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Camas National Wildlife Refuge is 36 miles north of Idaho Falls on I-15. Exit at Hamer and follow signs east, north, and west over I-15 to the refuge, about 5 Miles. The mailing address is 2150 E. 2350 N. Hamer, Idaho 83425. Refuge Headquarters phone: 208-662-5423. Rob Larrañaga is the Refuge Manager.

**Spring on the Refuge is all about water!** The snowpack in the drainage area above the refuge was 80% on March 1, 2007, compared to 114% at the same time last year, and we received very little additional moisture in March of this year compared to substantial storms last year in March and early April, which means water will be more scarce in 2007. Record flows were experienced in 2006 (1,700+ cfs) during the first week of May, probably the highest daily flows since the estimated 1,700 cfs flows during the 1983/84 floods. Despite the increased flows, the main core marsh impoundment (Center Pond) was not managed at target levels for the third straight year since 2004, and did not receive nesting activity by Trumpeter Swans. Due to the lack of adequate snow pack and an early run-off, the 2007 water year is not looking too optimal. Camas Creek started to receive substantial flows several weeks earlier than the first week of April last year. The early run-off will most likely result in minimal creek flows during the summer months, thus requiring a higher dependency on well water. Rob Larrañaga has detailed information about the pump and creek volumes should you want specific data.

Wetland management in Camas NWR requires daily monitoring of Camas Creek water volume diverted to the refuge as well as precise accounting of water pumped from the seven refuge wells. Data is reported to the Water Master who assures that water resources are allocated according to approved Idaho water rights. Water monitoring and management of water control devices to direct flooding of marshes and ponds is performed by Rob Larrañaga, Farrel Downs, and resident volunteers John and Sharon Dollar. That activity requires an enormous amount of time, skill, and record keeping. It is crucial to both migratory and nesting waterfowl that food supplies, managed by mowing, controlled burns, and flooding are assured, and that water levels in nesting areas will not fluctuate to flood or dry out nests and hatchlings. Water is the lifeblood of the wetland and skillful management of water resources, both in flood and drought, is critical for migratory and resident birds.



**Migratory Landbird Research.** Dr. Jay Carlisle of Idaho Bird Conservancy and his research team finished their fall 2006 mist netting on October 15. They operated the mist nets on 88 different days from July 20 through October 15 for a total of 4,312.2 net hours. A total of 4,664 birds of 74 different species were captured, data recorded for each, and released, a result very similar to the 2005 results. Specific information about the most frequent species, numbers of specific species, comparisons with 2005 and with the Boise area research efforts as well as observations from standardized 10-minute pointcounts at Camas NWR, Mud Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and Market Lake WMA and conclusions about weight gain or loss and conditions of the migratory birds is available in Dr. Carlisle's *2006 Annual Report of the Migration Monitoring of Songbirds at Camas National Wildlife Refuge*. Conclusions about differences in spring and fall migration routes for some species, conspicuously lower numbers of some species compared to 2005, and data which will provide long term baseline information about the use of native versus introduced plants is fascinating. The research team felt the study was very successful and completes the second year of two planned study years for fall

migrations. A fall 2006 planning meeting determined that the second of two planned study years for the spring would begin on April 16, 2007, and wrap up in mid-June 2007. The two years of baseline data will be summarized for publication in at least one peer reviewed journal. For a copy of the report, contact Dr. Carlisle at the Idaho Bird Observatory, Boise State University's Department of Biology, 1910 University Drive, Boise, Idaho 83725-1515 or you can contact him through [IBChresearch@boisestate.edu](mailto:IBChresearch@boisestate.edu)

**The Spring 2007 Songbird Research** has been funded through cooperative contributions of several entities, including USFWS, IDFG, and the Portneuf Valley and Snake River Audubon Societies. An Idaho Collaborative Grant proposal prepared primarily by Mark Delwiche, President, of the Snake River Audubon Society and supported by the Portneuf Valley Audubon Society, resulted in a commitment of \$752 for the research via National Audubon. In addition,



PVAS contributed \$1,000, \$10,000 is coming from the USFWS Division of Migratory Birds, as well as over \$7,400 in the form of an Idaho Department of Fish and Game state wildlife grant. Dr. Carlisle's team will add an international tie to the project this year and will include two research assistants from Latin America with the idea that they would be well-trained to begin or carry on migration observations and data collection in their home countries. In addition two of the Resident Volunteers who plan to be here through the research period, as well as several commuting volunteers, will assist with data recording and support services for the research team. Dr. Carlisle's team welcomes visitors and has offered fascinating learning opportunities for school groups, researchers, and birders from all over eastern Idaho.



**Visitor numbers** remained high through a relatively mild winter on the refuge offering big game viewing. A cougar kill was observed near the headquarters on 10-16-06, a hidden large white-tailed buck carcass and a nearby raccoon, and although no one observed the cat, the tracks were clear and the cache behavior and wounds were consistent with a cougar kill. This might have been the only confirmed cougar activity on Camas NWR, although not too surprising since cougars have such a large home range. Numbers of Great Horned owls observed were consistent with other years, and the count of Bald Eagles, done weekly from December through March, exceeded the January high count for 2006: during one January Bald Eagle count, Rob Larrañaga observed forty, 35 adults and 5 immature, on the roost sight on the night of January 11.

The peak for 2006 was on March 1, when 47 were sighted; slightly lower numbers were recorded during this year's March peak. Rough-legged Hawk numbers during the January mid-winter Bald Eagle Counts were down considerably on the refuge this year, from 13 in 2006 to 5 this year. Several hundred refuge visitors took in an early spring migration this year, considerably higher than past year's visitation.

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**The Dubois Grouse Days Festival** is scheduled on Friday and Saturday April 20th and 21st. Activities begin on Friday evening at 5 PM and conclude with the Saturday evening banquet following a morning of viewing grouse dancing on their leks and a day of informative presentations and activities. Those activities will include planned tours of Camas National Wildlife Refuge Saturday conducted by Rob Larrañaga. John and Sharon Dollar and other knowledgeable volunteers will provide educational presentations for children and information about the Refuge Display to visitors. On Saturday, Mike Parker, Refuge Manager from Red Rock Lakes NWR will present an overview of their refuge and Dr. Jay Carlisle will present the findings of the two-year Landbird Migration Research on Camas NWR. The schedule and information about registration and available accommodations is available from the U.S. Forest Service in Dubois, contact Jeri Tavenner, at (208) 374-5422, or [jtavenner@mudlake.net](mailto:jtavenner@mudlake.net).

**Spring Migrations** started a few weeks early this year, as the refuge has experienced a mild spring. Rob observed 12 Trumpeter Swans on the refuge February 18, a couple of weeks earlier than most years, and up to 10,000 ducks arrived the first week of March, along with a couple thousand Canada geese. Pumps were started and grain fields mowed anticipating the arrival of geese and swans a week earlier than 2006. In recent years, Swans and Sandhill Cranes have typically arrived as early as the last week of February. The light geese (Snow Geese and Ross' Geese) migration peaked the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March at approximately 18,000 birds, at least a week and a half earlier than the past few years. Short-eared owls were observed in early March, several weeks earlier than the first observation in early April last year. An Elderhostel Friends for Learning group which visited the refuge on October 6, 2006, planned another visit to take in spring migrations on March 26; however, missed the big numbers. Over 60 participants did experience the mating courtship of several sandhill crane pairs. Come NOW, to take in the beginning of the songbird migration that will peak around Memorial Day.

**International Migratory Bird Day** will be observed at Camas NWR on May 12. Activities planned include volunteer work on the trails and with the native tree plantings, as well as refuge tours and the opportunity to observe the mistnetting research in progress by Dr. Carlisle and his team. Contact Rob Larrañaga if your group has not already signed up to volunteer on that day. The Hamer Lions club will be invited to provide refreshments again this year.



**Citizens Taking Prompt Action** resulted in the apprehension of alleged poachers on two separate occasions during last fall's hunting season. Thanks to the swift action and use of cell phones by refuge visitors; staff, county and state officials was able to apprehend the alleged violators. Waterfowl hunters in an area closed to hunting on the refuge were cited for taking ducks, and three individuals are under investigation for shooting at least 2 cow elk and possibly a 3<sup>rd</sup> one on the refuge, after cutting a fence and driving several miles off-road. All big game hunting is prohibited on refuge. Your action can make a difference in protecting Camas NWR and other wild areas.

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**Prescribed Burning** was conducted during the end of March, to include the 40 acre wetland burn on the south side of Big Pond and several miles of water system delivery ditches. Camas NWR has 31 miles of canals and the burning of tumbleweeds and other debris that obstructs the flow of water is critical to the Water Management on refuge. Prescribed fire is used to reduce dead fuel loads and to increase the availability of plant and invertebrate foods for breeding waterfowl and marsh birds during the spring and summer periods. The U.S. Forest Service personnel from Pocatello, and the Idaho Department of Correction's, St. Anthony Work Camp, Crew provided valuable assistance in completing these burns and fuel load reduction projects (chain saw work) near the headquarters.

**Funding for the NWR System** continues to be a major concern. President Bush's annual budget request to Congress increases the National Wildlife Refuge System Budget slightly, but the increase is not enough to keep up with inflation. As a result, the proposed budget is the fourth straight year that effectively cuts funding for the Refuge System.

The costs of recovery for the Gulf Coast Refuges damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina are overwhelming, and much of the needed work to restore habitat for both resident and migratory waterfowl as well as other wildlife is simply not happening due to funding constraints. As a result of the budget cuts pressure, many refuges are not filling staff positions or are simply not staffed at all. Several organizations, including Friends of the Refuge System, are working diligently to inform members of Congress of the dire needs in many locations, needs which are jeopardizing endangered species, habitat safety and maintenance, and in many cases excluding the public for whom the refuge system may be the only avenue of education and appreciation of our endangered wild places. Idaho will lose almost a third of its personnel on seven National wildlife refuges, which encompass 84,000 acres and more than 50,000 visitors each year. Camas NWR has already lost a heavy equipment operator position, and has continued to progress toward refuge goals largely thanks to the quality of our incredibly valuable resident volunteers. The USFWS Service is considering several plans to reduce already constricted budgets, one of which may involve combining management offices for the refuges in southern Idaho and sharing some staff between refuges.



**Volunteers!** John and Sharon Dollar, resident volunteers from Birmingham, Alabama, brought their remarkable energy and expertise to Camas NWR in 2004, stayed through the winter of 2005, and have participated in heavy equipment operation, transplantation of native plants, helped with water control and monitoring, fence removal and building, and John has provided his GPS mapping expertise for the location of noxious invasive weeds on the Refuge and for the benefit of adjacent farmers. Both received the 2000 hour Volunteer Director's Certificate of Appreciation award for their outstanding contributions and service to the U S Fish and Wildlife Service in 2006. They are with us again for the spring and summer of 2007, and we can't begin to express our gratitude for their spirit and energy and skills. We are also eager to work with Dave Ewoldt and Dianne Parrot from Arizona who plan to be resident volunteers from mid April through the Migratory Bird research and will help with the data recording and support services for Jay Carlisle's mistnetting team. Joe and Linda Noll from Georgia plan to volunteer from mid-July into October and will help with general tasks on the refuge, as will Steve and Linda Mondle from Ohio beginning in early August. We certainly welcome all of these folks and look forward to working with them.

Your comments/questions about the content of the Newsletter are always welcome. Please contact Nancy Maxwell at 208-232-2784 or P. O. Box 4787, Pocatello, Idaho 83205.