



Willapa Tidings

Newsletter of the Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge • Vol. 1, No. 3 • Spring 2001

Habitat Restoration Leads Refuge Priorities

Long term loss of wetlands and decreasing woodlands throughout the Pacific Northwest make habitat at Willapa National Wildlife Refuge a critical resource. Invasion of the nonnative cordgrass *Spartina alterniflora*, which is spreading rapidly across intertidal mudflats and saltmarshes of Willapa Bay, adds significantly to the problem.

During the past year, the Refuge staff's major effort has been restoration of habitat to replace lost habitat and improve existing habitat for wildlife use. This is a continuing program that will consume major resources in the future.

In addition to extensive work at the Tarlatt Slough Unit (formerly Shier's farm), shallow ponds have also been created at Riekkola, Porter Point and Lewis units. Tall marsh grass and reed canary grass have been disked and plowed under at Lewis and Porter Point units so that smartweed, bur-reed, and other aquatic plants favored by dabbling ducks can thrive. Water control devices permit converting wetlands at the Lewis unit to mudflats during shorebird migration so that feeding areas will be available when bay mudflats are covered by high tides.

Ducks, geese, and amphibians have quickly found the improved habitats. Shorebirds have also appeared with the



The Refuge's amphibious tractor with a rototiller attachment rigged in place of the conventional mower cuts spartina roots to prevent spread of the infestation.

major migration not yet underway as of this writing; however, the numbers of dabbling ducks (green-winged teal, wigeon, pintail, mallard) have increased significantly this year.

Acre for acre, there is more life in a healthy wetland than any other kind of

habitat. Wetlands can support large numbers of insects, fish, birds, amphibians and other animals. Approximately one third of all the animals and plants listed as threatened or

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Shorebirds resting on the ocean beach. The annual spring migration begins in April and brings thousands of shorebirds to the area. Sanderlings, dunlins, western and least sandpipers, and black-bellied plovers are commonly found on the bay during low tide and on the ocean beach at high tide.

Eric Jambor, a member of Cub Scout Pack 25, Den 8, from South Bend, Washington, helps plant trees along Headquarters Stream on February 10, 2001.



Annual Membership Get-Together Planned

Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge will host a fun get-acquainted afternoon picnic in September. We hope all members and their families will want to attend. Look for details about time, place, and program events in the next newsletter.

Calendar of Activities May-June-July 2001

Friends Activities

If you see an activity you'd like to participate in, call the Friends at 360-665-6859.

- Conduct fourth-graders' May field trip to Refuge (previously scheduled for April).
- Survey shorebirds on the peninsula.
- Monitor water levels and amphibians at Tarlatt Slough Unit.
- Maintain trails and campgrounds.
- Monitor nest boxes.
- Assist in developing a bird list for Tarlatt Slough Unit.
- Conduct detailed review and evaluation of the fourth-grade education program.
- Board meeting May 17th, 7:00 PM, at the PUD Building, 95th & Sandridge Road, Long Beach. All members welcome.

Refuge Staff Activities

The Refuge staff will be pursuing these projects:

- Rototill spartina meadows.
- Mow spartina.
- Rebuild parking lots at headquarters and Leadbetter Point Unit, to be completed late May.
- Monitor marbled murrelets.
- Monitor shorebirds.
- Survey streams.
- Monitor breeding success of snowy plovers.
- Restore Riekkola unit pastures
- Start construction of fish ladders at Lewis and Porter Point units
- Regulate water levels on Riekkola, Tarlatt Slough, and Porter Point units to enhance habitat.



Friends member Carl Buchholz displays a bluebird nest box, one of sixteen he has constructed and donated for placement on the Refuge. A retired school principal from Hobart, Washington, Carl and his wife Mary have a weekend retreat on the peninsula.

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Michael McDowell, *Editor*

To request an address change, to contribute items of interest (including photos), or to write articles for publication, please contact Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

Mailing Address

PO Box 627, Ocean Park, WA 98640

Telephone

360-665-6859

E-mail

rudwin@willapabay.org

Web

<http://www.teleport.com/~mmcdowel/friendsofwillapa/>

Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge

A nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge was established in July 2000 to provide support and assistance to Refuge programs and to enhance awareness and appreciation of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge.

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Fourth Graders Study Amphibians

During the week of March 12-16, the Friends continued their education program by bringing amphibian egg masses and aquariums to local fourth grade classrooms. The Refuge staff and Friends members visited six participating classrooms in Ilwaco, Naselle, and Olney.

Each class learned about amphibians found in the Pacific Northwest and received a red-legged frog egg mass in an aquarium. The classes will observe the egg masses as they develop into tadpoles. The students will return the tadpoles to their pond habitat during the field trip to the Refuge scheduled in early May.

The Friends' year long education program is funded by a grant provided by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's National Wildlife Refuge Support Group Grant Program in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wildlife Refuge Association, and National Audubon Society.



Willapa National Wildlife Refuge Manager Terri Butler shows a red-legged frog egg mass to fourth grade students at Hilltop School.

President's Letter

By now almost everyone has heard of the invasion of the nonnative cordgrass *Spartina alterniflora*, which is rapidly spreading across the intertidal mudflats and saltmarshes of Willapa Bay.

Control efforts to date have been insufficient. *Spartina* continues to spread at a rapid rate, causing havoc with migratory bird feeding areas and risking serious economic consequences for the resident aquaculture industry.

In 1991 *spartina* covered approximately 2,500 acres of Willapa Bay. Now the infestation covers 15,000 to 18,000 acres of tidelands and is projected to cover 56,000 out of the 80,000 acres of Willapa Bay if left uncontrolled. Clearly this is unacceptable. Considering the rapid rate of expansion of this nonnative species, a final opportunity to control *spartina* may soon be approaching.

The proven methods available at present—chemical treatment, mowing, and root eradication—must be increased. Waiting for more efficient methods is not a viable option. More equipment and operational staff are needed now. Funding for additional airboat operations to apply Rodeo to scattered clones and greater rototilling capability to attack solid grass *spartina* meadows is necessary to regain control and stop the spreading infestation. What can the Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge do?

Can our elected officials at county, state, and federal levels help?

—Rudy Schuver

Membership News & Notes

Friends Member Chuck Blight has agreed to take over the position of Membership Chair, which had been shared by Melissa Herrold, Winona Schuver, and Janet Weidman. We appreciate his accepting this job and look forward to working with him.

In the last newsletter, the Patron membership of Miraculture should have been listed as Bay Center Mariculture (Dick & Janet Wilson).

We welcome the following new members of Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge, who have joined since the last newsletter.

Patron Memberships

John Heckes

Family Memberships

John & Catherine Morrow, Phil Raistakka & Anita Smith, Malcolm & Tammy McDowell, Robert & Thea Pyle, George & Consie Schuver

Membership Form



Make checks payable to: Friends of Willapa NWR

Send to: Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge
PO Box 627
Ocean Park, WA 98640

All dues and donations are fully tax deductible.

Amount enclosed:

- \$10 Individual Membership
- \$15 Family Membership
- \$50 Patron Membership
- \$100 Benefactor Membership
- \$500 or over Advocate Membership

Name: _____
Address: _____
City, State, Zip: _____
Phone: _____
E-mail: _____

Volunteer Interests

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special Projects and Events | <input type="checkbox"/> Fund Raising | <input type="checkbox"/> Trail and Campground Maintenance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Outreach | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Relations | <input type="checkbox"/> Shorebird and Waterfowl Monitoring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Habitat Restoration | <input type="checkbox"/> Fish and Amphibian Monitoring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Membership Recruitment | | |

Spartina Continues to Spread, Despite Efforts to Control

(Continued from page 1)

endangered in the United States either live in wetlands or depend on them in some way.

The most serious challenge to Refuge habitat and Willapa Bay is the continual encroachment by spartina. Spartina eliminates the value of intertidal areas for wildlife because it traps sediment and raises the ground level in addition to forming a dense thicket of tall grass. During migration, shorebird concentrations exceed 100,000 birds and more than 15 percent of the Pacific flyway population of dunlin winter within the bay. The continuing loss of intertidal mudflats and native saltmarsh to spartina will have a devastating effect on shorebird use as well as wintering Pacific brant and Canada goose habitats.

In addition, spartina troubles the aquaculture industry since it also destroys oyster and hardshell clam habitat.

Control and eradication of spartina is difficult. Fluctuating tides restrict work hours and adherence to water quality regulations limits treatment options. Approved herbicides and the Refuge's current equipment capable of operating on unstable mud are expensive and slow. Consequently, the rapid spread of spartina has overwhelmed control efforts.

The integrated pest management approach to controlling spartina includes chemical control of scattered small clonal circular patches and seedlings, and mowing and root eradication of large concentrations (spartina meadows).

A biological control, the small leaf-hopping insect *Prokelisia marginata*, presently under test on three locations in the bay, may prove useful; however, it may be several years before significant results

can be expected.

Recent Refuge staff experience indicates that root eradication by an amphibious rototiller may be the most reliable method to control spartina meadows, now estimated at 2,350 acres. The one machine now in use can clear five acres per week during the non-growing season. Mowing of meadows during the growing season helps control seed spread, but disturbing the root system by rototilling from

Volunteers Contribute to Long Island

A group of volunteers has done road, trail, and campground maintenance on Long Island for the last five years. The main cadre from Astoria has been assisted at times by students from Lewis and Clark College and Pacific University as well as Boy Scouts from Astoria.

Originally the concern was over campgrounds, a rare commodity in the national wildlife refuge system but valuable to the kayakers and canoeists who paddle the waters of Willapa Bay. Long a low priority at Willapa National Wildlife Refuge due to a shortage of staff and more urgent requirements, the campgrounds provided an ideal project for volunteer help. With minimal guidance by the Refuge staff, the volunteers gained necessary skills and were soon working independently.

Volunteers have now contributed over a thousand hours on Long Island. They have serviced the portable toilets, cleared miles of roads and trails, picked up bags of trash, pulled tansy and scotch broom, installed new fire pit rings at each campsite, and talked to hundreds of campers.

In the process they have learned that coordinators can be invaluable, that volunteer work can be structured to provide

November to June has proven to be the most helpful.

Approximately 12,700 acres infested with spartina are in the form of scattered clonal patches and seedlings covering about 25 percent of the mudflat area. Control of these large areas by mechanical means is not feasible but instead depends on the use of airboats to apply the herbicide Rodeo. One air boat and crew can cover around 200 acres of spartina in a season.

tangible rewards, that work should reflect the interests of the volunteer, and that there are some tasks that don't lend themselves to volunteer efforts.

Anyone wishing more details on visiting or camping on Long Island should see the new Willapa National Wildlife Refuge brochure or talk with Refuge staff. The campsites are primitive, and getting to and from the island can be difficult and occasionally dangerous.

Members who'd like to volunteer help on the Long Island Unit are invited to call Larry Scott at 503-325-5611.



Aerial view of the 7-mile length of Long Island (Photo courtesy of US Fish & Wildlife Service).

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Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 627
Ocean Park, WA 98640

Stamp