



2021
in review

RIDGEFIELD NWRC



It goes without saying that we had a year like no other. Among the challenges, we expanded our family; with new staff joining us and some moving on, saw the construction of the new Refuge Complex Headquarters come to fruition, and met major milestones for the Steigerwald Reconnection Project through the support of various partners. Sandhill cranes (threatened species) nested along the Kiwa Trail and successfully raised a colt; perhaps reminding us of what these critical habitats and homes can provide. While many of us were tucked at home, we also found new ways to bring the Refuge to you.

However, it is worth noting, that one of our brightest moments over the last 12-months, has been the ongoing support of our volunteers and the community as we navigated many changes, all while moving forward multiple large-scale projects and planning for the future of your local Refuges.

We hope these highlights (which are only a sampling) help you to remember what is achievable when we work together, and inspire you for the year to follow.

- The Refuge

RIDGEFIELD

It is easy to focus on what we've missed out on over the last year, but when we focus on what we've learned, often our smiles return and we can find the positives.

In 2021 for the second time, a pair of sandhill cranes built a nest along the Kiwa Trail at Ridgefield NWR. Of the two eggs, one was successfully hatched.

Sandhill cranes are known to make a stopover at the Refuge while migrating south, but usually migrate north to nest.

[LEARN MORE BY READING AN ARTICLE IN THE COLUMBIAN ABOUT THIS SUCCESS STORY.](#)

"This is only the third known nesting attempt" by cranes anywhere in the lower Columbia River region... Even rarer, refuge staff [were] able to watch the attempt.

- ERIC ANDERSON, DEPUTY REFUGE MANAGER



STEIGERWALD LAKE

Through the Steigerwald Reconnection Project, the Refuge continues to work to enhance habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species while addressing critical community needs.

Over the last year, there have been numerous success stories; **the reconnection to of Gibbons Creek and Steigerwald Lake back to the Columbia River, the planting of wapato and native trees and shrubs** to help restore the floodplain and wetland habitats, and **the sign of spawning salmon** in the waterways above the Refuge and within the project site...

But these stories, would not have been possible without the leadership and collaborative efforts fostered by the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership (LCEP) and their staff.

BY THE NUMBERS

During 2021, LCEP and numerous partners, with the additional help of volunteers and local students, together supported:

4 Educational field trips
4 Community plantings
7,500 Trees planted
40,000+ Lamprey (along with other native species) salvaged

FOR A 360' DEGREE VIDEO OF THE SITE PROVIDED BY LCEP, [CLICK HERE](#)



FRANZ LAKE & PIERCE

The other two Refuges in our Complex, while not open to the public, continue to provide a haven for wildlife in the increasingly popular Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area.

Franz Lake which provides a home for wintering Swans can be viewed from a wayside off of Washington State Route 14 as you head east.

Each year, we rely on the support of volunteers to help keep this wayside clean and maintained for the may travelers and local residents using the spot as their own "stopover" as well.

This year, Pierce was also reliant on the support of volunteers to help enhance habitat for the **charismatic herd of 30 Roosevelt Elk and other species, that call the Refuge home.**

ENHANCED PARTNERSHIPS

This last year, "In collaboration with the Skamania Noxious Weed Control Program (SNWCP), with the financial assistance of a Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Grant, volunteers prepared sites for blackberry treatment below the heron rookery at Pierce NWR."

Jared Strawderman, Gorge Refuge Stewards

The SNWCP treated a total of:

26 acres of Himalayan blackberry and Canada thistle

FOR A TIME-LAPSE VIDEO BY THE GORGE REFUGE STEWARDS ON BLACKBERRY REMOVAL, [CLICK HERE.](#)

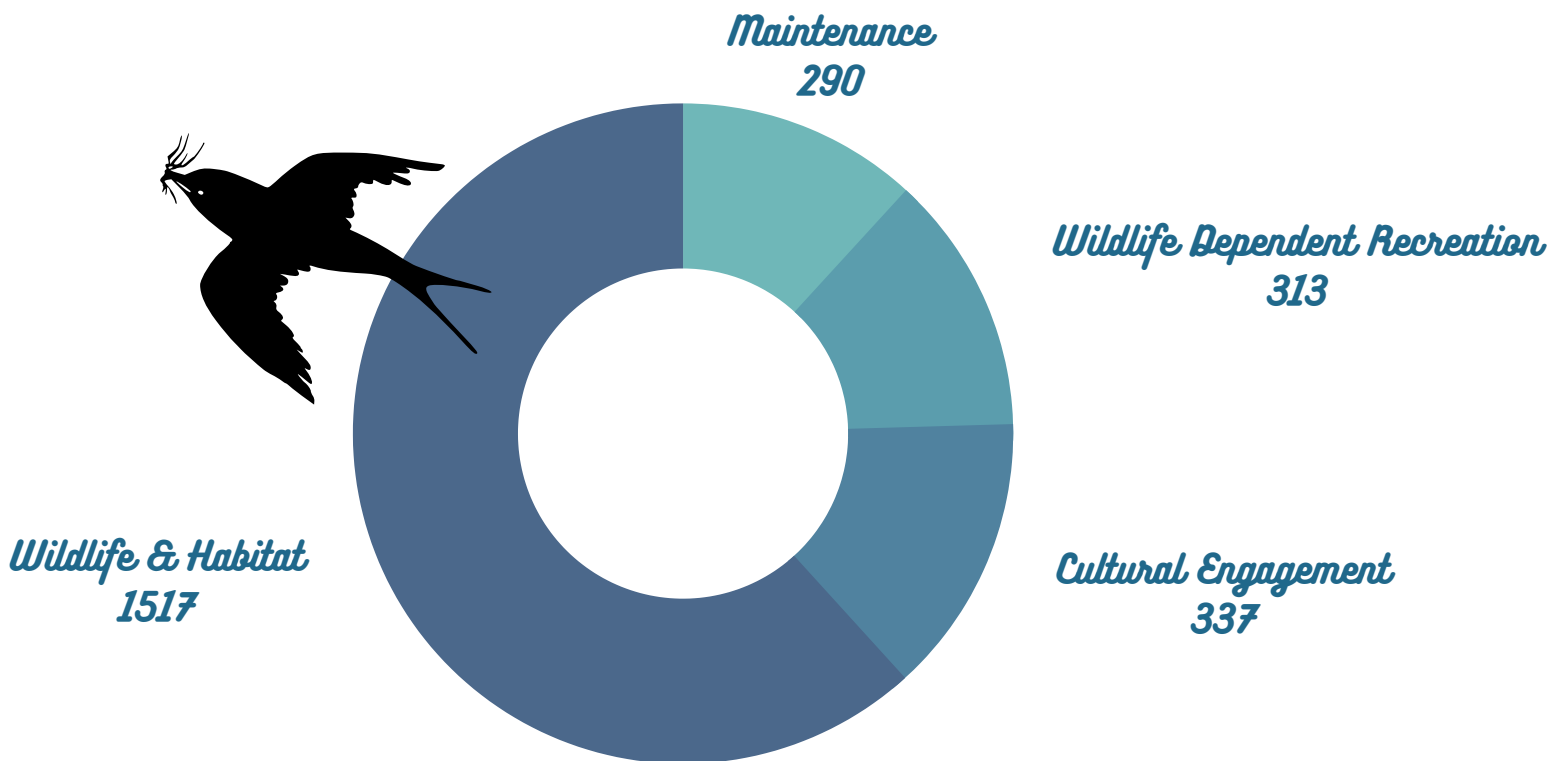


VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are vital to the health of not only our Refuges, but the greater ecosystem. Even during a year where a large portion of the volunteer program was on hold, with YOUR help, we were able to meet some mission critical goals of the Refuge Complex.

VOLUNTEER HOURS CONTRIBUTED BY PROGRAM (ACROSS THE COMPLEX)

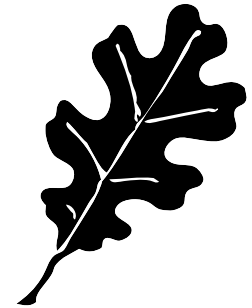
Hours recorded for Volunteer Engagement do not often tell the full story of how the community and our non-profit support groups collaborate to help us reach our mission; to be an asset for wildlife, plants, and the community.



PUMAS

Over the past 5 years, volunteers for the Complex have banded an average of 300 Purple Martins (PUMA) from Ridgefield, Steigerwald Lake and Pierce National Wildlife Refuges with an increase in over 150 fledglings.

VISITOR ENHANCEMENTS



MEETING THE COMMUNITY NEEDS

Along with the construction of the new Refuge Complex Headquarters, the Refuge has been working alongside the community to help us plan for future visitor enhancements. Trails have shown to offer much needed respite during the last year for people of all abilities, and we want to work towards updating our programs, volunteer opportunities, site amenities, and outreach & communication so that we are more inclusive.

Projects In Progress:

Facilities:

Refuge Complex Headquarters construction (Ridgefield)

Community Nature Center planning (Ridgefield)

Wildlife Dependent Recreation:

Oaks to Wetlands Trail realignment (Ridgefield)

Gibbons Creek Wildlife Art Trail realignment and expansion (Steigerwald Lake)

Outreach and Communication:

Updated Refuge websites for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Complex wide)

New nationally branded entrance signs (Ridgefield; see below and Steigerwald Lake)

New parking lot and welcome kiosks (Steigerwald Lake)

Updated signage (Complex wide)



RIDGEFIELD
National Wildlife Refuge



UPDATES

The Community is our priority in all we do. Visit [Refuge 2020](#) for more information about some of the projects underway and how to get involved. Stay tuned for more on our USFWS sites in the coming months.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



GROWING TOGETHER

Washington Trails Association (WTA) has played a big part in advocating for trail access across Washington State and in helping build, restore, and maintain them.

One goal of WTA is to try to improve access to greenspaces, as nearby opportunities – and not just focus on far off wilderness areas; and thus Ridgefield NWR work parties have been a unique opportunity to expand their reach and offerings; which continued in 2021 using smaller skilled crews due to safety.

According to WTA,

“These opportunities have been very popular with the local community, having volunteers from the neighborhood join the events.”

LEARNING IN PARTNERSHIP

The ability to access and use a trail, impacts the quality of many people's lives; we have definitely witnessed that more than ever this last year. But thanks to a partnership with Access Recreation we are learning that the community needs more information to help them plan their visit to our sites.

After a site review by Access Recreation and community engagement forums held this summer, we are learning what features need to be highlighted to attract users of all abilities.



(C)USFWS/ WTA Trail Crew working on the Oaks to Wetlands Trail

CONTINUED SUPPORT

REACHING YOU WHERE YOU ARE

The Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge (Friends) for the second consecutive year worked to create an experience like no other, 2021 Birdfest & Bluegrass (virtual edition).

With support from Valadrian Creative and Consulting, the Friends were able to invite more people than ever to join in the fun. **With the theme "Return to the Refuge," in full focus, the group provided fun video spoofs that hopefully got everyone dawning their best neon colors and nostalgic; while inspiring you for where we are headed...**

BY THE NUMBERS

During 2021, the Friends were able to provide:

1 weekend of Birdfest & Bluegrass Celebrations (virtual)

1 Veterans hunt for new hunters (just one of many hunt days supported by the Friends Checkstation operator)

5 Second Sunday Series Events (virtual)

941 Volunteer hours donated by the Board of Directors

Countless acres of habitat conserved and maintained (i.e. Main St. along Gee Creek, search & removal of Ricefield bulrush)

Endless engagement via social media ("Take a Walk Tuesdays" & regular posts) and newsletters



CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

The Cathlapotle Plankhouse Second Sunday events were virtual for 2021, offering more people to listen, learn and experience this Series from the comfort of their homes.

The Friends provided special presentations and activity demos as well as free home kits to participate in the activity. Each month, from May through September, they released new videos on their Facebook and Youtube pages. In collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, trail tips for enjoying the Refuge complimented the other presentations.



TO WATCH THE 2021 SECOND SUNDAY SERIES PRESENTATIONS, [CLICK HERE.](#)

CONTINUED SUPPORT



CONNECTING DURING THE CLOSURE

The Gorge Refuge Stewards (Stewards) knew that the **Refuge would be closed for the Steigerwald Reconnection Project May 2020 until spring 2022**, but what they didn't anticipate was a closure prior to then due to covid that would also shutter most of our Visitor Services across the Complex, including the Volunteer Program.

This meant new challenges and left them wondering, how would they continue to support the Refuges and the community during this time?

It has been no surprise that the creativity of this group allowed for their continued support through various virtual programs and outreach, when unable to get onsite. And that when needed to lend an extra hand, even if it meant getting muddy - they did.

BY THE NUMBERS (SELECTED)

During 2021, the Stewards were able to provide:

12 Photography group meet ups (virtual)

356 hours donated by the Board of Directors

Multiple updates to the Volunteer Program to make it more inclusive

Countless acres of habitat restored and maintained (i.e. Blackberry removal and tree plantings)

Endless engagement via social media posts, weekly volunteer emails and webinars & newsletter updates

EXPANDING PARTNERSHIPS

In collaboration with the Watershed Alliance, the Stewards are working to share the story of the Steigerwald Reconnection Project with students that attend Jemtegaard Middle School, which is located just up the creek from where Gibbons Creek flows into the Refuge. Together the Stewards and the Watershed Alliance are working to display how these students can positively impact the larger community and landscape, all while being directly involved in restoration work and hands-on learning and engagement.

(C)Jared Strawderman/Gorge Refuge Stewards
View of project site looking at the Columbia River



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STEIGERWALD PROJECT AND READ THE STEWARDS BLOG [CLICK HERE](#)



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We hope you'll join us in 2022!