



Newsletter of the Malheur Wildlife Associates, Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge
 Keeping the Needs of Wildlife First

Volume 2, Number 1

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MALHEUR
Wildlife Associates
 an affiliate of the
 National Wildlife Refuge Association

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A GENTLE REMINDER . . .

This will be your last newsletter if you are not a paid member of the Malheur Wildlife Associates.



WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING!

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

Since you last heard from us, Malheur Refuge settled into its quieter fall and winter mode and the Malheur Wildlife Associates used these same months for planning future projects and tying up a few loose ends from last summer's effort.

During National Wildlife Refuge Week in October, the Ranching Heritage Day celebration at the historic Sod House Ranch was well attended, Young and old alike enjoyed the tours, activities, and the delicious barbeque.

Our first 2005 project is scheduled for March 10 - 15. See the related article on page 3.

Please remember to send your 2005 dues soon so we don't have to waste time and money notifying you. The membership form is on page 5. Only paid-up folks are counted as members when talking to granting institutions and public leaders. Your membership card (sent following renewal) entitles you to a 15% discount at the Visitor Center store at refuge headquarters. Thanks for remembering!

WORK PARTIES COMING THIS SPRING

Whoa, members, we planned a work party in October and nobody came. Lucky for you, there's another chance or two!

March 10 through 15, inclusive, we need all the help we can get to plant hundreds of willow poles along the Blitzen River near headquarters. They must be in the ground before bud break. We'll also need help to plant rooted shrubs for wildlife food and cover in April.

We'll use the water jet stingers to plant the willow poles, but the rooted plants will require shovel work the old-fashioned way. It all promises to be great fun, though probably too chilly for water fights! See page 3 for more details.

WORKERS NEEDED



If you want to receive word about work parties, check the appropriate box on your membership form and include your e-mail address. A handy list of interested folks improves our efficiency in notifying only those interested in participating.

BE AWARE that our work projects often rely on available refuge equipment or staff, or are dependent on road conditions or access to marshland. Although we will give you as much notice as possible, we often cannot plan far in advance.

MEET THE STAFF - CHAD KARGES - Assistant Refuge Mgr.

Alice Elshoff, MWA Chair

Chad came by his love of refuges and wildlife naturally. Because his father worked as a Fish and Wildlife employee, Chad spent his early years living on a series of wildlife refuges around the west.

After graduating from Oklahoma State University, and working at a series of biological aide jobs, Chad landed a job at Matagorda Island, off the coast of Texas. He was the first US Fish & Wildlife staff member to actually live on the island where he looked after migrating whooping cranes, shorebirds and waterfowl.

His next job took him to the Charles M. Russell refuge in Montana, a large refuge surrounding Fort Peck Reservoir and home to antelope, deer, bighorn sheep and sharp-tailed grouse. Chad holds fond memories of this refuge, where the wide open landscape and lack of development were well suited to protecting wildlife. Also, it was here he met and married his wife, Rhonda.



The next assignment was a very different experience. It took him to the Salton Sea, an extremely important stop-over for migrating birds, but one having enormous and complex problems. Increasing salinity and excess accumulations of nutrients from agricultural run-off threaten both fish and birds. Momentum for restoring this unusual area is increasing and a restoration plan is in draft form.

Chad welcomed the chance to work at Malheur where once again the landscape was to his liking, large and open and relatively undeveloped. "Encroaching development, plain and simple, destroys our options for providing wildlife habitat." he said in

a recent interview. "Yes, there are problems to solve at Malheur but the components for forging solutions are still here."

Creating an environment in which the polarization of user groups can be broken down so that problems can be addressed on the ground instead of through the political or legal system is Chad's short term goal as assistant manager. "With everyone working together, we can truly begin the long term work of restoring a higher level of functionality to the ecosystems on the refuge." Because of Chad's vision, and in cooperation with progressive neighbors and the Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Station, plans for doing just that are taking shape.

Chad lives with his wife Rhonda and two teenage daughters on a small acreage where he keeps horses to assist in elk hunting, one of his favorite activities.



CRANE POND OVERLOOK

Wayne Bowers, Volunteer

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the Swan Pond Overlook project is on hold, but planning and some work has progressed on the alternate idea, the Crane Pond Overlook Trail.

After receiving archaeological clearance and consulting with refuge staff the 0.62 mile trail was flagged and sagebrush was cleared. The trail parking area is a quarter mile east of the Donner und Blitzen River on the road to Krumbo Reservoir. The loop trail winds through sagebrush scabland and past several weathered juniper trees. It has great overviews of Crane Pond and seasonal wetlands of the lower Krumbo Creek Valley as well as a striking view of Steens Mountain.

The trail will eventually provide accessibility for folks with limited mobility. We are exploring surfacing options that will resist the erosive forces of the harsh high desert weather. The next step is to look at funding options and get the grant writers busy. We may find that funding options might make this a work-in-progress, taking several years to complete.

The "Big Dream" is a winding hard-surfaced, self-guided interpretive trail with rest stops in the shade of gnarly junipers and at several spots along the rim overlooking the Krumbo Creek Valley. It will be a great place to stretch your legs after being trapped for too long in the confines of an auto. You can trade the rumble



A volunteer enjoys the view of the lower Krumbo Creek wetlands and Steens Mountain from the Crane Pond Overlook Trail.

of the tires, the artificial sounds of the sweet music radio and the smell of decaying orange peels for the essence of sage, the hum of mosquitoes, and the calls of various wildlife species along the trail. It should be a great place to pick up a life bird or two and to burn a number of images in the mind or with a mechanical contraption.

Stay tuned for the next update!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR BLITZEN TREE/SHRUB PLANTING PROJECT March 10-15, 2005

Patty Bowers, Newsletter Editor

A six-day effort to initiate a long-term riparian tree/shrub restoration project, complementing previous improvements to restore natural stream function along the Blitzen River channel, is scheduled for March 10 - 15, 2005. The goal of the project is to "put the system back together" by stabilizing the Blitzen River's streambanks, improving the riparian condition and its related watershed values, and increasing habitat diversity for all wildlife species.

Several years ago, Malheur Wildlife Associate (MWA) volunteers created a clone bed of trees and shrubs from the Refuge and nearby areas. The idea was to create a source of native plant material from which cuttings are taken and planted. The parent stock remains in the clone bed, providing more plant material over time.

The clone bed has enjoyed considerable success in growing native cottonwoods, red-osier dogwood, and willows. Experimental plantings of native blue elderberry were added in 2004.

Early efforts to outplant the whips were not as successful as hoped. Those planted close enough to the river to get their roots into the water table tended to wash out in the spring and those planted far enough back from the edge to survive high flows didn't survive the lowered water table of late summer.

To remedy this problem the whips were allowed to grow for at least 2 years, reaching lengths of 6 - 10 feet. And, instead of using planting rods or shovels, the Refuge invested in several water jet stingers to drill deeper holes for planting the whips along the river. The stinger uses a water jet to make a deep, small diameter hole to plant the whips, getting them deep enough so developing roots reach water during summer low flow conditions.

Last spring the new stingers were used to plant the first cottonwood cuttings along the Blitzen at the south end of the Refuge.

The new "crop" of native Blitzen willow whips are ready to plant. A concerted effort to accomplish this task is scheduled for **March 10-15, 2005**. The timeline is tied to getting the whips in the ground while they are still dormant.

Since the original work was planned, the scope of the restoration effort has expanded. In April, appropriate varieties of rooted fruit-bearing shrubs like serviceberry, silverleaf buffalo-berry, snowberry, black hawthorn, chokecherry, and Wood's rose will be planted with the willows along the river and in some of the meadow and upland areas.

N u m e r o u s wildlife species will benefit from these high quality woody and herbaceous shrubs. Berries produced by the shrubs persist into winter, providing important late season forage for many bird species, including upland game birds, and will potentially support the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's (ODFW) mountain quail reintroductions scheduled to take place on or near the Refuge in 2005. It is hoped the birds and the Refuge's water management program will further distribute the seeds throughout the system.

Financial assistance from ODFW's Game Bird Program has helped purchase most of the rooted plants. In addition, MWA has purchased 100 rooted snowberry bushes for planting along the river.

PROJECT DETAILS:

The March 10 - 15 time span, Thursday through Tuesday, allows a variety of date possibilities for potential volunteers. Planting sites

are close to Refuge headquarters where housing options are available for up to 10 -15 people in the bunkhouses. Showers and a full kitchen for cooking are also part of the bunkhouse amenities. A few RV sites with hook-ups are available and there is room for RV dry camping without hookups. Plans to provide at least part of the meals are underway. More information will follow as it becomes available. And for super hard workers, how does a tour "behind locked gates" on the Refuge sound?



Cal Elshoff prepares cottonwood poles for planting along the Blitzen River.

Gather some friends together or come alone for the entire time or only a day. Plans are to run at least four teams each day cutting, hauling, drilling, placing whips, and closing the holes. PLEASE let us know by phone or e-mail so we can schedule full crews for the entire time.

March weather in the Harney Basin can vary from warm and balmy to cold and windy. Plan layered clothing options. Rain gear, rubber knee boots, hip boots or waders are suggested for your comfort, although it is probably not a good idea to bring your best gear.

For more information or to sign up, please contact Alice Elshoff, 541-495-2322 or calice@highdesertair.com. We'll look forward to seeing you on the Blitzen in March and maybe in April, too. 🗺️

CRANES AND CONNECTIONS

Gary Ivey, MWA Vice Chair

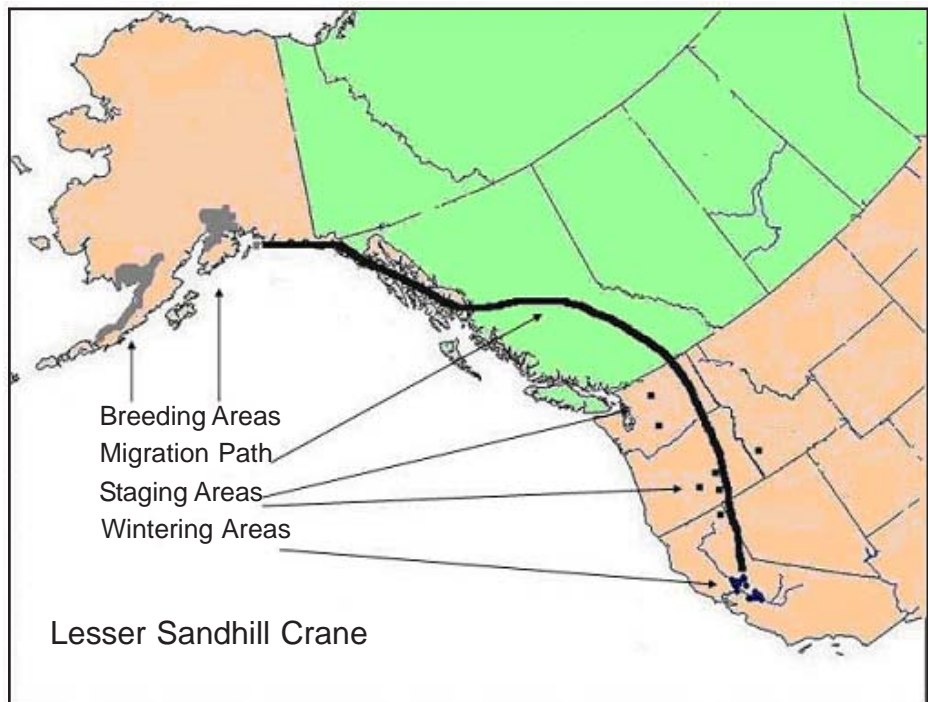
Spring in Harney County is heralded by the return of thousands of lesser sandhill cranes to the private hayfields of the Silvies Floodplain, north of Malheur Refuge. While the larger, greater sandhill crane breeds in this area, the lessers use it as a re-fueling station for their long northward migration. They begin arriving in early March. Large flocks totaling up to 12,000 birds can be found feeding in the irrigated meadows on the Silvies floodplain through mid-April.

The irrigated, hayed and grazed meadows of the floodplain provide ideal feeding sites for cranes as irrigation water and cattle droppings make an abundance of earthworms available. Cranes also love to dig for camas bulbs and soft roots of other meadow plants.

Harney County's lesser sandhill cranes are members of the Pacific Flyway population and the Silvies Floodplain is the most important spring staging site in the Pacific Flyway, supporting up to about half of the entire population. A recent study by Alaska Fish and Game has shown migration paths and wintering locations of individual cranes marked with satellite radios. Their known nesting areas in Alaska include the Alaska Peninsula and Bristol Bay east to the Kenai Peninsula and Upper Cook Inlet. It is possible that some Pacific Flyway cranes may also breed in Siberia. You can read the details about the Alaska study on this web page:

<http://hunt.alaska.gov/management/waterfowl/crane/adult.cfm>.

Fall migration begins in early September, as these birds begin to move east then south along the Alaska coast. They stop along the way to rest and feed and gather into larger flocks near the Copper River Delta, Yakutat, Gustavus and the Stikine River Delta in southeast Alaska. Near the Stikine River, they



migrate east through the mountains into interior British Columbia. Their route then takes them south through eastern Washington and Oregon, eventually arriving in the Central Valley of California where they spend the winter.

The cranes spend about a month on this fall journey, briefly resting a day or so along the way before continuing southward. They spend the winter in the Grasslands Region near Merced, California, and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta region near Lodi, where they forage in agricultural fields and wetlands for five months. After moving to several spring staging areas where they may linger a month or more, the cranes fatten up before continuing their journey northward. Their movements to the breeding grounds in the spring follow the same general path used in fall migration.

Where can I see sandhill cranes this spring in the Harney Basin?

The best locations to find lesser sandhill cranes usually include the meadows along Hotchkiss and Greenhouse Lanes and Highway 205 near Burns. Depending on water conditions, good viewing may also be found along Highway 20 between Burns and Buchanan. They sometimes use the meadows north of the Burns Paiute Reservation. The Silvies Floodplain areas continue to provide good looks at cranes through mid-April, but locating birds on a given day may take some scouting to find the concentration areas.



A sandhill crane feeds in the flooded fields of the Silvies Floodplain. Photo by Kit Larsen, USFWS.

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Guy Sheeter, MWA Sec./Treasurer

Membership Update:

- * There are about 60 active paid members for 2004.
- * Twenty-four members showed interest in participating in work parties.

Refuge Updates:

* Carey reported on the status of interpretative panels. It is hoped the Narrows panels will be ready for the bird festival. The Blitzen River panels are ready for placement. Work is moving forward with the Ag Research Center on the Silvies Floodplain panels for Hwy. 205. MWA has helped purchase and/or contributed to the text of these interpretative panels.

* Carey showed example of signs for the auto tour route - MWA will purchase the signs and the refuge will purchase the posts to put up by this spring. The script is ready.

* Rick discussed how and why the Refuge is working to remove non-native, highly invasive Russian olives as well as phragmites, cocklebur, and water hemlock. The Refuge is working with Richard Scheely from the Ag Research Center to determine how vegetation responds to management strategies.

* The Refuge is participating in ODFW's mountain quail reintroduction. Refuge staff also participated in a tour looking at reintroduction sites for Sharp Tailed Grouse. Researchers are not interested as shrub component (especially serviceberries) on uplands is missing. Shrubs are critical to winter survival of sharp-tailed grouse.

* Two spring riparian plantings are planned - one in March (willows/dogwoods) and one in April (fruit-bearing shrub root stock). See related story on page 3.

* Rick discussed problems that occurred during the 2004 Upland Game Bird Hunt Program. 370 hunters were present on opening weekend. Etiquette issues developed as a result of so many hunters. Options for reducing problems are under discussion.

New Business:

* Status of progress on the new Crane Pond Overlook Trail was discussed. See related story on page 2.

* MWA will be recruited to help post updated signage for hunt areas.

* Carey discussed Dave Marshall and Tom McAllister coming to speak at the bird festival. See bird festival insert for details.

* Carey discussed annual event (Membership Recognition Day/Conference) for members of MWA, Audubon societies, etc. See related story on page 6.

Reminders:

* Alice reminded the group to keep in mind how MWA is representing the needs of each of our member constituencies...

- Birders - new trail in progress and more planned for the future
- Hunters and Anglers - north end signage-postings
- Habitat - riparian plantings and clone bed maintenance
- Photographers/Artists/Writers - will be meeting with photographers soon regarding possible sites for photographic blinds
- Education - auto tour route
- Political Action - sent letter to Washington DC encouraging support for additional refuge funding to tackle weed problems



MEMBERSHIP FORM

2005

Annual Dues: \$10 Individual I prefer my newsletter by: Snail Mail New
 \$20 Family Email Renewal
 \$50 Donor
 \$200 Patron
 \$500 Life Member

NAME: _____
Last First Middle I

Mailing Address: _____ Phone: _____
 _____ Email: _____

Mail this form with check to: Malheur Wildlife Associates
 36391 Sod House Lane
 Princeton, OR 97721

I am interested in hearing about work parties via email. Please add my email address to the project notification list.

MEMBERSHIP RECOGNITION DAY & CONFERENCE AT MALHEUR REFUGE

Carey Goss, Refuge Liaison

To recognize our Malheur Wildlife Associates "friends" group, the Refuge and the MWA Board invite all members to a celebration event at Malheur Refuge April 29 - May 1. Staff and MWA Board members will host tours to special places on the Refuge on Saturday to allow participants to experience and understand the "big picture" of refuge management. A banquet is planned for Saturday evening. Enjoy the Refuge on your own on Sunday and/or join us for an optional MWA project that morning.

On Saturday morning Jess Wenick, Habitat Specialist, will present the Refuge's new 'Adaptive Management' program with Roger Sheley and Kimberly Morghan from the Eastern Oregon Agriculture Research Center and the Agriculture Research Service. Adaptive management is a way for the Refuge to shift gears to improve habitat and forage as monitoring and other factors indicate the need. Saturday's tours will get you up close and personal with the new management theory.

Plan to arrive Friday and enjoy the weekend with us at Malheur. The closest housing options are available at the Refuge bunkhouse and at the Malheur Field Station. You will receive a personal invitation with more details at a later date.

We hope you can make a springtime journey to join us at Malheur for this special event. Contact Carey Goss at 541-493-2612 or email Carey_Goss@r1.fws.gov for more details.



**NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES:
WILDLIFE'S BEST FRIEND**

National wildlife refuges are places in the United States where wild creatures can get what they need to live - food, water, shelter, and space. On national wildlife refuges, the needs of wildlife come first.



Malheur Wildlife Associates
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Here's What's Inside . .

What's Been Happening..... 1
 Meet The Staff..... 2
 Crane Pond Overlook..... 2
 Volunteers Needed 3
 Cranes & Connections..... 4
 Board Meeting Highlights..... 5
 Membership Recognition..... 5
 Migratory Bird Festival.....
 (see insert)