



## FRIENDS OF THE RIDGEGIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE ANNUAL REPORT 2022

The Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is a non-profit organization that manages a group of hardworking hands-on volunteers who share a passion for supporting wildlife and habitat.

The Friends are dedicated to promoting educational programs of the nationally acclaimed refuge and protecting and enhancing the refuge environment. The Refuge offers a scenic natural area for trail walking, exploration, bird watching, plant identification, meditation, volunteering, animal sightings, family outings, wildlife photography, school tours, and more. A native plankhouse, built in a Chinook tribal style provides a connection to the early history of native occupation by Lower Columbia Tribes.

This annual report provides a snapshot of our 2022 achievements, challenges, and future plans. We are grateful for the support and collaboration of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and all our cherished friends, sponsors, and community partners. To all, we say thank you.



Owen Mahoney, Third Grade



Brooklyn Wallace, 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade

## LIFEWAYS & LANDSCAPES

*The Landscapes and Lifeways program was paused this year as the refuge works to hear from Tribal partners and gather the messages, stories and lessons the Tribes wish the public to learn. These messages will help recreate the new volunteer manual and will ensure any nature walk, workshop or handout reflects Tribal sensibilities and teachings of living culture. Collaboration takes time, but we hope to have a draft document in 2023 ready for final Tribal review.*



## HABITAT

- Propagated over 300 plants in the high tunnel including cuttings taken from the former HQ planting bed.
- Planted over 200 shrubs and forbs along the auto-tour route and around the new HQ.
- Completed another year of ricefield bulrush work. 150 acres searched, sprayed, mowed, and disked.
- Converted 12 acres of upland pasture from reed canary grass to winter wheat, increasing deer and goose forage.
- Sprayed, mowed, and disked future restoration planting areas at the Port entrance.
- Performed annual planting maintenance including watering, caging and chipping new plantings. Caging allows for initial growth of plants before they become deer browse, and chipping acts as weed control in lieu of herbicide use.

By Keith Rutz, Habitat Restoration Coordinator

# VISITATION & VOLUNTEERS

by Susan Setterberg, long-serving volunteer & former Board Chair.



The Contact Station was reopened post covid in May this year with a cleaning, restocking and patching leaks by volunteers. Besides the general volunteer training in the spring, new Contact Station volunteers spent three mentor days with experienced volunteers to better prepare for greeting and helping visitors on the River S. Four new volunteers are now scheduling time to move us toward eventual daily coverage in the Contact Station.

Bird walks by volunteers restarted this fall on the River S & Carty trails. New volunteers have been training to be trail walkers to answer visitor questions on the Kiwa and Carty Oaks to Wetlands trails. Our volunteer supported bird feeder station next to the Contact Station has become a real hit with visitors.

Contact Station volunteers continue to perform a weekly auto tour bird census which is published on the Friends website and posted at the Contact Station. "From the Contact Station," created by volunteers, is published monthly in the Friend's e-news describing recent wildlife happenings on the River S auto tour.

***THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS! THE REFUGE IS ENHANCED AND VIBRANT BECAUSE OF YOUR DEVOTION, TIME AND EFFORT.***

## BY THE NUMBERS

- 190,000 total visitors counted.
- 75 volunteers, almost double the volunteer support in 2021
- 2489 total volunteer hours ~
  - 1370 hours devoted to wildlife and habitat, which includes bird surveys, purple martin work and other miscellaneous inclusions.
  - 606 wildlife dependent recreation hours such as visitor contact station, hunt program, trail stewards and walk leaders.
- 450 education participants. 256 more than 2021



Natalie Stokes, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade

## FINANCES ~ EVENTS

- 2021-2022 fiscal year was another year influenced by the pandemic, but the Friends continued our ongoing work on habitat restoration, education, and community building. With the generous support of funding received from grantors, community members and business partners, the Friends secured \$262,509 in funding. We received grant funding from US Fish and Wildlife Service, Community Foundation for SW Washington, Washington State Fish & Wildlife, Bullitt Foundation and City of Ridgefield.
- The revenue mix includes 99% contributions, memberships and grant funding and 1% funding from events.
- Program and operating expenses were \$300,908. Program expenses included Habitat support and restoration, plankhouse repairs, education, and community building activities and Birdfest.
- For the next fiscal year, the Friends look to build on our fundraising efforts and continue the program work that makes the Refuge a very special place.



## CELEBRATION

Finally! A new administration building for the Fish & Wildlife Service. The Grand Opening was December 16, 2022, with a group of children cutting the ribbon, acknowledging future leaders and users of the Refuge.

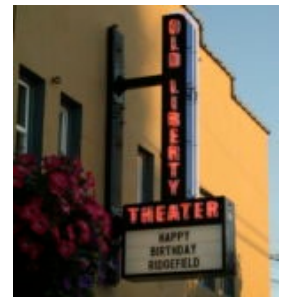
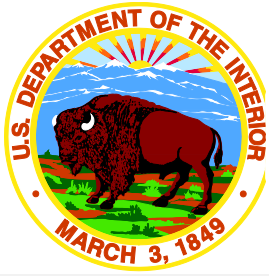
Photo by Rick Bannan, The Reflector



Artist rendering of Community Nature Center

## WHAT COMES NEXT

As part of its Master Plan, the F&WS, with its diverse partnerships, is working toward a community nature center that will integrate community, culture, education, and nature through accessible sensory experiences and multigenerational engagement.



***Thank you to our amazing sponsors and donors. Your generosity reaches all levels of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge and supports habitat, wildlife and grounds.***



Evie Chan, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade

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