Turnbull Wildlife Refuge

Friends' Newsletter

Friends of Turnbull

Winter 2025/2026

President's Report

by Lorna Kropp

The Nature Store season 2025 wrapped up with two weekends of Holiday Sales at the end of November to "make up" for the loss of the entire month of October due to the Government Shutdown. Again this year, sales increased over the previous year, with the earnings on sales this year over $11,000 for the first time. We also benefitted from new volunteers joining the Nature Store Volunteer/Refuge Ambassadors. A Big Thanks to our Nature Store Management Team who work tirelessly and as a well-oiled group during the season to order and tag merchandise, train and organize volunteer schedules, and manage the bills and deposits and the consignment goods going to Copy Junction. We are already looking forward to the opening of the 2026 Nature Store Season in April. If you are interested in volunteering, look for the announcement of training sessions in March and beginning of April. The Nature Store will be open Friday/Saturday/ Sunday/Mondays from 10am to 4pm April through October inside the Refuge Administration Building. Greeting visitors, making sales and spending time at Turnbull makes this project fun, valuable and rewarding.

Board recruitment is on-going; with up to 10 members, the current board has four members who have served more than 10 years. The Board is responsible for managing the relationship of advocacy and assistance for the Wildlife Refuge, recruiting volunteers and helping with activities to engage our communities in support of habitats for animals and plants. Ready to step up and become more active, we have many opportunities for the upcoming season and beyond. Inquiries welcomed, please talk with a Board member or email: president@fotnwr.org.

The Friends will be providing volunteer labor on a planned project to renovate the Pine Lake Overlook this coming Spring. We will be supplying the materials and recruiting the volunteers to work with the Refuge staff to complete the project in Spring/Summer 2026. We applied for support from the national Public Lands Alliance "Find Your Wild" fundraising and were awarded $500 toward the project.

Our group will organize and train a Volunteer Crew to assist Refuge Heavy Equipment Operator to 1) take out current small concrete pad, bench, and broken scopes; 2) Level and prepare site for 10' by 10' concrete pad with rock wall for ADA viewing pad with ADA Companion Bench facing the wetlands; 3) pour and level concrete and install bench; 4) complete any additional landscaping around new Viewing space. We will be signing up the crew to work starting at the beginning of March. If you are interested, please contact president@fotnwr.org.

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In December we received a donation of $15,200 from the AgWest Farm Credit team for habitat restoration projects on the Refuge, and also a pledge of volunteer crew help to plant trees in the Spring. They were scheduled to work on planting at the newly restored edges of Beaver Pond on the 5-mile Auto Tour near Kepple Lake in October, but will be planning a workday in the Spring.

The Friends of Turnbull Board thanks Joyce Alonso, a long-time Refuge Volunteer and avid birder for her service on the Board. Joyce started volunteering at the Refuge in the mid-90's and was instrumental in the Riparian Restoration project along Pine Creek. Since late 1990's, many of the annual Tree Planting days were held along the banks of Pine Creek. Trees were planted each year and then protected in "Exclosures" of 6 ft fence.

panels to keep the browsing elk, moose and more away until they were big enough to survive. She spent many days driving the 4-wheeler with tubs of water to the trees in the dry summer weeks.

Joyce has served as an Environmental Education Volunteer from 1998 – 2019 for the many field

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trips during the Spring and Fall Fieldtrip season. Joyce joined the Board in 2017 and has served 8 years.

Here is a reminiscence of the new trees along Pine Creek Riparian area 20 years ago when the project was new.

Refuge Report: Completion of the Visitor Services Action Plan

by Josh Contois, Visitor Services Manager

During 2025, Supervisory Park Ranger, Josh Contois and other US Fish & Wildlife staff, plus community partners participated in workshop consultations and other gatherings to develop a 5-year Action Plan (2026-2031) for guiding program offerings and community outreach for the Refuge.

Goal 1: EMPOWER staff, volunteers, and partners

- Objective 1 – Maintain, strengthen, and expand partnerships to build resiliency and capacity, ensuring continuity of programming
- Objective 2 – Create a robust volunteer program to meet the refuge needs

Given the reduction of staff within the Complex, programming will have to rely more on cooperative planning and leadership among the Refuge Community Partners. The Plan recommends organizing and training volunteer work crews, and increasing the coordination of volunteer-led EE and community programming. Our Refuge staff are responsible for management and programming at all 3 Refuges in the Inland Northwest Complex – TNWR, Little Pend Orielle NWR and Kootenai NWR. They wear lots of hats!

Goal 2: ENGAGE with local communities

- Objective 1 – Promote community involvement through on- and off-site events
- Objective 2 – Ensure visitors can understand and recreate responsibly through proper products for safe opportunities on the refuge
- Objective 3 – Provide meaningful recreation for both self-guided and facilitated opportunities
  to see the refuge as a place for inspiration
- Objective 4 – Provide meaningful environmental education to inspire stewardship from local youth and families
- Objective 5 - Build Trust with Local Indigenous Communities

The Friends of Turnbull is contracting with a local educator to complete a new set of Environmental Education Field Trip lessons – 7 lessons spread

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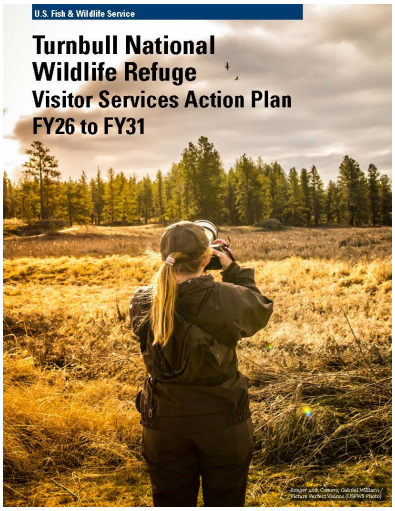
through the ages ranging K-12. The lessons should be available for the next school year. The lessons relate specifically to the habitats, animals and plants of Turnbull and will also include connections to the original inhabitants, the Spokane Tribe and to Salish names for plants and animals.

Turnbull NWR Interpretive Themes:

1. The powerful forces of volcanism, glaciation and some of the largest floods in geological history have forged a distinct environment at Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge that is unique to the Region.
2. The Refuge provides vital habitat for wildlife, from moose to migratory birds, making it a living sanctuary where people can connect with nature firsthand.
3. Turnbull's diverse plant communities, from wildflowers to ponderosa pines, are key components of the Refuge's ecosystems and enrich the visitor experience across seasons.
4. Turnbull fosters meaningful human experiences—through quiet reflection, outdoor learning, and recreation—while deepening connections between people, nature and place.
5. At Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge, fire is a natural and necessary force. Through careful management, the refuge works with fire rather than against it, to sustain a. healthy resilient landscape.

You can read the entire document on the website. https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2025-12/turnbull-nwr-visitor-services-action-plan-508.pdf



Change is Nature's Way: Wetland Restoration at Turnbull NWR

By Cassie Roeder, Refuge Manager

We are told that the only constant in life is change, and it is no different for the habitat at Turnbull NWR. The cold stillness of winter will soon give way to the vibrant, active spring as new life enters the refuge. Summer brings steady growth as we watch the moose calves grow, then fall will bring the sound of heavy equipment. Wait, what? Most years, the refuge has some habitat restoration work underway somewhere, but this year, visitors will have a front-row seat. Restoration is planned for two wetlands within the visitor use area, Beaver Pond near Kepple Lake, and Finger Pond along Smith Road and the Pine Creek walking trail.

We continue to look for ways to improve our habitat to meet the conservation goals and the refuge's purpose identified in our Comprehensive Conservation Plan. When restoring a wetland, the primary goal of the project is to improve water management capabilities, increasing the duration of water on the landscape. In addition to improved water availability for wildlife such as ducks, geese, and swans, longer water residence time in a wetland basin increases groundwater recharge and improves water quality. The refuge will install water control structures, build earthen dams, and recontour ditches and wetlands to help meet this goal. The improved water management will also contribute to meeting the second goal of these projects: increased vegetative diversity and improved control of invasive species. Native vegetation provides food and nesting resources for a variety of species, including birds, moose, elk, deer, and small mammals. Restoration and continued management of these wetlands also contribute to controlling invasive species and reducing decadent vegetation, both of which reduce vegetative diversity.

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Both projects within the visitor use area this year share these primary habitat goals, although you may notice some differences in how they are managed. Beaver Pond is located at the far north end of the auto tour route and is part of the Kepple Lake drainage. In 2025, the refuge fire staff began work on the wetland by conducting a prescribed

burn to thin the dense vegetation and allow access to the area for construction. This year, we will install a water control structure and contour the wetland to meet the water management and vegetation goals.

The Finger Pond project runs along the south side of Smith Road from the old fee station to the comfort station bathrooms. This area has previously been restored and now needs some maintenance and further enhancements. Refuge staff will be rebuilding earthen dams that help slow water and hold wetland basins, as well as re-contouring islands and waterways.

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Finger Pond Restoration Area

Watch throughout this year as you visit Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge to see the transformation these wetlands will undergo, and enjoy the diversity and beauty that come with new life in the spring of 2028. For "Change is the very nature of nature." – Ilchi Lee

Why Do Birds Migrate?

by Carlene Hardt

Birds migrate primarily to find food, especially when their aquatic habitats freeze over in colder months. Migrating is a great way to escape harsh weather and find more temperate climates where the waterways remain open and the days are longer. Deciding just when to migrate is a combination of their internal biological rhythms, environmental changes (mainly how much daylight their brains perceive in a day), and the consensus of the flock (individual birds don't typically just fly off on their own!).

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Turnbull is an important stop for many species, offering wetlands for waterfowl and a variety of habitats and food sources for other migrating birds.

In mid-October as I walked by Winslow Pool, I saw a couple of Tundra Swans hanging out and eating. I could tell they were Tundra Swans - and not Trumpeters - because of their black bills with a *yellow spot* at the base in front of the eye. And they're noticeably smaller than Trumpeter Swans, weighing only 3-8 lbs with a wing span of 72-80 inches, where a Trumpeter Swan is bigger and heavier, weighing 21-30 lbs with a wing span of 84-96 inches. I have only seen Tundra Swans during migration. Trumpeter swans are easy to spot because of their red "lipstick" thin line on their lower bill.

As I was walking around Middle Pine Lake, I spotted three VERY tall birds at the west end of the lake that were kind of shaped like Great Blue Herons but as I got closer to them, I could see that they were *all* white and I realized they had to be Great Egrets! They migrate through eastern Washington from Mid-September to mid-October and these three were at Turnbull that day! It was pretty cool to see them! They sure are tall, elegant and *very* starkly white. They do however have jet black legs and orangish-yellow bills. They were slowly wading through the water, looking for small fish that might pass by. Sometimes they stood completely still, waiting for the fish to come to them. When their prey swam close enough, they would strike *lightning*-fast with their long neck and bill-spear and then swallow the fish whole.

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After they were done "fishing" they each flew up into the same tree that was in the middle of the lake. It looked to me like they were resting and "chilling," and sometimes they called to one another. One of them was on the *other* side of the tree, so maybe they were just checking on each other. Who knows… After a half hour or so they all flew off to continue their journey.

For me, it was a *rare sight to see* the Great Egrets. I would describe them as graceful, elegant, slender and tall.

Enjoy the beauty of nature!

Oral History Project

with Steven Bingo, EWU Archivist

EWU Archivist, Steven Bingo and intern will be starting an Oral History Project about Turnbull NWR in January 2026. During Winter/Spring they will be setting up interviews for persons with a long connection to the Refuge.

See Steven Bingo's request below …

"The Eastern Washington University Archives and Special Collections is interested in conducting oral histories that will help future generations learn about the impact of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge both on the environment and on the people who use and enjoy the refuge. Topics of interest include work performed to preserve the natural environment and wildlife, educational and recreational uses of the refuge, changes to the refuge both in terms of environment and the refuge's mission, and relationships between the refuge and different local organizations, including schools, farmers, and businesses. The pilot will occur during the first half of 2026 and will consist of roughly 10 interviews, which is only the tip of the iceberg. Interviewees will be selected to capture a cross-section of people who have had a stake in the refuge, with special consideration given to those with longer ties to Turnbull. The hope is to conduct more interviews after the initial interviews in 2026."

If you are interested in participating, please contact EWU archivist Steven Bingo with your name, contact information, and a brief description of your involvement with Turnbull (a couple sentences will suffice unless you want to write more). Steven can be reached through email at sbingo@ewu.edu or by phone at 509-359-2302.

Thanks for your consideration!

Friends of Turnbull NWR
PO Box 294
Cheney, WA 99004

The Friends of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge is a nonprofit organization which supports the mandate of the refuge to protect and enhance wildlife and their habitats through education, research, habitat preservation and restoration.

Annual Memberships run from July through June. If you haven't already renewed your membership for July 2025—July 2026, please use this form. Thank you.

Membership Application

YES! I want to support the Friends of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge and its programs with my membership.

Name _____

Address _____

City , State and Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Annual Membership (Circle one)

Individual	$15
Family	$25
Business/Group	$35
Patron	$100
Benefactor	$500
Donation	$_____
Endowment Fund Donation	$_____
Amount Enclosed	$_____

New _____ Renewal _____

I would like to volunteer _____

Nature Store	_____
Committee	_____
Environmental Education	_____
Where needed	_____

My check is enclosed payable to:

Friends of Turnbull NWR
PO Box 294
Cheney, WA 99004