4106 or Eric.Anderson@fws.gov to register for a hike, obtain directions to the starting location, or to obtain additional information.

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

Become a Member of the Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards

We invite you to join us in our efforts to support the Columbia River Gorge Refuges. By joining the Refuge Stewards, you support the fish, wildlife and plants that rely on the Gorge Refuges and assure 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.

Member Benefits

Members will receive periodic news about the Refuges, Stewards' activities, and opportunities to visit the Refuges or volunteer for projects. 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, 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.

Name _____

E-Mail Address _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Please make checks payable to **Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards** and mail to:

Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards
PO Box 827
Washougal, Washington 98671

Board Members

Gay Leslie, President
Carol Kohler, Vice President
Wil Niosi, Secretary
Joan Durgin, Treasurer
Wilson Cady, Environmental Education Ch.
Randy Fortish, Director
Rick Jones, Director
Sallie Jones, Habitat Restoration Chair
Dave Miller, Director

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

Photos from Trail Opening

Courtesy Dave Olson



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