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Edited by Nancy Maxwell
208-406-8003

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.

The Summer Camas NWR *Newsletter*, in the words of Dick Munoz, Project Leader for Southeast Idaho National Wildlife Refuge Complex, “marks the end of an era for Camas. Refuge Manager, **Rob Larrañaga has accepted a transfer to the Las Vegas National Wildlife Refuge Complex in New Mexico**, where he will be the Refuge Manager for Las Vegas NWR and will supervise the manager of Maxwell NWR as well. Rob and his family reported to their new duty station in July. A career with the National Wildlife Refuge System has many benefits and one of those is the opportunity to take on new challenges anywhere in the country. These transfers provide new perspectives leading to a better manager with a wide variety of experience and knowledge. This ensures that the System develops excellent leaders for upper level management jobs. Rob is on this track and this move will greatly enhance his position in the Fish and Wildlife Service as a leader. Project Leader status is an important step in a career and this move gives Rob that status.”

“Rob came to Camas NWR in 2004 and hit the ground running. His dedication and commitment to the Refuge System is one of his best traits. His honesty, integrity, and character are also exemplary. Camas National Wildlife Refuge has experienced many improvements for having Rob at the helm these past four years. His wife Leslie also had a positive influence on the refuge and the community of Hamer. We will always remember her authentic Mexican cuisine and gracious hospitality that was the foundation for numerous refuge staff and related agency lunches at Camas.”

“Rob’s noteworthy accomplishments here, and these are just the highlights, include the **restoration of the riparian zone along Camas Creek**, for which he enlisted financial support and volunteer labor from several community sources. Those familiar with Camas NWR know that drought conditions have dramatically impacted the trees at the headquarters site. Rob planned and implemented the planting of native vegetation in areas that can be irrigated with refuge pumps so that over the next decade we should begin to bring back the vegetation strata so important to migrating land birds and bald eagles. He also implemented the **Sandhole Lake wetland enhancement project**. This North American Waterfowl Conservation Act project took a great deal of Rob’s time and energy. Waterbirds responded immediately, and the ability to keep Sandhole Lake full during drought years will be an extremely important lasting legacy.”

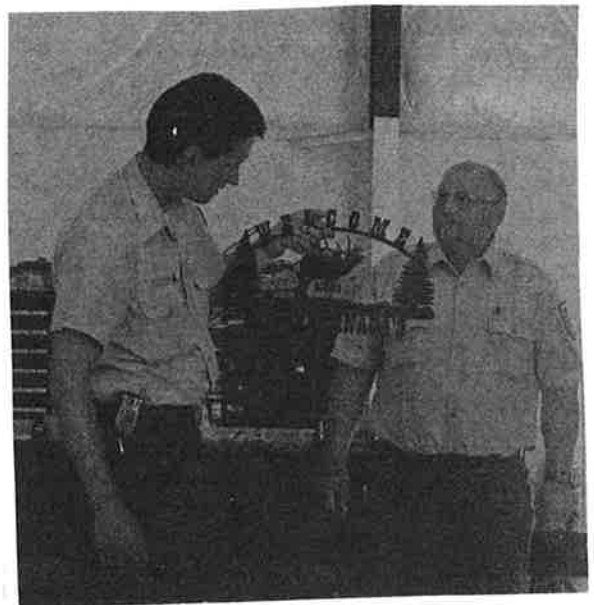
“**Landbird research** in conjunction with the Idaho Bird Observatory demonstrated the importance of Camas NWR to migrating landbirds.” Dr. Jay Carlisle’s enthusiasm in sharing the experience of his research team’s mist netting, banding, and evaluations of landbirds with local school children, birders from all over Idaho and abroad, college and graduate students from BYU Idaho and Idaho State University generated excitement and support from all age groups who came to appreciate the value of the refuge in a new and personal way. Rob worked with many funding sources and Dr. Carlisle for four research seasons over two years. The research data established a baseline that will allow future managers to document the success of riparian restoration. To right, Rob Larrañaga discusses a mist netted bird with Dr. Jay Carlisle in the spring of 2007.



Rob represented the Fish and Wildlife Service in the planning and execution of the **Dubois Grouse Days** celebration for the four years he managed Camas NWR, and included tours of the refuge and adjacent sage grouse leks as well as educational programs for visitors focusing on the value of grouse habitat. As discussed in the Spring *Newsletter*, several groups are now supporting a **sage grouse habitat restoration** effort on a 30 acre abandoned agricultural site on Camas NWR. Rob was able to obtain funding for a summer seasonal employee, through a student temporary employee program, Tracey King, a former volunteer with the migratory landbird project and a student at ISU, who is conducting a census of vegetation and avian species present on the site this summer prior to any restoration efforts.

Another outstanding program Rob has developed is the attraction of skilled and enthusiastic **resident volunteers** through a national Fish and Wildlife Service, Park Service, and Forest Service program to encourage private volunteer work in the Refuges, Parks and Forests across America. Camas has welcomed almost two dozen invaluable volunteers in the last four years who have demonstrated skills in GPS mapping (see below) construction, heavy equipment operation, viewing road maintenance, mowing, fence building, developing computer data bases, conducting bird, plant, and animal census, providing educational programs and tours for school children and refuge visitors, as well as the difficult and essential jobs required to maintain clean and welcoming facilities for refuge guests. The value of contributed labor by volunteers over four years is estimated to be close to \$200,000.

Fish and Wildlife Service staff, joined by members of many other public and private organizations, provided a "Bon Voyage" luncheon for Rob, Leslie, A. J., Brandon, and Christian Larrañaga on June 26th. Several people spoke about their regard for the Larrañagas, their respect for the achievements of his four year tenure as Refuge Manager at Camas, and shared much laughter about the most memorable of incidents on the refuge. Carolyn Bohan, National Wildlife Refuge Chief for Region I, expressed her regard for Rob's achievements, sadness to see him leave the Region, and congratulations on this next step in his Fish and Wildlife Service Career. Representatives of Idaho Fish and Game, Portneuf Valley and Snake River Valley Audubon Societies, Dubois Grouse Days, the Hamer community, and Senator Larry Craig's office as well as appreciative volunteers and birders, attended this farewell gathering and added their best wishes. To right, Farrel Downs, Equipment Operator and Maintenance worker, presents Rob and Leslie with a beautiful wrought iron "Welcome to the Larrañagas" sign for their new home New Mexico.



The Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP): Regional Representatives Carolyn Bohan, Chief of Region I, Forrest Cameron, Refuge Supervisor for Region I, Fred Paveglio, Regional Biologist, and Kendal Morris, Conservation Planner for Region I, Dick Munoz, Project Leader, and Dick Sjostrom, Deputy Project Leader, for the Southeast Idaho National Wildlife Refuge Complex took this opportunity to meet with Rob for almost two days to discuss the progress of the CCP for Camas, and to glean his thoughts about priorities and directions for the future of Camas National Wildlife Refuge. Kendal Morris, FWS Regional Planner, summarized the issues in an overview of the role of Camas NWR in the Upper Snake River Plain W&H Conservation, in the context of State areas, Mud Lake WMA, Market Lake WMA as well as FWS land. He noted the Refuge's role in providing migratory waterfowl spring and fall migration habitat, citing concentrations of 10,000 to 25,000 light geese in spring as well as several hundred Canadas, several thousand ducks, large numbers of trumpeter and tundra swans. Production on the refuge has been relatively low, although in recent years trumpeters have successfully nested. Camas is a very important migratory stopover for landbirds and several state records have been documented on Camas. He noted that sage grouse is a species of concern, and that habitat restoration for summer broods is a goal; grouse broods have been documented on the refuge during July and August. Camas is an important resource for sandhill cranes as well, 150-200 in the spring and between 500-600 in mid September. Several pairs remain through the summer, and have been known to nest on refuge wetlands near the tour routes.

The refuge provides early fall shorebird migratory habitat as well. The Idaho Bird Inventory Survey in '05 and '06 identified 20 of 24 waterbird species of concern at Camas; they found "19 of 24 at Bear Lake which reflects the significance of this refuge and of the SE Idaho Refuges as well." He noted that Camas provides the most significant bald eagle roost on the upper Snake River Plain with 50 observed on January 1st, 2008. Camas also hosts five species of ungulates, with major changes in recent years in apecies abundance and distribution. Moose and pronghorn are both present in small numbers; mule deer numbers have decreased while white-tailed have increased. Nearly 100 elk have been recently observed in winter. Conservation planning will focus on all of these visitors and residents on the refuge.

Rob has made a major effort to invite individuals and organizations from the surrounding area to "enjoy your refuge" and to participate in activities on the refuge. Because of his invitations and the distribution of the quarterly *Newsletter*, as well as excellent media coverage, the community at large is aware of projects and achievements at Camas, and of concerns as well, such as drought problems, the urgency of fire protection efforts, the value of the habitat restorations, and the species served. Public comment and input will be solicited for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Camas NWR in the spring of 2009.

International Migratory Bird Day activities on May 10th on Camas were exciting and very successful with over 100 participants in over 40 vehicles, full parking lot and overflow parking! This year's added partnership included the National Forest Service, Idaho Department of Fish and Game, both Snake River and Portneuf Valley Audubon Societies, Bureau of Land Management and BYU Idaho's Wildlife Society, Hamer and Dubois Boy Scouts, and enthusiastic visitors. We had ample outreach materials for the children and a local raptor rehabilitator's great horned owls were a huge hit with the kids. Sections of a birding trail were completed, and birding trail benches were installed. Twenty native trees were planted and several others received weed barrier fabric. Guided tours of the refuge were well received and the weather was beautiful. We hope to replicate this kind of participation for next year's IMBD celebration!

Camas NWR has been a partner in the **Continental Divide Cooperative Weed Management Area** for several years and works with many other conservation organizations and government agencies in planning for identification, mapping, control, and eradication of invasive noxious weeds. Locating and mapping small infestations is crucially important since the probability of successful eradication is much higher than for larger established plots. An excellent resource for information about noxious invasive weeds, control and eradication methods, and the damage and/or risks specific plants pose for agriculture, human beings, livestock, and wildlife is *Idaho's Noxious Weeds*, published by the University of Idaho Extension Service, Department of Plant, Soil, and Entomological Sciences, College of Agriculture, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. (\$5.00) All of these noxious plants compete with native plants for water, nutrients, and space.



Above, Jefferson County Weed Superintendent, Mitch Whitmill and Camas NWR Equipment Operator Farrel Downs evaluate Russian knapweed treatment results. To right, John Dollar collects data for the GPS mapping of invasive weeds.

Some noxious weeds quickly crowd out native species, some are toxic to livestock and wildlife, some infest crops subject to controls for noxious weed seeds, thus posing economic problems for farmers, and some aquatic invasive plants clog streams, erode stream banks, and impair fish habitat.

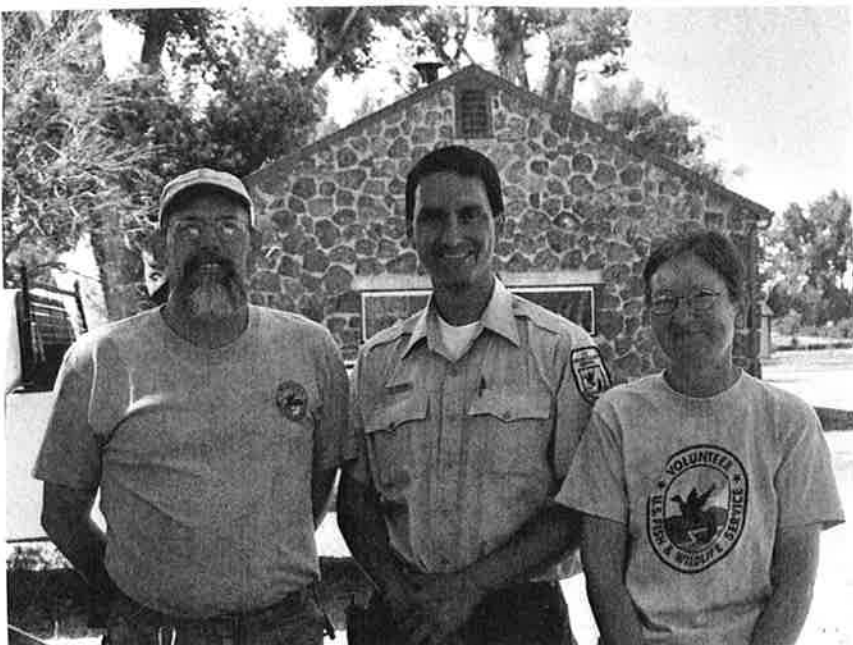
Leafy spurge, located mainly along portions of Camas Creek on the refuge, is a good example of dangers and difficulties of eradicating invasive plants. This weed, introduced from Eurasia in 1897, contains a milky latex in all parts of the plant which can produce blisters and dermatitis in humans, cattle, and horses, and can cause permanent blindness if rubbed into eyes. This perennial weed has roots exceeding 20 ft. in depth. Ripe seed capsules rupture when touched and spray seed as far as fifteen feet. They spread and establish quickly and require chemical eradication. One of the most destructive on Camas is Russian knapweed, which causes "chewing disease" in horses and overwhelms valuable native grasses and forbes. It creates 6 to 27 root shoots per square foot and roots grow to a depth of 23 feet!

John Dollar, five year returning resident volunteer at Camas NWR, has contributed well over a thousand hours utilizing GPS and GIS technology in mapping of noxious weeds on the refuge and on farmland on the southern borders of the refuge. His work enables farmers to address infestations dangerous to their crops and livestock, and facilitates control and eradication on the refuge. A portion of his work is supported by a competitive grant involving the National Wildlife Refuge Association, the USGS's National Institute of Invasive Species Science and the Continental Divide Weed Management Area (CWMA) funds.

Through John's mapping efforts, the recent identification of alkali swainsonpea on the refuge has aided in promoting awareness of this infestation on refuge, state and private lands. The urgency to control this invasive weed resulted in it being added to the Clark and Jefferson County control lists. Chemical treatment is expensive, and efficient only when directed at precise infestations. Several thousands of dollars are spent each year on Camas fighting this continuous battle with the invaders to include the planting of grass and forb species this fall in recently treated areas. A recent national study revealed that invasive species are the biggest threat to the biological integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Camas efforts have benefited wildlife and plant communities on the refuge as well as surrounding private agricultural operations. Our best defense in the war on weeds has been the close cooperation of the Continental Divide's CWMA's partners, including Chairman Keith Bramwell and numerous organizations who share information and strategies for destruction of invasive plants and restoration of native communities. The Jefferson County Weed Superintendent, Mitch Whit mill, conducted a tour of the refuge's recent treatment areas and was pleasantly surprised with the control efforts

New Resident Volunteers at Camas NWR, Dan and Laurie Mooney, arrived on June 1st with a wealth of volunteering experience and a fascination with the Refuge System, and particularly birds. Both Dan

and Laurie spent thirty years in the Knoxville, Tennessee area working in the electronics industry, Dan as a manager and Laurie as a purchasing agent. Both are enthusiastic birders. On retirement, they were interested in the volunteer program for the FWS and the first year volunteered at the 44,000 acre Brazoria NWR salt marsh and little blue stem region in south Texas. They worked at Brazoria for four months doing bird banding and GPS mapping work. They then went to Wichita NWR in central Oklahoma, 66,000 acres of native grassland, wooded creeks, and open water, where they worked for two months. They returned to Brazoria NWR where they continued the bird banding and GPS mapping for three



months. Dan and Laurie arrived at Camas on June 1st and plan to leave in late August. Here they have conducted bird surveys and worked on GPS mapping as well as conducting various maintenance and administrative duties. Dan states that the most impressive characteristic of their high desert Camas experience has been seeing birds in glorious breeding plumage that he first learned to identify in their fall basic "drab." Their most interesting observations on Camas include three sandhill crane colts raised to flight stage, a dozen or more long billed curlew chicks raised to flight stage, watching willets move their youngsters from field to field to avoid observation, a Canada Warbler which was a state record, dozens and dozens of ruddy ducklings as well as a large number of young eared grebes, closely guarded by their parents. While refuge staff and other volunteers of course provide sighting information for the refuge, the Mooneys have been able to spend considerable time in remote areas and have provided important data about reproductive success on the refuge. They plan to "go someplace south" for the winter and note that it's 1800 miles from Camas to Brazoria. Both hope to continue their volunteer work as long as they are able. We have appreciated them very much and hope they can plan a return trip to Camas NWR!

Farrel Downs, Equipment Operator and Maintenance worker at Camas for nearly 15 years, with vast experience on and dedication to our refuge, will be managing maintenance and activity at Camas supervised by Dick Munoz, Southeast Idaho Complex Project Leader, until a replacement is selected for the Refuge Manager's position. John and Sharon Dollar have been invaluable volunteers for four years. John has provided GPS and GIS technical expertise for the refuge and surrounding areas, and with Sharon, helps with monitoring water levels, management of water flows, planting and maintenance of the native trees and general maintenance of facilities. Sharon completed the FWS heavy equipment training at Minidoka NWR and also operates the tractors, back hoes and other equipment needed for heavy work. The Dollars will leave the first of August to welcome a new grandchild, and plan to return in late September.

A footnote about the **black bear cub** featured in the spring Newsletter: John Dollar observed this visitor to the refuge east of I-15 in June and we subsequently learned that the cub became stranded on top of a telephone pole several miles northeast of Camas NWR. Idaho Fish and Game, with much appreciated help from a Rocky Mountain Power crew with a bucket truck, rescued and relocated this youngster in a remote area where he/she is less likely to encounter people problems!

Watch for **Idaho Public Television** coverage of Camas NWR and the other refuges in the southeast Idaho complex this fall on Outdoor Idaho. **Kris Millgate**, independent journalist and film producer whose work is often featured on local television channels, filmed an interview this spring with Chuck Trost and Frank Renn, Portneuf Valley Audubon Society birders, about the importance of the refuge and is producing another longer piece on the refuges to air this fall.

We will remember Rob Larrañaga and his family with so much respect, gratitude and appreciation for their investments in Camas National Wildlife Refuge. All of them are missed acutely and we certainly wish them all success and happiness in future endeavors.

Fall migrations begin in August with the shorebirds and migratory landbirds, and continue through October. The sandhill cranes will peak in the middle of September, followed by the waterfowl as conditions north of us force the migration for food and open water. Rest and nutrition is crucial successful migratory journeys. Late autumn skies are often filled with clouds of awe inspiring ducks and geese against the Tetons at sunrise and the Lemhi at dusk. **Come, and enjoy your refuge!**

Your comments and questions about the content of the *Newsletter* are always welcome. Please contact Nancy Maxwell at 208-523-4344, home, or 208-406-8003, cell, or write to 1454 N 1189 E, Shelley, ID 83274, or e-mail to outlier1@Yahoo.com

