

E-News from the Columbia River Gorge Refuges:

Steigerwald Lake, Franz Lake, and Pierce National Wildlife Refuges

January 2008

Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards

Greetings from the Columbia Gorge Refuge Stewards! Note our new logo, courtesy of multi-talented board member Wilson Cady, who did the original painting. Thanks, Wilson!

Steigerwald Lake NWR in the News

If you subscribe to the Vancouver *Columbian*, you may have noticed that Steigerwald Lake NWR has been in the news lately. The newspaper featured the interpretive kiosk and trail that are planned for SLR in both an article describing the project and an editorial endorsing it. If you missed the article, information can be found on the Columbia Gorge Scenic Area website, <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/columbia/projects> under "Current Projects".

We hope that construction of the kiosk and trail will be finished by this time next year. We'll keep you posted on that.

On the Refuge

The wintering flocks of Cackling Geese, which look like a smaller version of Canada Geese, have arrived back at Steigerwald Lake NWR. This is an Arctic nesting bird species that was elevated to a full species status a few years ago after DNA studies showed that they have not interbred with Canada Geese for over 10,000 years. Along with their smaller size (3 to 5 pounds) they can also be separated from the Canada goose by a shorter neck and their high pitched cackling call which sounds almost like a small dog yapping.

This fall, among the hundreds of birds visible from Highway 14 was a goose with a pure white body and a brownish neck and head. This is an aberrant color form referred to as leucism which differs from being an albino as the bird retains some color rather than being pure white with pink eyes. This is the second year in a row that this stunningly beautiful leucistic Cackling Goose has been present on the Refuge. This year, a second bird in the flock had more limited leucism showing only pure white wings.



What Do You Call?

What do you call a group of eagles?
(See the end of the newsletter for the answer)



Columbia River from the Pierce Refuge

Congressional Staff Visit

Staff from the Vancouver offices of Senators Maria Cantwell, Patty Murray, and Congressman Brian Baird toured Steigerwald Lake NWR on October 16th to become familiar with the Gorge Refuges and the fish and wildlife needs that they serve. The Congressional staff members were: Mindi Linqvist, regional director for Senator Murray; Bob Dingethal, regional director for Senator Cantwell; Page Phillips, contact person for USFWS in Congressman Baird's office; and Amanda Dotson, the Congressman's liaison with Clark County.

Representing USFWS were Bob Flores, Project Leader of the Ridgefield NWR Complex, and Jim Clapp, manager of the Columbia Gorge Refuges. Representing the Stewards were Gay Leslie, president, and Wilson Cady, board member.

Time constraints limited the participation of Senator Murray and Congressman Baird's staff members to Steigerwald Lake NWR. Bob Dingethal was able to continue on to Franz Lake and Pierce. Web research indicates that we can expect strong general support from our Congressional delegation.

Putting the Plants to Bed

We're delighted to report that over 90% of the 2,000 trees and shrubs that were planted on Steigerwald Lake NWR last winter have survived. A typical survival rate for a project such as this is 60%, so we are doing really well. Stewards members and volunteers were out on the Refuge December 1 making sure that the plants are ready to make it through another winter. That meant checking each of them individually to see if the tubes around them are still big enough and ensuring that the supporting stakes are firm. The tubes protect the plantings from nibblers (e.g., voles (very similar to mice) and deer) and both tubes and stakes protect them from winter storms.

Summer Watering

It was a challenge getting enough volunteers to water the new plantings at Steigerwald Lake NWR this past summer. Without the frequent watering, however, survival would have been much lower. Watering will be repeated – though probably not as often – this coming summer. If you can help, we will certainly appreciate it. More information will be distributed as the time approaches.



During the summer, many Pacific Chorus Frogs took refuge in the planting tubes.

Winter Projects

Meanwhile, there are an abundance of winter projects on the drawing board. Stewards board members met in an all-day session at the Camas Public Library in November to plan the projects.

At Steigerwald Lake NWR, volunteers will be needed to help remove invasive species (such as blackberry, false indigo bush and English ivy) and expand the planting areas, including a new project to create oak savanna habitat. Volunteers will also be needed for a one-time project cleaning the storage shed at the Refuge office near Washougal.

In Skamania County, we'll be looking for volunteers to help with planting native shrubs at the Highway 14 overlook on the Franz Lake NWR. At Pierce NWR, volunteers will be needed to remove English ivy and false indigo bush.

We plan to have some projects in the spring and summer as well (beyond just watering).

Please check the calendar on our website at www.refugestewards.org to see when these activities will take place and to sign up online. We will be working many Saturday mornings, starting late January.

Thanks

We want to thank all the volunteers who came out last winter to plant trees and shrubs at Steigerwald Lake NWR and those who came out to water the plants this past summer.

Special thanks go to Bernadette Price, who has volunteered to pick up litter and sweep the board walk at the Franz Lake overlook. *Thanks, Bernadette!*

Other Needs

While habitat restoration remains our primary focus, we are anxious to develop an environmental education program. Board member Wilson Cady has agreed to lead that effort. Anyone interested in helping should call Wilson at 360/835-5947 or send us an email at volunteer@refugestewards.org.

As our membership grows we have identified some new, fairly urgent needs. In particular, we could use assistance with publicity and fund-raising. If you can help, please contact us at volunteer@refugestewards.org.



A group of volunteers from Hewlett Packard came out in September to measure plant survivorship at the Gibbons Creek planting.

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 our children and grandchildren.

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 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

What do you call a group of eagles? A convocation.