

Volume 21  
Issue 2  
October 2013

# The Pygmy Owl

The Newsletter of the  
Spokane Audubon Society



## ***October 9th Program: Preserving Old Growth Habitat on Mt. Spokane, featuring Lands Council Executive Director Mike Petersen***



Join us on October 9th for a presentation about the conservation challenges facing Mt. Spokane. The Lands Council has won a court action that challenged the re-classification of part of Mt. Spokane State Park to allow a ski area expansion. This is an effort that Spokane Audubon Society has strongly endorsed with a significant financial donation as well as with the expertise of several of our members to support their case. Mike Petersen, Executive Director of the Lands Council, will present photos of the old growth forest and wildlife of Mt. Spokane. He will discuss the court decision, and we will talk about next steps in protecting this unique area on Mt. Spokane.

*Mike has worked at the Lands Council for over 20 years, the last 10 as Executive Director. For more about the recent Mt. Spokane decision, see page 4.*

*Northern Goshawk photographs courtesy of Jeanne Dammerell.*

*Spokane Audubon's October program will be held at the  
Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Building (see page 8 for directions),  
Please join us at 7 p.m. for refreshments and friendly conversation.  
The program will begin at about 7:30 p.m., after announcements.*

## The Pygmy Owl

Volume 21, Issue 2 ~ October 2013

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Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and pg. 8 © Jan Reynolds.



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## Letter from the Editor

*Look deep into nature, and then  
you will understand everything better.*

~ Albert Einstein

Welcome to October, fall migration and sweater weather!

This month brings some exciting news from the Lands Council about the struggle to protect Mt. Spokane's old growth habitat. Lands Council Executive Director Mike Petersen will be sharing that news in more detail with us on October 9th; but, to tide you over, the announcement about the ruling is printed on page 5. I encourage you to visit the Save Mt. Spokane web site. The coalition's proposal for the Park aims to continue to develop the existing footprint of the ski park for recreational use *and* seeks to protect existing old growth habitat. (Kudos to the Save Mt. Spokane Coalition for looking for a *win-win* scenario.)

In an exchange about the ruling, Ron Dexter wrote,

*Yes, we won this battle, but I hope everyone realizes that the fight is not over. We all need to provide evidence to future courts that there is something in that area worth preserving... birds, plants, trees etc.*

I'm going to take that comment slightly out of context (sorry Ron!) for a moment, because, well, *truer words were never spoken*. The scope of the comment can — and should — be applied beyond Mt. Spokane.

While it's true that many folks who understand the issues choose to disagree with us, it's also true that many people in our community don't know much about our birds, wildlife or local habitats.

As people who are interested in our area's birds, we are predisposed to take an interest in the natural world that surrounds us. We have a responsibility to share that interest and enthusiasm with our neighbors and to promote good stewardship of our natural resources.

Engagement in the conservation affairs of our community is a responsibility we all share (even those of us who aren't super-advanced birders). It is up to all of us to provide evidence, not just in legal actions, but in our everyday affairs, that there are so many things in our local natural habitats that are worth preserving.

November Newsletter Deadline:

**Friday, October 25**

Send material to  
*carmen@floreo.com*

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# Sights & Sounds

## Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest by Cindy McCormack

We had such an interesting September! Summer temperatures for most of the month, then suddenly, like a switch had been flipped, fall is now here. No real time to adjust to the change, was there?

October's birds will still include some lingering or late migrant warblers and shorebirds, so keep an eye out for them. Waterfowl migration should be at its peak soon and some of the early winter birds could be arriving any time now.

### *Interesting Sightings for September*

An **ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD** has been visiting a home in Viola, ID for much of September (NM).

**SANDERLINGS** were reported at Soap Lake (SD) and Mann Lake (JH).

**STILT SANDPIPERS** (6) at Coulee City STP, 1 at Brooks Lake (SD).

**SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER** near the bridge at Lind Coulee (BW, GG) and at Reardan's Audubon Lake (JI).

Three **AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER** have been located at the Dodd Rd blood (eww!) ponds (MMD).

A **MARbled GODWIT** has been seen at the north end of Scooteny Reservoir, nine miles SE of Othello (TM).

This is a bit out of our area, but definitely worthy of mentioning! A **LESSER SAND PLOVER (MONGOLIAN PLOVER)** was both seen and heard at the Game Range at Ocean Shores, WA. Mike & MerryLynn mentioned that they tried to contact birders via FRS radio (there are always birders in the area at Ocean Shores!), so make sure to carry them! (Use 11-22 for the standard birders' channel). (MMD)

A **SANDHILL CRANE** was seen at Sheep Lake (Whitman County) (JI).

An elegant **GREAT EGRET** was reported at Philleo Lake (TO).

**HERRING GULLS** and **FRANKLIN'S GULLS** were located among the gulls at Sandpoint City beach (CL).

Uncommon for the area, an **AMERICAN REDSTART** was seen during migration on Spokane's South Hill (JI).

Makes me wonder when we will see them here... **LESSER GOLDFINCH**, about 20, have been observed in Colfax along N. Palouse River Rd. (TB, RJB, MC), and another in St. John, WA (RJB).

A single **TENNESSEE WARBLER** was located amongst the other migrating warblers at Sprague Resort (JI).

Davenport's Cemetery still brings them in! A **RED-EYED VIREO, OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER, GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW** were some of the migrants seen in the oasis of the agricultural "desert" (JI).

September is the time of year to see these normally pelagic gulls! **SABINE'S GULL**—five were located on Sprague Lake (JI); 1 at Dodd Rd ponds (MMD), 2 on Tyson Pond/Dodd Rd. Later in the week at Sprague Lake, one of these striking gulls was relocated, only to be taken almost immediately by a Peregrine Falcon! (BW, GG, JI, CM) Needless to say, it is no longer a viable "chase" option anymore...

A migrating **LEWIS'S WOODPECKER** was viewed at Sprague Resort (JI).

The rather unusual, but amusing, antics of a **PILEATED WOODPECKER** feeding on berries in a fruiting tree (upside down on the small branches!) entertained a small group of birders at the Davenport Cemetery (SD).

An adult **CLARK'S GREBE** has been viewed with Western Grebes and a begging juvenal on Sprague Lake (JI). Possible hybridization?

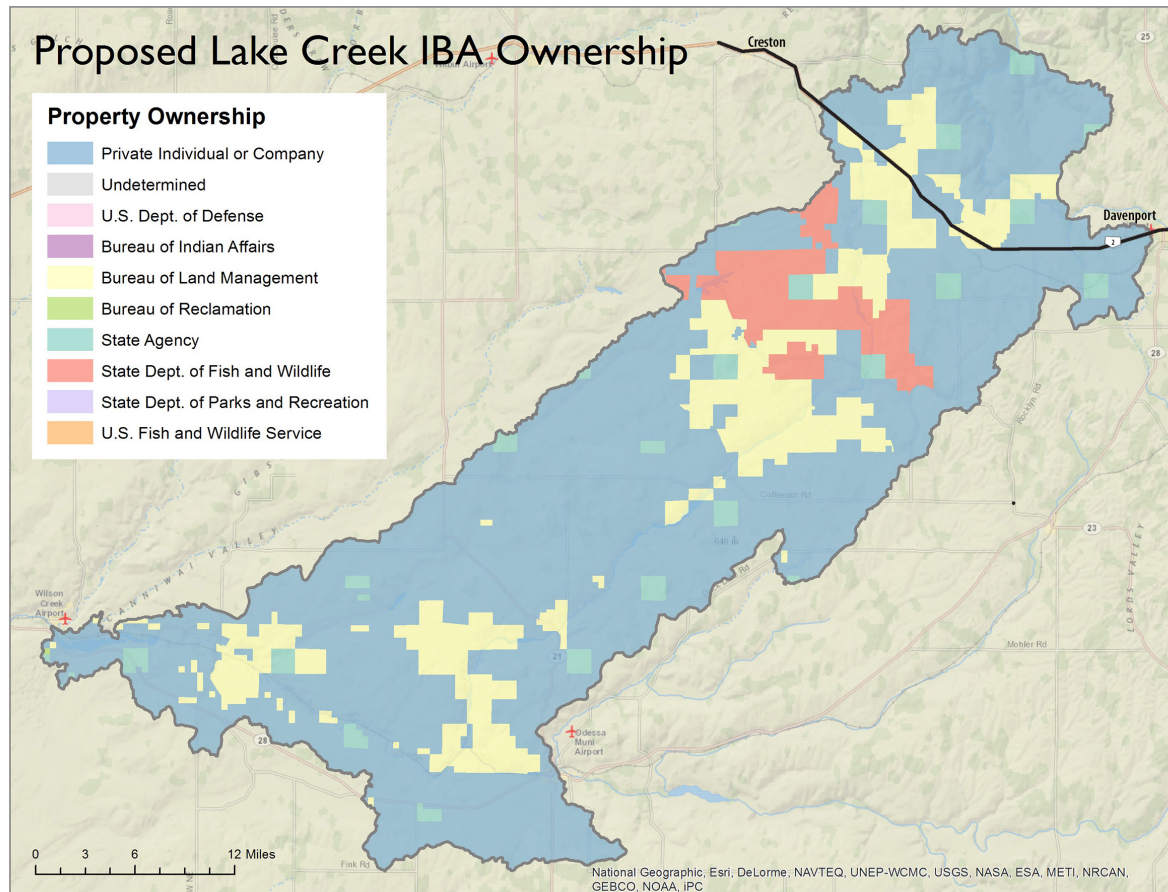
Empidonax flycatchers have been in just about every little migration stopover. Some are fun to identify, many are challenging, and a few are just frustrating when they won't give you a good view! However, this little guy must have finally cooperated—a **LEAST FLYCATCHER** was identified working the entrance hedge along with **HAMMOND'S FLYCATCHERS** at Sprague Resort (BW, GG, JI).

A **WHITE-THROATED SPARROW** was observed a few miles up Harvey Cr. Rd, Pend Oreille Co. (MC) Not a frequently reported migrant in that county!

*BD: Bob Derting; BH: Brendon Higgins; BW: Brad Waggoner; CL: Carl Lundblad; CM: Cindy McCormack; DH: Dave Hayden; GG: George Gerdt; JF: Joe Fulton; JH: John Hanna; JI: Jon Isacoff; LH: Lindell Haggin; MC: Mike Clarke; MMD: Mike & MerryLynn Denny; MY: Matt Yawney; NM: Nancy Miller; NT: Norma Trefry; RJB: RJ Baltierra; SD: Scott Downes; TB: Tim Brennan; TL: Terry Little; TM: Tom Mansfield; TO: Tim O'Brien; WC: Warren Current.*

Good Birding!  
Cindy McCormack  
nwbirder@gmail.com

# Introducing Washington's Newest Important Bird Area: Lake Creek IBA



by Kim Thorburn

Washington State's newest Important Bird Area (IBA) is right in our backyard. The Lake Creek IBA, west of Davenport in Lincoln County, provides some of the state's best shrubsteppe birding.

Nominated in 2010 during a lull in the state's IBA program, an ad hoc state IBA committee meeting in August 2013 found greater sage-grouse and sharp-tailed grouse populations in the Lake Creek IBA sufficient to meet state-level IBA criteria. The nomination also documented more than 60 other bird species of interest.

The public lands in the Lake Creek IBA are a site of intensive recovery efforts by the state and its federal partners of the two state-threatened prairie grouse species. The Greater Sagegrouse had disappeared from the area until 2008 when the state began re-introducing birds captured in Oregon. While Sharp-tailed Grouse were still known in the area, the population was crashing until the state began bringing in

birds from Idaho and other places in 2005. Last spring's lek surveys put the sagegrouse population at 50 and the sharp-tailed population at 100, the highest it's been since 2002.

Spokane Audubon Society contributes to the grouse recovery as the recipient of an Aquatic and Lands Enhancement Accounts (ALEA) grant that facilitates volunteer participation in population monitoring. Over a dozen volunteers assisted with lek surveys last spring.

While there's no guarantee that you'll see prairie grouse while birding at the Lake Creek IBA, there are plenty of other good birds that make it a destination. A spring/summer visit is going to yield Sage Thrashers, Brewer's Sparrows, Lark Sparrows, Swainson's Hawks, Gray Flycatchers, and Loggerhead Shrikes. Grasshopper Sparrows are common and Sage Sparrows have a limited range in the IBA. Short-eared Owls nest in the IBA prairie grasslands. Lewis's Woodpeckers find good brood habitat in the wooded transition zone.

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The many potholes are home to breeding and migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. Even winter brings a bounty of winter visitors — northern Rough-legged Hawks and Snow Buntings.

At dusk last winter, while snowshoeing in Marlin Hollow that cuts through the center of the IBA, I was nearly knocked down by a Snowy Owl intent on some prey.

Lake Creek IBA is comprised of the more than 3 million acres of the Lake Creek drainage of Crab Creek. Anglers among us will be familiar with the area for Z, Twin, and Coffee Pot Lakes in the drainage. There are several stops on the Palouse-to-Pines Great Washington Birding Trail in the IBA. They include Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and Telford, Twin Lakes, and Lakeview Ranch, owned by the Bureau of Land Management. Much of the IBA is private land with several owners who



participate in US Department of Agriculture conservation programs to assist with prairie grouse recovery.

*Images courtesy of Kim Thorburn.*

## The Lands Council Wins Lawsuit to Protect Old Growth Forest In Mt. Spokane State Park

The Lands Council has won a court action that challenged the re-classification of part of Mt. Spokane State Park to allow a ski area expansion. We are pleased that the appellate court judges agreed with our concerns that Washington State Parks Commission failed to follow the law by allowing a ski area expansion in Mt. Spokane State Park. At stake is the largest old growth stand in Spokane County, which the Commission had said could be opened up to ski area expansion.

The Washington State Court of Appeals said that “...the Commission’s failure to prepare an EIS for the 2011 classification decision violated the terms of SEPA and its rules and was contrary to governing case law. We affirm the trial court’s ruling that the Lands Council had standing under SEPA to bring this action. We hold that SEPA required the Commission to prepare an EIS for its May 2011 classification decision and, accordingly, we reverse the trial court’s summary judgment order dismissing the Land Council’s claims under SEPA.”

Their decision is the first step in permanently protecting the magnificent old growth on the west side of Mt. Spokane, which is our largest state park. As the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife wrote in a letter opposing the expansion. “The native old growth forest habitat on the

northern aspect of Mount Spokane is an extremely unique forest ecosystem for the region with a high value for wildlife and species diversity. The northern aspect is the very feature that makes this forest type unique from all other forest areas within Mount Spokane State Park. Considering its size, its unfragmented condition, along with its stage of forest succession structure and complexity, a similar forest cannot be found anywhere else in the Spokane County regional area, nor replicated.” The Lands Council found that some of the trees in the proposed lift line were over 200 years old.

Mike Petersen of the Lands Council said “We hope that the Parks Commission now steps back and questions the plans that the ski area concessionaire has for this park. We hope to work with the Parks Commission and the concessionaire to improve the existing ski area, and have our own vision that would bring more visitors and still protect the most important old growth forest in Spokane County.” This vision can be found on the Save Mt. Spokane website: [www.savemtsokane.org](http://www.savemtsokane.org).

The Lands Council was represented by David Bricklin, of Bricklin & Newman, LLP. We had great assistance from members of the Save Mt. Spokane Coalition, and the Center for Justice.

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*Get your  
Spokane Audubon Society  
2014 Calendar!*



*Bald Eagles, by Bob Cashen.*

***Birds of Eastern Washington***

featuring photos by  
Spokane Audubon members.

If you purchase them  
at a meeting, they're

**\$10 each**

That's the same price as last year!

Calendars are available at meetings, by mail  
or through [spokaneaudubon.org](http://spokaneaudubon.org) (using PayPal).

Shipping charges apply for all mail/online orders:

1 calendar: \$10 + \$2 s&H = \$12

2 calendars: \$20 + \$4 s&H = \$24

3 - 6 calendars: \$30 + \$6 s&H = \$36

Contact Spokane Audubon for  
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To order by mail, send check to:

Spokane Audubon Society  
15418 Little Spokane Drive  
Spokane, WA 99208

Make checks payable to *Spokane Audubon*.

**October & November  
Field Trips & Events**

**Celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week  
at a Community Work Party  
at Turnbull NWR!**

**When: Saturday, October 19, 2013.**

**Planting Time: 9 am to 12 p.m.**

Lunch: Potluck 12 p.m. (Hamburgers will be provided by  
Friends of Turnbull)

Where: Turnbull NWR Headquarters, 5 miles south of  
Cheney on Cheney-Plaza Road: turn left on Smith Road  
and drive 2 miles on gravel road to headquarters.

Clothing: Long-sleeved shirt, work pants, sturdy boots or  
shoes, gloves.

Equipment: (If you can) shovels and pliers, labeled with  
your name.

Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge and Spokane Audubon  
Society will host a community work party on Saturday,  
October 19th. This is part of an ongoing community ef-  
fort to restore native riparian habitat to benefit birds and  
other wildlife species. We have hundreds of native saplings  
to plant, and fencing to build at the project site to protect  
the trees from deer, elk, and moose browsing. Everyone is  
welcome!

Attention Groups: Please call in advance (235-4723) to reg-  
ister. Ask for Sandy. It helps us in our planning if we know  
how many are coming. The Refuge will also host a potluck  
lunch. Please bring your favorite dish.

**October 26, 2013, Saturday**

**Grant County Late Fall Migrant Trip**

**Leader: Gary Blevins**

This is a beginning, intermediate and advanced birder-  
oriented trip to look for specialty birds, such as Arctic Gulls,  
Lapland Longspurs, and other hard-to-find and see north-  
ern visitors. There may be some down time, with little action  
in between bird sightings, but potential for rarities is high.  
It is a full-day trip from sunrise to sunset. Contact Gary  
Blevins (533-3661 or [garyb@spokanefalls.edu](mailto:garyb@spokanefalls.edu)) by October  
20 if you plan to attend.

Target Birds: Loons and grebes; scoters and rare winter-  
ing waterfowl; wintering raptors; Glaucous, Thayer's, and  
Glaucous-winged Gulls; Snowy Owl; Northern Shrike; Snow  
Bunting; Lapland Longspur; Gray-crowned Rosy Finch

**West Valley Outdoor Learning Center Open House**  
**October 26, Saturday**  
**Time: 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

The West Valley Outdoor Learning Center provides outdoor education to more than 10,000 people a year, but because the OLC belongs to the school district, it's only open to the public for monthly open houses. Drop by for family-friendly activities and tours of the classrooms and raptor sanctuary, and meet the snakes, tortoises, lizards, guinea pigs and raptors of the OLC!

The West Valley Outdoor Learning Center is located on the grounds of Pasadena Park Elementary School on Upriver Drive. The address is 8706 E Upriver Dr, in Spokane Valley.

**November 23, 2013, Saturday**  
**Douglas Plateau Northern Visitors Trip**  
**Leader: Kim Thorburn**

The Waterville Plateau is a challenging but high-quality destination for rarities during the late fall and winter months.

We will work the rolling steppe of the Plateau in search of unusual raptors, owls, and passerines and also bird along the Columbia River in hopes of finding rare Arctic Gulls and saltwater waterfowl, such as scoters, Long-tailed Duck, and Pacific Loon. If attendees are interested, we will spend the night of November 22 in Brewster for an earlier start with the birds during this short daylight season. Contact Kim Thorburn (465-3025 or kthorburn@msn.com) by November 16 if you plan to attend.

Note: This trip will be dependent on weather and road conditions.

Target Birds: Loons and grebes; scoters and rare wintering waterfowl; wintering raptors; Glaucous, Thayer's, and Glaucous-winged Gulls; Snowy Owl; Northern Shrike; Snow Bunting; Lapland Longspur; Gray-crowned Rosy Finch. We will hunt for elusive rarities, including Gyrfalcon and Northern Hawk Owl.

**Spokane Audubon Society**  
**Membership Form**

Local Membership Dues:

Individual: \$20/year \_\_\_\_\_

Couple & Family: \$25/year \_\_\_\_\_

Student: \$10/year \_\_\_\_\_

Lifetime: \$300 \_\_\_\_\_

National Membership Dues: \$35/year \_\_\_\_\_

Individual + National Dues: \$55/year \_\_\_\_\_

Couple + National Dues: \$60/year \_\_\_\_\_

**Your local membership provides you with *The Pygmy Owl* and supports your local chapter's many conservation and education activities. You will also be eligible for website privileges.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



Please make check payable to:  
**Spokane Audubon Society**  
Send this form and your check to:

Audubon Membership  
Attn: Dave Plemons  
1224 W. Riverside #1101  
Spokane, WA 99201

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<http://spokaneaudubon.org>

Receiving duplicate newsletters? Errors or other changes needed on your mailing label? Contact Dave Plemons at [davep\\_nublado@me.com](mailto:davep_nublado@me.com), or 413-1524.



The Pygmy Owl  
**Spokane Audubon Society**  
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**October 9th Program:**  
**Preserving Old Growth on Mt. Spokane,**  
**with Lands Council Executive Director**  
**Mike Petersen**  
**7:30 p.m.**

**To:**

*The Spokane Audubon Society provides resources and services to educate people about birds, wildlife, and the importance of habitats, and to advocate and support public policies and actions that conserve and restore wildlife habitats.*

**Visit our website: <http://spokaneaudubon.org>**

**Directions to the General Meeting:**

*Riverview Retirement Community, Village Community Building  
 2117 E. North Crescent Avenue*

**To get to Riverview Retirement Community:**

**From West Spokane & South Hill**

- I-90 East to Exit 281 toward US-2 E/US-395 N/Newport/Colville
- Follow US-2 E/US-395 N to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**From Spokane Valley**

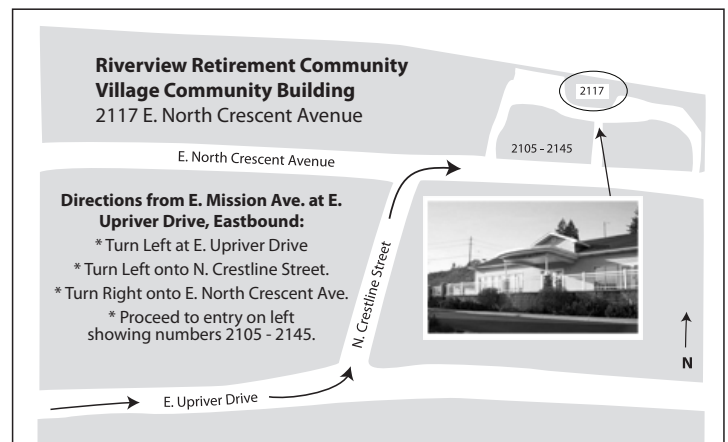
- I-90 West to Exit 282A
- Follow N. Hamilton St. to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Right at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**From North Spokane**

- Take US-395 S to E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Mission Ave.
- Turn Left at E. Upriver Drive

**Once you're on E. Upriver Drive (see map below):**

- Follow E. Upriver Drive to N. Crestline Street
- Turn Left at N. Crestline Street
- Turn Right on E. North Crescent Drive



- Proceed to entry on left showing numbers 2105-2145  
 Limited parking is available by the Village Community Building.  
 Overflow parking is along E. North Crescent Ave.