



Spring 2014

BIG OAKS CONSERVATION SOCIETY



Newsletter of Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge & Big Oaks Conservation Society

President's Column

By Jim Jackson

In a recent article responding to the effects of the sequester and continued budget cuts to United States Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge system, Jim Kurth, Chief of Refuge System stated that we are being asked to do more with less. He implied that this is becoming increasingly difficult, and the time is coming that we will have no choice but to do less with less. At this point in its history, Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS) faces the same dilemma. We have been very successful in doing more with less. One need only recall the excellent activities BOCS, in collaboration with the refuge, provides to our membership and the community. These include an excellent winter speaker program; the youth turkey and deer hunts; Outdoor Women at Big Oaks; Take A Kid Fishing Day; community ice cream social at the Oakdale Schoolhouse in August; Christmas gathering at the historic Old Timbers Lodge; and this year the September meeting hosted by Dr. Bob and Ellen Mulford at Capability Farm. In addition, BOCS has become de facto caretakers of Old Timbers Lodge, catering for it and helping to preserve it for future generations.

Consider now the possibilities open to us if we could do more with *more*. This, in essence, is our challenge. What it will take (the “more”) to improve our service to the refuge and the community is an increase in our membership. We can all participate in this endeavour by reaching out to prior members, encouraging them to renew their membership this year, and by growing our organization with new memberships; all current members can help with this. Growing BOCS can also be accomplished by enhancing and improving our outreach into the community in new ways, engaging the public in our programs and activities on and off the refuge and at Old Timbers Lodge; and by strengthening relationships with our community partners. We should seek to develop a closer relationship to our sister group, Friends of Muscatatuck, inviting them to join in our activities and offering to help them with theirs; doing so will help both groups to grow and achieve mutual goals.

Consider how well we have done more with less; now, envision how much more we could do with “more”.

We have our challenge – lets take it on!

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10th Annual Outdoor Women at Big Oaks

By Lisa Jones

Whether you're a first time or repeat participant there is a day of fun in store if you attend the 10th Annual Outdoor Women at Big Oaks (OWBO) event! The Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS) and Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge are in the final preparation stage for this year's event that will be held on Saturday, June 7th at the historic Old Timbers Lodge.



This year marks the 10th Anniversary for this very popular event and the OWBO planning committee, which consists of BOCS member volunteers and refuge staff, has been working since January to assemble yet another adventurous event. There are 25 different courses offered this year. Of those, you have the opportunity to take 3 classes, each giving an overview of the topic with varying amounts of hands-on experience. We will make every effort to ensure you are assigned to classes you most prefer, but keep in mind classes will be assigned on a first registered, first enrolled basis.



Our volunteer instructors are well trained and come prepared to educate participants and expose them to all kinds of new adventures!

Registrations received after May 10th will be \$65.00. The fee covers all the classes, instructional materials, a welcome gift, continental breakfast, lunch, drinks and other refreshments throughout the day. A one day pass to Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge is also included.

Ladies be sure to bring your check books because this year's OWBO planning committee is working long

and hard at getting those amazing raffle/silent auction items you much anticipate. Many amazing items have already been donated and



I can assure you we will meet your expectations. As in years past we will have a silent auction in conjunction with the raffle. All proceeds from the raffle and silent auction help to replenish the events expenses as well as provide funding for other BOCS efforts. Raffle tickets will be available for purchase on the event day.



Every year we hope for a clear and sunny day, but sometimes mother nature has other plans. Regardless of weather the activities will move forward as scheduled, so prepare accordingly.

There are only a few days remaining to register, and we have not reached capacity yet, so spread the word. Please visit our websites: www.fws.gov/refuge/big_oaks/ or www.bigoaks.org for the printable course description and registration form. They must be postmarked May 19th to participate in the event.

We can be found on Facebook!

Pictures from past events are posted, as well as discussions regarding classes and other important



messages relative to this upcoming event. Feel free to "like" the page and add your comments.

For more information please call the refuge office (812)273-0783 and ask for Lisa Jones.

Hope to see you June 7th!



12th Annual Take A Kid Fishing Day

By Jim Leveille

On Saturday, July 12th Big Oaks Conservation Society volunteers and



Big Oaks NWR staff will host their 12th Annual Take A Kid Fishing Day at Old Timbers Lake. Event sponsors, led by RKO Enterprises, have teamed up to provide kids 15 and under and their families a free fun-filled day of fishing and other events. In addition to raffle prizes and a free fishing tackle bag, RKO and event co-sponsors, Bass Pro, Walmart, and DMF Bait Co. provide food, drinks, and bait for all in attendance. No fishing licenses are required for kids or adult mentors the day of the event. Extra fishing poles are available if needed. Participants are welcome starting at 7:00AM at the refuge office, building 125. The raffle prize drawing will be held at noon. The lake closes at 4:00PM. For more information, visit the refuge website at http://www.fws.gov/refuge/big_oaks/ or call the office at (812)273-0783.

Come out early to drive around the "Day Use Area" of the refuge and enjoy a free family day at beautiful Old Timbers Lake.



Many Thanks To Our Sponsors

Big Oaks Conservation Society (a 501c3 tax exempt organization) could not be the successful organization it is without the support of our many local and national sponsors. The Board of Directors and general membership is so very grateful to and appreciative of our sponsors and other organizations who have graciously given of their time and treasure to help us serve our community and support our Refuge.

There have been loyal local business sponsors that truthfully are too numerous to mention here; they are publically acknowledged at each event and in our event programs, without whom these events would not be possible. Without the excellent relationship with and support of the Indiana Air National Guard, our efforts to improve and preserve Old Timbers Lodge would not come to fruition. Conservation Officers from Indiana DNR, and organizations such as Bass Pro, Walmart, Gander Mountain, Hunter Specialties, RKO Enterprises, the engineering firm FPBH, Inc., and more recently Cabela's, allow us to provide high quality and successful programs for hunters, anglers, birders, youth, and all interested in the outdoors, both on the refuge and at Old Timbers Lodge. Groups such as the Indiana Chapter of the Wild Turkey Federation and the Indiana Deer Hunters Association give both financial supports to our youth hunters as well as provide presenters at our youth workshops. Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge and the Society were important in developing youth hunts that translated to state-wide youth hunts. Our Outdoor Women at Big Oaks Day brings in rave reviews and teaches a wide variety of outdoor skills with a spirit of camaraderie.

We appreciate all of these partnerships and seek to forge new friendships with other individuals, organizations, businesses and corporations who share our vision for a positive conservation ethic. Our members and partners believe that youth and adults prosper when they participate in outdoor activities. Please come join us in these efforts!

OLD TIMBERS LODGE UPDATE

By: Fred Swinney, Chairman
OTL Committee

After many months of talking, planning, and even some hopeful anticipation, Old Timbers Lodge and property is sporting a brand new modern sewage handling mound system! Most of you are aware there was a construction project underway with the actual work



phase beginning last fall. The system design was donated by FPBH, Inc. and that work enabled the INANG to submit these plans for project funding. The installation was recently completed and we are now ready to test the system. Some BOCS members, Refuge Staff and INANG Staff were trained on the system alarms, operation, and other basic system knowledge (*shown in photo above*). We needed the weather to warm enough to be able to turn on the water at the Lodge so the system can be primed and tested. This new system gives us the capability to hook up all the restrooms in the building.

The contractors have some final grounds work to complete – soil leveling, rock removal, and grass seeding. The remaining work is minimal given the scope of the project as a whole.

BOCS gives the INANG heartfelt thanks for finding the funding to make this project a reality. To all the professionals, contractors, engineers, planners, and project managers who did the work, we extend our thanks for a job well executed. Let us not forget the prior BOCS leadership who had the vision and drive to help see this project to completion!

The Board of Directors voted to upgrade some of the restrooms on the main level. Some preliminary work was done by BOCS Old Timbers Lodge Committee members to determine what was needed to make the bathrooms operational and create a proposal for approval by the INANG. The plans have been submitted and we are now awaiting the approval of these plans. There was hope we would be able to have the bathrooms operational by this June, but at this point we are running out of time in order to get the project completed prior to the June 7th Outdoor Women at Big Oaks event.

The annual spring clean-up day is set for Saturday, May 17th. Work generally begins around 8am and continues throughout the day for as long as volunteers are game to work. As most of you are aware, the Lodge did not get a 2013 fall clean-up due to the contractors working on-site. The contractor crews did a great job of cleaning up after their work, but we still need to clean the grand old house! The list of tasks to be done is lengthy and includes activities both inside and outdoors. The lawn has lots of tree limbs that need to be picked up after the long winter in order to get to the mowing. As you can tell.....we need lots of helping hands!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank some people for all their help and support during the time I have been leading some of these projects... FPBH, Inc., Sgt. Todd Bass, INANG, Jim Leveille, Ken Knouf, refuge staff, the BOCS Board of Directors, and the OTL Lodge Committee. Their expertise and knowledge of the proper contacts has been of great help to me and to everyone in the planning of each project.

Again, the next scheduled cleanup date is Saturday, May 17th.

If you would like more information about the events and activities stated in this article please contact the refuge office at (812)273-0783.

Manager's Corner: Restoration of Crawfish frogs: Partnership and Collaboration Bring Success!

By Joe Robb and Ben Walker

Crawfish frogs (*Lithobates areolatus*) have experienced significant declines throughout their range, mostly due to habitat loss. There are an estimated 1,000 crawfish frogs left in Indiana and Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge is fortunate enough to have an estimated 300 of these frogs, an incredible 30% of the state's population. As you recall from previous articles in this newsletter on this species, crawfish frogs get their name from the fact that they spend most of their lives in crayfish burrows except when they occupy temporary (we refer to these as ephemeral) wetlands during breeding season (March-April) in Indiana. Their habitat niche is the availability of these temporary wetlands, crayfish burrows and grassland or savannah habitat. Fortunately in Indiana these requirements can sometimes be met in low pastureland or reclaimed strip-mine land or in a former Army Proving Ground. We believe these frogs could have adapted to roaming bison herds that would occasionally wallow in mud holes and create perfect breeding wetlands for this rare species. This is a species that is resilient to fire (they do live in burrows) and like periodic disturbance that creates new, pristine, shallow wetlands.

We have begun helping this species by restoring wetlands designed to fit the wet/dry cycle of their breeding ponds. The Partners for Wildlife Program of the Fish and Wildlife Service designed and built 3 wetlands at Krueger Lake County Park and we released about 500 tadpoles and young frogs in 2011; we also seeded a few crawfish frog egg masses in 2012 and 2013. A few frogs chorused last year, and we know it takes 2 or 3 years before frogs return to breed. This was the third year after our initial release and about 25 frogs returned to breed and we counted about 15 egg masses where the frogs were calling. This is one of the largest choruses ever observed in the 3 county area (*Jefferson, Jennings and Ripley*). This success in the small habitat available around the county park



A 56 gram female captured at Krueger Lake County Park believed to be two years old.

grassland restorations on the refuge should also succeed.

This year former intern Andrew Hoffman (photo on right) began his PhD study and part of his research will examine if captive breeding or tadpole



direct releases are more beneficial for restoring this species into restored habitat. This study will occur on Bob and Ellen Mulford's property in Ripley County, where they have restored wetlands and grasslands also through several conservation programs. This spring refuge staff and volunteers also caught about 100 burrowing crayfish to add to the triad of requirements at this beautiful restored habitat. We will watch this restoration with Andrew, Bob, and Ellen, and hopefully, see another restored population in 2016. If readers are interested in restoring wetlands or grassland on their property, please contact the refuge office at (812)273-0783.

Citizen Science, what's all the fuss about?

By Benjamin Walker



Volunteers work to identify wetland plants during a bioblitz event at Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area. A bioblitz is an event where participants survey all living species within an area.

(Photo credit: handlensandbinoculars.blogspot.com)

Every year, thousands of individuals across the country spend countless hours documenting species presence, monitoring streams and wetlands, and observing constellations in the night sky. These individuals are not professional scientists, they are individuals that have a passion for the natural world and are willing to volunteer just a little bit of their time. This type of data collection, often called “citizen science” is scientific research in which the data is entirely or partly collected by amateur or nonprofessional scientists. The longest running Citizen Science project, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) has been in existence since 1900. Every year, volunteers arm themselves with their binoculars and spotting scopes to document the birds that they observe in a defined count circle.

Information collected from long-term studies like the CBC are extremely important. Often, researchers and land managers are unable to survey large areas due to distantly fragmented habitats and short survey windows. By recruiting volunteers and coordinating their survey efforts, researchers and land managers are able to monitor species health and occupancy throughout their area of interest. Dr. Benjamin Zuckerberg, an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin – Madison uses data from citizen science projects to test the effect of range-wide problems such as modern climate change and habitat loss at differing scales.

Citizen science projects are not limited to reoccurring yearly surveys. One form of citizen science is an event called a BioBlitz, where volunteers count as many species from as many taxonomic groups as possible in a 24-hour time period. Projects like a BioBlitz aim to estimate species richness while providing an educational experience that all ages can enjoy. Don't worry if your identification skills may be a bit rusty, each event typically has a number of experts that will assist with identification.

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) participates in a number of natural resource based citizen science projects and is always looking for volunteers. Some of the current projects include amphibian call surveys (March-April), Mayday bird count (May), invasive species inventory (summer), Big Oaks NWR butterfly survey (August), and the CBC (December). If you are interested in participating in a survey, please contact me at the office (812)273-0783.

Get Your Goose On! at a National Wildlife Refuge

The National Wildlife Refuge System, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is the nation's premiere network of public lands and waters that provide habitat for wildlife and unparalleled outdoor experiences for the public.

Step 1: Get Out There!

There are more than 560 National Wildlife Refuges across the country and one within an hour's drive of every major metropolitan area.

Get outside, have some fun and take some photos!

Step 2: Join GYGO on flickr

Visit us at our GYGO Flickr page and click "Join this Group" at the top of the page. *(Note: You'll need to be a member of Flickr before you can join a group. If you aren't already a member, Flickr will walk you through how to create a free account.)*

Step 3: Upload Your Photos

Once you've joined the group, click the "Add Photos" at the top of the page. Here you can select photos you've already uploaded to your own Flickr account. Once you have selected a photo to share, simply click the "Add to Group" button, and you're done.



Big Oaks NWR is participating in this event, so signs are available at the office to check out. To find out more information about this exciting activity that is catching on quick visit:

fws.gov/getyourgooseon.

Visitor Information

All visitors must annually view a safety video and sign an acknowledgment of danger form. This will give you access to the areas designated for public use. There is a daily access fee, or users may purchase an annual pass. The day use area covers 4,170 acres. An additional 22,500 acres is open to the public for special hunts and guided tours. The public may access the refuge from mid-April to the end of November every Monday and Friday and the second and fourth Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. *(Closed for all federal holidays & hunts)*

Big Oaks Conservation Society Annual Meeting

On September 8th at 5:30pm BOCS will hold it's Board election and annual meeting at Capability Farm, 128 E. County Road 200 S, Versailles, IN 47042. Beautiful wetland and grasslands were restored on Bob & Ellen Mulford's property beginning in 2011. Please come join us for light refreshments. Guests should bring blankets or lawn chairs.

BOCS would like to thank the Jefferson County Public Library for allowing the group to conduct meetings and presentations throughout the year.

BOCS monthly meetings will typically be held at the Library the first Monday of each month at 6:30pm.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Would you like to become a Big Oaks Volunteer? Opportunities are plentiful to assist refuge staff in their management of the 50,000-acre refuge. There are a variety of positions available.

Those who enjoy fieldwork and the outdoors are needed to lead wildlife and educational tours at the refuge. These tasks permit volunteers the opportunity to access Big Oaks at no cost and to see areas of the refuge not commonly viewed by typical visitors. If indoor tasks are more your cup of tea, then consider the refuge's need for speakers who can visit schools and civic groups to speak about Big Oaks. Those interested in becoming ambassadors for Big Oaks would receive instruction and training in the history and on-going projects associated with the refuge. For individuals who don't care to wander Big Oaks, vast spaces or are intimidated at the prospect of speaking to strangers, then the friendly U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff could always use help in their office. This could involve checking in visitors, answering phones, or aiding in the refuge's safety-briefing program. The opportunity to become involved is open to all.

NEW FACES ON THE REFUGE

Meet Our Experience Works Employees Keith Tyra and Arthur Large

By Lisa Jones

Experience Works is “a national, charitable, community-based organization that helps seniors get the training they need in their local communities.” Many of you may remember that this program was formerly known as Green Thumb. It has expanded to become an organization that provides training, job placement and community service for mature people (Source: *Experience Works Handbook 2014*).

At Big Oaks NWR we have two Experience Works individuals working here this year, Keith Tyra and Arthur Large.

Keith Tyra

Although many of you may have already met Keith during the fall public use and deer hunting season, we would like to properly introduce him. Keith was born and raised in Elmira, New York and lived there until his early twenties. He continued living in various towns throughout New York until he was inspired to move to Madison in 2006 by some friends that lived in the area.

Professionally he was a truck driver for 20 years. Last year he ventured a career change and through Experience Works came to work at the refuge in September 2013. Keith enjoys learning about computers and over winter he tackled a huge project scanning photo slides to digital format for our database.

He has been married to his wife Cara for 21 years. His step-son Brian is a principal at a high school in



Albany, New York. He has a step-grandson and step-granddaughter.

Keith lives in Madison with his wife Cara and their 2 cats, Asa and Toby. In his spare time he enjoys the violin, studying, reading his bible and is a hobby carpenter. We look forward to his continued help in the future.

Arthur Large

Arthur or “Art” as he likes to be called was born in Seymour, Indiana. As a young child his family moved around a bit for a few years only to return to North Vernon, Indiana where he was raised. After graduating from high school Art enlisted in the Marine Corps from 1970-1973 and was stationed in San Diego, California. During that time he serviced in Guam for 18 months.



After returning home from his military duties Art found work as a head sawyer at a sawmill for several years. He has worn many hats throughout his professional career, but he truly enjoyed teaching the most. In his own time Art truly enjoys reading about all aspects of business.

Art married his wife Marilyn 4 years ago. They currently live on a 117 acre farm in Madison on the Jefferson County / Switzerland County border. Through previous marriages he has 11 children and 15 grandchildren.

Art has 2 horses and enjoyed riding prior to a medical injury. He use to enjoy hunting deer and his wife would like to see him take up the hobby again.

Together he and his wife enjoy traveling to her native home in the Philippines where they own a few homes. Art is considering retiring there someday.

If you would like to join or rejoin the **Big Oaks Conservation Society** to support the refuge, please fill out this membership form and send along with your check to:

**Check here for
Renewal**

**Check here for
New Member**

Yearly Membership Form (Oct. 2014-Sept 2015). Please select a category above.

___ Youth \$5

Name(s) _____

___ Individual \$15

Address _____

___ Family \$25

City _____

___ Supporting \$25

State _____ Zip _____

___ Lifetime (per Individual) \$150

Phone () _____

___ Corporate \$500

E-mail _____

If you would like to join, or rejoin, the Big Oaks Conservation Society, please fill out this membership form and send along with your check to: **Big Oaks Conservation Society, P.O. Box 935, Madison, IN 47250**

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge
1661 W. JPG Niblo Road
Madison, IN 47250

Phone: 812-273-0783

Fax: 812-273-0786

E-mail: bigoaks@fws.gov

Website: www.fws.gov/refuge/big_oaks

REFUGE STAFF

Dr. Joe Robb - Refuge Manager
Mardean Roach - Administrative Support Asst.
Ben Walker - Wildlife Biologist
Brian Winters - Fire Management Officer
David Jones - Lead Range Technician
Casey Mefford - Range Technician
Kerry Brinson - Maintenance
Kim Brinson - Maintenance
Lisa Jones - Park Ranger
Beth Black - Park Ranger
Keith Tyra - Experience Works Employee
Arthur Large - Experience Works Employee

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Newsletter Editor
Lisa Jones

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Big Oaks Conservation Society Membership Benefits

-  10% discount on merchandise
-  Opportunities to participate in special refuge events
-  Contribute to the improvement of the refuge for all visitors
-  Big Oaks Newsletter

Big Oaks Conservation Society

P.O. Box 935
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**BIG OAKS
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
2014 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

April	18	Open for Public Use, Fishing Begins
May	17	Old Timbers Lodge Cleanup
June	7	Outdoor Women at Big Oaks
July	12	Take a Kid Fishing Day
August	2	Butterfly Survey
	4	Ice Cream Social @ Oakdale Schoolhouse
August	15	Squirrel Season Opens
September	8	BOCS Annual Meeting @ Capability Farm
October		Deer Archery Season, Primitive Muzzleloader
November		Youth Deer Hunt, Deer Shotgun Season
December	13	Christmas Bird Count
January		Bobcat Tracks in Snow at Big Oaks
February		Great Horned Owls Nest
March		Prescribed Burning



**Big Oaks
Conservation Society
P.O. Box 935
Madison, IN 47250**

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Fred Swinney - Vice President
Yvette Hayes - Secretary &
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Ellen Mulford - Treasurer
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www.bigoaks.org