



the Pileated Post

Newsletter of the Flathead Audubon Society

Volume 23

Number 2

February 1998

Legislative alert: Grazing rights (?) on public lands

Little is known by many of the major conservation organizations about the grazing of domestic livestock on public lands. The two major agencies involved are the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. The users are some 19,000 "permittees" who have grazing privileges on 100 million acres of BLM land and 70 million acres of Forest Service land.

Slipping quietly through the national legislative process is H.R. 2493, the misnamed Forage Improvement Act of 1997. Passed by the House of Representatives last fall, the bill is now in the Senate, where it has been assigned to the Public Lands Subcommittee. Headed by Senator Larry Craig (R-ID), our own Senator Conrad Burns (R-MT) is a committee member.

Numerous changes were made in the House bill. The obscure legal language involving the term "appurtenant" was stripped out. In the original bill, the grazing of livestock on public lands was long held to be a "privilege" and in the modified bill it would be elevated to a property "right." Thus, all other privileges would be second in nature to "dominant use" (the grazing of domestic livestock). "Multiple use" for all, as we now know it, would be eliminated.

Another change in the House bill would allow only the 19,000 or so permittees, their paid consultants and agency representatives (BLM or USFS) to have a say over "monitoring" conditions or uses on those public lands. This would prevent any other user, interested group, individual or other agency, as now defined, from questioning or protesting

management practices they might observe.

Many are of the opinion that no industry or group should be allowed to exclusively police itself. Just because some industries are self-monitored, is not an indication that it's desirable when it pertains to the management of natural resources.

On the plus-side of the bill is a statement which provides that "Nothing in this Act shall be construed to limit the use of Federal lands (as defined) for hunting, fishing, recreation or other multiple use activities in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws and the principles of multiple use ---"

However, it's questioned what good that is to a hunter if there's nothing to hunt because of the way the "allotment" is managed? Grazing practices can impact, often severely, the populations of grassland game birds and neotropical migrants, so the provision could be an empty promise.

Senator Burns, as well as Senator Baucus, should know of your concerns about the content and passage of this bill. Write to: Senator Conrad Burns, 825 Hart Senate Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510 and/or Senator Max Baucus, 706 Hart Senate Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20510.

James Phelps

Yellowstone Valley Audubon

In This Issue —

Meeting notice	page 2
Investment Return	page 3
President's Page	page 4
Bird Count Reports	pages 5,6,7



The editor's spotting scope

What do you know about American Coots? They're seen in lakes and ponds, so does that make them ducks? Years ago, it was not uncommon to call a senior citizen who was a little different "an old coot." Who should be insulted — the person or the bird?

In the past several weeks, Coots were brought to mind because there were so many of them, hundreds of them, on the south end of Flathead Lake, in the Polson area. Curiosity about the bird sent me to the reference books.

Coots are not of the duck persuasion; they are part of the Rail family, which has over 120 species, including the Purple Gallinule. (If you want the scientific name, you can find it in a field guide, but most of us call them coots or rails or whatever.)

All of the field guides and reference books I checked said the same thing about Coots. They are notable for having the lateral fringes of the toes expanded into well-developed lobes as an adaption for swimming and diving. If you have watched Coots dive for food and wondered what they were after, it's submerged vegetation.

From her living room window, Betty Brill of Polson has an excellent view of the lake, as it's just a stone's throw away. She has spent a lot of time lately with her binoculars, watching the winter drama unfold across the street.

She commented, "The large flock of Coots in this area will break into two groups when they feel it's safe to feed and you can watch them dive for food fairly close to shore. When the Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles arrive though, the Coots gather in one large mass for self-protection.

"When the zero temperature hit us, I could actually see the ice begin to form on the lake and many of the Coots became ice bound and were sitting targets for the Eagles."

On Highway 93, where it passes a few feet from the lake, Dr. Pam Sandall and Brooke Ingram watched another drama unfold from their office window. "It was awful," Dr. Sandall said. "The birds on the outside fringe of the flock

were thrashing around, trying to free themselves from the ice, and the Eagles just picked and chose what they wanted to eat. We had to let Nature take her course, but it was difficult. I suppose that's Nature's way of controlling over-population of a species, but you sure wanted to help them somehow, somehow."

It would seem that a dark mass of floating birds in a lake or pond would surely attract birds of prey, moreso than if they scattered far and wide on their own. But the American Coot has apparently worked out its own plan of defense for survival and it's passed on from one generation to another.

But you have to wonder if the birds on the outside fringe are trying to break the ice, or if they are desperately trying to muscle their way into the more protected inner circle. Where an Eagle is involved, those that are in the middle are more apt to be called "old coots" than those thrashing around on the outside edge.

Sharon Bergman



Take Note

February General Meeting

Monday, February 9, 1998
Fish, Wildlife & Parks Bldg.
490 N. Meridian Rd. Kalispell
Meeting starts at 7:30 pm.

Program: Kate Kendall, Research Ecologist with the Biological Resources Division of the USGS, will present a slide show program featuring the co-evolved relationship between Whitbark Pine, Clark's Nutcrackers and Grizzlies. Currently stationed in Glacier Park, Kendall started work with the National Park Service in 1974. Her original research, in 1977, was on Grizzly Bear Ecology. She worked with the Interagency Grizzly Bear Recovery Team in Yellowstone and got her Masters degree from MSU in 1981. She's been working on Whitebark Pine, Clark's Nutcrackers and Grizzlies since 1995.



New in our Midst

We bid welcome to the following new members who have joined Flathead Audubon since August, 1997.

Bigfork: Johanna Bageman, George Bonham and Timothy Snyder. **Columbia Falls:** Columbia Falls High School and Patricia Wood. **Condon:** Elizabeth Spettigue. **Eureka:** Carl Waltz. **Hot Springs:** Mark Boesch and Frank Burnie. **Hungry Horse:** Jim & Sue Swab. **Kalispell:** Lora Boyce, John Conlon, Philip Crissman, Gerald Darling, Claire Evans, Lona Evans, Barbara Foster-Macal, Rebecca Harrison, Jeff Jacobson, Sidney Johnson, Dr. Glenn Johnston, Martha Jones, Mara Mercer, Kate Parker, Jennifer Phillips, Judith Saurman and Mark Sorenson. **Lakeside:** James Barthelmes and Jane Schelsky. **Libby:** Eileen Driscoll, C. Harvey, Richard Johnson and Robert Uithof. **Marion:** Michael Weston and Daniel Pollard. **Plains:** Susan Mielke, Jack Webster and Gayle Keeney. **Polson:** Jonathan Parsons, Hugh Henderson, Gary Gallagher and Karen Noles. **Rexford:** Claudia Clayton, Melvin Mullett and William Troyer. **Ronan:** C. Mihulecky. **Thompson Falls:** Jim Quam, Betty Sahinen and Randy Shermukas. **Trout Creek:** C. Michaels. **Troy:** Ray Beardsley, Kal Randall and Stella Reese. **West Glacier:** Sheila Michels and Amy Brees. **Whitefish:** Bev & Connie Cohen, Bob Heim and Suzi Law.

Field trip a success

The Ninepipes Field Trip led by Chad Olson of Missoula was deemed to be very successful by over 65 birders who participated. Some 22 cars snaked down the back roads of the Mission Valley carrying people from Missoula, Ronan, Moise, Polson, Bigfork, Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls. Linda Winnie, Flathead Audubon publicist, commented that the list of raptors seen included Rough-legged Hawks, Red-tailed Hawks, Harriers, Short-eared Owls, an American Kestrel, a Prairie Falcon, a Harlan's Hawk and a Ferruginous Hawk. Linda said, "Chad was able to handle that large group so smoothly. He did a great job. Took us to very active spots and taught us all a lot."

Get a return on your investment

Audubon's Population and Habitat Campaign is trying to get you to make the connection — that more people result in a loss of habitat. For our feathered friends, as well as other species, it's not only the numbers of people, but also the resources that are consumed which have an impact.

Happily, there is a way to cut your resource consumption and energy use, which results in a 16.3 percent return on your investment and helps reduce CO2 emissions or global warming in eastern Montana, and in western Montana it helps reduce hydropower consumption which affects salmon, etc. It's simply building your new house, addition or remodel to specifications of what is referred to as a "Super Good Cents Home". By spending a little extra money and time up front, you'll save money in the long run and live in a quieter, more comfortable and, most importantly, a healthier house.

The ideas that fostered the Super Good Cents approach were developed in the United States, Canada and Scandinavia. Basically, you want to reduce the heating or cooling requirements of your home by one half, which saves you money.

To cut your home's energy use, follow a two-step approach by installing more insulation and tightening up the shell of the house to control air infiltration. As an example, on a new \$100,000 home, the additional insulation and air infiltration control will cost about \$2,000 more, or an extra \$2 per month on the mortgage payment, BUT the average monthly heating bill will be reduced by \$10 or more.

Because the shell of the house is tightened, a system will be needed to bring in outside fresh air to keep it healthy. This can be either a whole house fan, costing about \$500 or a heat exchanger for approximately \$2,000. Now a total of \$3-\$4 per month has been invested and added to the mortgage payment, but there is a savings of \$10 or more per month in the heating and cooling costs.

To learn more about saving money as well as resources for an improved wildlife habitat, contact Brian Green, Dept. of Environmental Quality, 1520 E. 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620, (406) 444-6768 or Ward McCartney, 7227 Farm to Market Rd., Whitefish, MT 59937, 862-5449.

Ward McCartney, Member, Mt. Audubon Population and Habitat Committee.



President's Page ➤➤

Illusions of grandeur. I get them every winter about this time, here at the apex of the New Year; inexplicable amidst the long nights, interminable overcast and sodden snow of January. I find myself arising at 4 a.m., bustling to the kitchen, brewing a pot and retiring to my big chair in the dark and quiet living room, alone with my dreams.

There's nothing like a clean slate. All the puzzlements, the half starts, the unsettled problems of last year get tossed with the old calendar. Today anything is possible or better. I can do it all! That's the joy of these grand illusions; this is the one moment when the road to success reveals itself, beckons like the easy curve of an on-ramp, my aspirations seem as well-mapped and accessible as any freeway. Why I didn't take this route last year, or the year before, is beside the point. What matters is it's morning! I've got all day, a full tank of gas and miles to go.

To tell the truth, I'd be lost without these fresh starts. For just as certain, the year will wear on, time will devolve into routine, or worse, implode into chaos, leaving my grand plans as unrecognizable shreds, a wreckage of good intentions. But down the road a ways, in the real, work-a-day world of midyear, invariably I'll kick up one or two shreds of these winter dreams and breath them back to life, coax them into at least a semblance of their original glory.

And so progress is made; from grand illusions to actual, albeit incremental, changes: some project, one accomplishment, a new direction along the road to success.

It is a time-consuming route and not recommended for anyone in a hurry; maybe more like the back road to success, rather than the freeway. But then, I've always been a bit of a dawdler, unwilling to sacrifice enjoyment of the scenery (with frequent stops to appreciate the birds), for speed in getting where I'm going. Actually, I admit though I do enjoy the scenery, but it's taking a long time to get anywhere.

For someone entering the 50th year of life, that ominous half-century mark, time is of the essence. Compared to those free-wheeling

days of 20 and 30 years ago, when one had all the time in the world, time to burn, today time looks more and more like a non-renewable resource. When morning slides past midday, with hints of sundown already coloring the horizon, and you still have miles to go, you don't waste any more time. That old saying, "It's now or never" takes on astonishing significance.

As much as I wrestle with the time factor on my personal road to success, and fragile as these wonderful winter dreams are against hard reality, I rely on my long, quiet mornings alone for an annual renewal of hope. I often think of our Audubon chapter in similar terms.

We could be great. We've got the infrastructure — our organization and consistency; the personnel — our reliable membership and dedicated leaders; and we are riding a crest of environmental concern as the natural world seems to be unraveling everywhere around us, and there's a particular concern for the fate of bird life.

If there was any doubt, after last month's field trip for hawk watching, where some 70 enthusiastic birders turned out, it is apparent we do have a constituency. I would contend that today our only limitation to achieving all the success that's possible for Flathead Audubon is time. With nearly all of our lives constrained by that ever-present clock ticking away, how much more is there to devote to Audubon? How much more chaos can you add to your life?

Fortunately there is one vital and important difference between one's personal constraints and that of our organization. A difference I'm becoming increasingly aware of as I look toward the end of the road is the completion of my term as president of Flathead Audubon. For Audubon, there is no sundown, no end of the road, no reason not to achieve our dreams.

The next president will pick up exactly where we need to be. As an organization devoted to the natural world, this is not the time to stop. There is no time. We just have to keep on keeping our beautiful corner of the world together.

Leo Keane



Swan Valley Bird Count Report

The 5th annual Upper Swan Valley Christmas Bird count, sponsored by the Grounded Eagle Foundation of Condon and Flathead Audubon, was held on Monday, December 29. The count circle for the area is centered on the Forest Service Condon Work Station.

Taking part in the count were eight field observers in five parties, all local residents, as well as ten feeder observers.

Twenty-nine species were observed on count day and one additional species was seen during count week. A total of 559 birds were counted. The largest number of species on the Swan count was 38 recorded in 1995.

Field observers were surprised at the scarcity of birds away from feeders in spite of the relatively open winter. The largest number of birds and species were seen at the feeders.

Highlights of the count were the 13 Bald Eagles and four Golden Eagles, which were the largest number of either species for any Swan count. Two new species for this count were a Winter Wren and a Northern Harrier. Black-capped Chickadees provided the largest number of individuals at 112. The second largest number was 77 Common Ravens, followed by 86 Common Redpolls.

Rod Ash



Mark the Box and Make a Difference

Montana's Watchable Wildlife Program needs your help! Since 1983 this program has relied heavily on the Wildlife Tax Check-off for funding. Montana Income Tax forms include a line and box for those check-off contributions.

In 1983, Montana received more than \$35,000 from more than 6,600 taxpayers who contributed to the check-off. In 1996, only 1,951 taxpayers contributed \$16,081 to the nongame wildlife check-off. Because of legislation, the wildlife check-off will be dropped from tax forms if the fund receives under \$20,000 in two consecutive years. As a result, **this year is crucial.** Montana's Watchable Wildlife Program may be discontinued if this check-off is dropped from the tax forms.

Your contribution will assure that all Montanans, young and old, can better enjoy and appreciate the diversity of our nongame wildlife. Marking the box for a donation —

- Provides opportunities for children to attend wildlife viewing field trips;
- Continues Project Feeder Watch, which places bird feeders at nursing homes;
- Furnishes educational exhibits at wildlife viewing sites;
- Supplies informative brochures, viewing guides, posters, wildlife lists and ID guides.

Support Watchable Wildlife on your Montana tax return.



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home page: <http://www.wln.com/~dschwick>
 email: dschwick@wln.com



Bigfork Christmas Bird Count

TOTALS: 83 species, plus 1 during count week (CW); 12,887 individuals

There were 42 observers in 12 parties in the field. Mild weather before and during the count resulted in our 5th highest species total in 24 years, about average total individuals and new high counts for several fair-weather species. These included a (first) House Wren at Wood's Bay, bringing our cumulative 24-year list to 137 species. New high totals were recorded for nine other species (underlined in the report).

Lingering waterbirds with new high totals included 4 Double-crested Cormorants, seen only once before; 7 Green-winged Teal and 9 Killdeer, which benefitted from the open shorelines. Brewer's Blackbirds have also usually left by December, so the 402 near Creston were unusual. The 2 Three-toed Woodpeckers tied our count high for the species and had been seen only once since 1978. Big flocks of Common Redpolls had been common this fall, so it was no surprise when a new high total of 674 was set, which was over five times the 10-year average for the species. The Long-eared Owl had been seen only twice before on the count.

Dan Casey

Pied-billed Grebe	1	Belted Kingfisher	9
Western Grebe	cw	Downy Woodpecker	22
<u>Double-crested Cormorant</u>	4	Hairy Woodpecker	14
Great Blue Heron	11	Three-toed Woodpecker	2
Tundra Swan	165	Northern Flicker	64
Canada Goose	2565	Pileated Woodpecker	10
<u>Green-winged Teal</u>	7	Gray Jay	3
Mallard	1871	Steller's Jay	7
Northern Pintail	9	Blue Jay	4
Gadwall	5	Black-billed Magpie	96
American Wigeon	6	American Crow	224
Canvasback	1	Common Raven	164
Redhead	31	Black-capped Chickadee	319
Ring-necked Duck	60	Mountain Chickadee	73
Greater Scaup	215	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	18
Lesser Scaup	9	Red-breasted Nuthatch	134
diving duck, species	850	White-breasted Nuthatch	1
Common Goldeneye	310	Pygmy Nuthatch	17
Barrow's Goldeneye	26	Brown Creeper	7
<u>Bufflehead</u>	110	Marsh Wren	1
Hooded Merganser	19	House Wren	1
Common Merganser	96	American Dipper	4
Red-breasted Merganser	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet	95
Bald Eagle	34	Townsend's Solitaire	3
<u>Northern Harrier</u>	11	American Robin	1
Accipiter, species	1	Bohemian Waxwing	333
Red-tailed Hawk	5	Northern Shrike	13
(Harlan's) Red-tailed Hawk	1	European Starling	175
Rough-legged Hawk	19	American Tree Sparrow	7
American Kestrel	1	Song Sparrow	20
Ring-necked Pheasant	23	Dark-eyed Junco	38
Ruffed Grouse	13	Red-winged Blackbird	164
Wild Turkey	569	<u>Brewer's Blackbird</u>	402
American Coot	1177	Pine Grosbeak	15
<u>Killdeer</u>	9	Cassin's Finch	45
Ring-billed Gull	97	House Finch	208
California Gull	3	Red Crossbill	172
Herring Gull	4	White-winged Crossbill	2
gull, species	17	<u>Common Redpoll</u>	674
<u>Rock Dove</u>	296	<u>Pine Siskin</u>	337
Mourning Dove	81	American Goldfinch	6
Great Horned Owl	3	finch, species	40
Northern Pygmy-Owl	1	Evening Grosbeak	202
Long-eared Owl	1	House Sparrow	2
owl, species	1		



Ninepipe Christmas Bird Count

TOTALS: 74 species; 19,994 individuals

The 17 observers who participated in the Ninepipe bird count found above average species and total individuals this year. Mild weather and the resultant open water resulted in high waterfowl counts, including our second-highest Mallard total ever (12,246), and new count highs for Redheads (34) and Ruddy Ducks (17). The ratio of Red-tailed Hawks to Rough-legged Hawks was high, with near record numbers of the former (62) and fewer of the latter (74) than in recent years, when Ninepipe hosted the national high count for this species.

Ring-necked Pheasant numbers were well below last year's high count of over 800, perhaps due to more limited production during the late, wet spring. Two Common Snipe at the same place along Post Creek as during the 1996 count were unusual, as were the two Yellow-shafted Flickers among the 67 Red-shafted ones.

Dan Casey

Great Blue Heron	9	Long-eared Owl	1
Tundra Swan	4	Short-eared Owl	13
Canada Goose	1171	Belted Kingfisher	7
Green-winged Teal	8	Downy Woodpecker	10
Mallard	12246	Hairy Woodpecker	1
Northern Shoveler	4	Northern Flicker	67
Gadwall	23	Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker	2
American Wigeon	23	woodpecker, species	2
Canvasback	6	Clark's Nutcracker	1
Redhead	34	Black-billed Magpie	230
Ring-necked Duck	18	American Crow	23
Lesser Scaup	26	Common Raven	37
Common Goldeneye	59	Black-capped Chickadee	135
Bufflehead	5	Mountain Chickadee	1
Hooded Merganser	7	Chestnut-backed Chickadee	3
Common Merganser	2	Red-breasted Nuthatch	51
Ruddy Duck	17	White-breasted Nuthatch	1
Bald Eagle	28	Pygmy Nuthatch	17
Northern Harrier	33	American Dipper	3
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Golden-crowned Kinglet	23
Cooper's Hawk	1	Townsend's Solitaire	45
Northern Goshawk	2	American Robin	36
Accipiter, species	1	Bohemian Waxwing	1274
(Harlan's) Red-tailed Hawk	2	Cedar Waxwing	100
Red-tailed Hawk	60	Northern Shrike	8
Rough-legged Hawk	74	European Starling	1069
Buteo, species	1	American Tree Sparrow	189
Golden Eagle	1	Song Sparrow	23
American Kestrel	7	Dark-eyed Junco	24
Prairie Falcon	3	Red-winged Blackbird	917
Gray Partridge	45	Western Meadowlark	7
Ring-necked Pheasant	118	Brewer's Blackbird	4
Ruffed Grouse	9	Pine Grosbeak	1
Wild Turkey	6	House Finch	65
American Coot	110	Red Crossbill	104
Common Snipe	2	Common Redpoll	55
Ring-billed Gull	2	Pine Siskin	61
Rock Dove	172	American Goldfinch	98
Mourning Dove	12	House Sparrow	925
Great Horned Owl	8		



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The Flathead Audubon Society is affiliated with the National Audubon Society and meets on the second Monday of each month from September through May. The regular meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. and includes a featured guest who will present a conservation or nature program. The regular monthly meeting is preceded by the Executive Board meeting. Both meetings are open to all those interested.

THE PILEATED POST is published September through May and is sent to members of the Flathead Audubon Society as a membership benefit. Subscriptions for non-members are \$10.00 per year.

Deadline for newsletter copy: the 20th of each month. Newsletter Fax: 849-5486.

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