



Finalizations of the Loon Lake LAMIRDs

by Jeanie Wagenman

On January 20, 2015 the Stevens County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) signed Ordinance 2015-1 into effect, adopting revisions to the Loon Lake and West Kettle LAMIRDs (Limited Area of More Intense Rural Development). The newly adopted LAMIRDs for both areas were much smaller than the previously adopted ones. This is in response to the EWGMHB (Eastern Washington Growth Management Hearings Board) Second Order on Compliance case no. 06-1-0009c, (3/21/14) which found both LAMIRDs (adopted 12/2013) as non-compliant with the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The Commissioners' action ends a long conflict, at least for the community of Loon Lake. The Petition for Review filed in 2006 challenged the county's Comprehensive Plan on a number of issues. The last of these issues questioned the proposed LAMIRDs, which would allow inside those boundaries, more intense densities and uses. The county had with the previous proposed revision, (8/2013) drawn a new LAMIRD including the entire 1100 acre lake, in addition to property in Loon Lake town not built in 1993 as required by GMA.

This action was strongly opposed by many Loon Lake citizens. More intense development around the lake would just simply add to the water quality/quantity problem and threaten environmental sustainability. This action by the Commissioners seemed to ignore the county's promise to the community that we could "plan for our own community" which is supported by the Growth Management Act.

Fortunately, the Growth Board agreed with Petitioners that placing a LAMIRD clear around the lake was not GMA compliant. Subsequently the county in August 2014 proposed to eliminate both LAMIRDs entirely, reverting to a rural designation.

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Common loon by John Picken, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

The Loon Rangers

Restoring a national icon takes luck, patience, and more than a little guile.
The backing of a billionaire helps quite a bit, too.

by Scott McMillion

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Under a gray sky on the eastern border of Grand Teton National Park, Arizona Lake looks like slate in the deep parts, like weak tea in the shallows, where the trap waits.

Onshore a clutch of scientists huddles behind camouflage netting as a small loudspeaker blares loon calls. It's a challenge meant to inspire a bird to battle and, soon enough, a male Common Loon drifts from the distant reeds to the middle of the lake. He does a chest-puffing penguin dance, warning the noisy plastic decoy off his turf. Canada Geese arrive in a raucous vee, but the agitated target remains out of range.

Then somebody twists a dial and the loudspeaker blasts a new mix of loon songs—yodels and wails and tremolos—and this does the trick. The male, nearly the size of a Canada Goose, approaches within 50 feet, then 30, still wary. He paddles and dives, taunting his faux rival as he floats just inches from the edge of the mist net planted below the imposter. He isn't happy, and he says so. Louder than a

bugling elk, as brassy as a car horn, he yodels 12 times in a row, then follows up with an odd sneeze-like noise.

The five scientists behind the camouflage hold their breath, ignore their cramping legs, and silently urge the loon: Just swim over the net already. He's one of only a handful of breeding loons in the entire state, and they want to get their hands on him temporarily to band him and take biological samples that will shed light on his health and maybe even whether climate change is taking a toll. But today they're out of luck. The loon's caution trumps his rage. He steers clear of the trap.

An hour or so to the south, on the other side of Jackson, Wyoming, in the eye-popping valley carved by the Hoback River, Joe Ricketts lives in a sprawling log house on a property he discovered years ago during a snowmobiling trip. Ricketts, a self-made billionaire who founded the online brokerage TD Ameritrade, is known for spending millions to back conservative political causes, mostly through a Super

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Loon Rangers — *from page 1*

PAC he calls the Ending Spending Action Fund (the group dropped \$10 million supporting Mitt Romney alone in 2012). Now he's set his philanthropic sights on conserving loons, not just at Arizona Lake but throughout the northern United States.

The Democrat-turned-Republican-turned-Independent might seem an unlikely source for a \$6.5 million donation for bird conservation, but he says he sees no contradiction between conservatism and environmentalism. And the slow pace of government conservation projects and the shrinking budgets of wildlife agencies leave him concerned. "Conservation," says the businessman, "is everybody's business."

Ricketts's interest in water birds began years ago with Trumpeter Swans. He works with the Wyoming Wetlands Society, which raises cygnets on ponds on his 1,300-acre ranch to boost native populations elsewhere. He became curious about Common Loons on a fishing trip to northern Saskatchewan several years ago. The abundance of loons there made him realize how rare they were in Wyoming, where today only 14 breeding pairs can be documented, down from 26 a couple of decades ago. Ricketts wants to bring them back to the Hoback Valley, which is part of their historic range. "They're beautiful, and they have that haunting call," he says. "I thought it would be nice to do something to help recovery in northwest Wyoming."

There are still about 650,000 Common Loons—the vast majority are found in Canada—but populations have dipped overall in the past two decades. There's no single culprit. Mercury poisoning, largely from coal power-plant emissions, has been shown to reduce fledging success by 40 percent. The lingering effects of acid rain have reduced the populations of the fish loons eat. The birds suffer from lead poisoning from ingesting lead sinkers and jigs used by anglers. Botulism outbreaks in the Great Lakes have killed 40,000 loons in the past decade. And oil spills kill and weaken birds exposed to slicks.

Ricketts's host at the fishing camp

introduced him to longtime loon field biologist Jeff Fair, who connected him with David Evers. Evers has studied loons for 30 years and is executive director of the Maine-based Biodiversity Research Institute; he'd wanted to pinpoint the reasons for recent declines and try to restore the birds to places they had disappeared from, but funding was sparse—at least until Ricketts came along. But instead of focusing solely on his own backyard, Ricketts ponied up enough to fund research from Wyoming to Maine. "David gave me the sales pitch for the whole country," he says. The gift means he might have loons on his ranch someday, but it could also mean a lot more. "Undertaking translocation experiments with loons now, before their breeding range dwindles further," says Fair, "represents an attempt to develop a restoration protocol for the birds before a crisis hits the species."

Restore the Loon launched in October 2013. The five-year project aims to make the Common Loon even more common by mapping the bird's distribution, digging deeper into what's causing declines, finding and protecting good habitat that lacks loons today, and trying to translocate chicks—something that, until recently, nobody had done before. "Loons are homebodies," says Evers. "The young move on average about 13 miles from natal lake areas. So to regain parts of loon range, you either have to wait a long, long time, or jump-start it."

Loons spend half their long lives (up to 30 years) in freshwater and half in saltwater. Their wings don't provide much lift for their heavy, dense bodies, so they need long runways—at least 20 acres of water—to get up enough speed for takeoff. They can't glide, so they have to shoulder through every inch of their migrations (the Gulf of Mexico to Minnesota or central Canada is no easy slog) at up to 9,000-foot elevations. The chicks somehow find their way, alone, to coastal waters (a special gland allows them to filter the salt from the seawater they swallow, then snort it out). After two and a half years at sea the young find their way back to within a few miles of their natal ponds.



But loons aren't just homebodies, they're violently territorial homebodies. These serial monogamists fiercely protect their breeding grounds, only to abandon both mate and offspring when ice starts to rime the pond. By age six they're ready to breed—and that means war. Males fight males and females fight females, battering one another with their wings and even torpedoing up from the depths to drive a beak into a challenger's breast. The winners pair up and breed; the losers, if they survive, scatter, rarely producing chicks.

In his translocation work, Evers is counting on instinct to pull the birds back to the areas where they fledged rather than where they were hatched. The approach has worked with other species, including Trumpeter Swans and Bald Eagles. But nobody had attempted it with loons until this past summer, when Evers captured, banded, and moved five chicks 300 miles south in Minnesota. His team had scoped out hundreds of potential lakes near the Twin Cities and found that about 10 percent had the necessary clear water, healthy fish populations, and good shoreline integrity. "This was a core part of the loon population at one time, and the habitat is still there and healthy," says Evers. "Loons may even stop over there during migration, but their site fidelity is so strong they keep moving." The relocated birds fledged; Evers will now have to wait three years to see if they return and the gamble pays off.

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"Conservation is everybody's business" — Joe Ricketts

In the meantime, he's placing more bets, gearing up to move chicks to loon-less lakes in Massachusetts in 2015 and Wyoming in 2017.

As he did in Minnesota, Evers will work closely with state biologists on those projects. For their part, the state agencies dealing with strapped budgets welcome the collaboration. "Minnesota wouldn't be able to get funding for this kind of project, and it's their state bird," says Evers. "Joe Ricketts is making that happen."

The work could benefit much more than loons, says Doug Brimeyer of the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, because the bird is an indicator of aquatic health. When contaminants threaten lakes—whether it's heavy metals or fertilizer-laced runoff from lawns—the damage often shows up first in the local loon population. "Lots of times, water quality has degraded and we don't know about it," Evers says. "But the loons know."

On top of all of the assaults loons now endure is the looming threat of global warming. "There's very little known about the specific impacts of climate change on loons," says Evers—from warmer water temperatures to changing fish populations to physiological responses. "We've just started investigating some of these questions."

This past summer, for instance, researchers began looking for heat-stress

hormones in the blood samples they were taking from the loons they captured—a new addition to the drill they've got down pat. When they actually catch the birds, that is. Had the Arizona Lake bird been netted, it would've received the same treatment as the 135 loons the team snared last year, from British Columbia to Maine: Researchers draw blood and pluck a couple feathers, for genetic and health analysis; weigh and measure the bird; and attach four leg bands—an aluminum one with an ID number, and three brightly colored plastic ones arranged in unique patterns easily visible from a distance. That way they can tell which birds are pairing up at a given lake without the considerable hassle of retrapping them. Some birds also get a geolocator that reveals, when the bird is recaptured, where it spent the winter.

Evers's team is still waiting for stress hormone results. Their findings could help generate better predictions for how loons will fare as temperatures continue to rise. Audubon's climate report, released last September, projects that the Common Loon's breeding grounds will shift north out of the United States by the end of the century. That forecast was based on 17 climate variables; incorporating the physiological and habitat data that Evers's team is gathering into Audubon's climate model will provide a clearer window into the future, and offer a better idea of what it will

take in the long term to conserve the iconic species.

After the failure at Arizona Lake, Evers's crew headed back to Jackson, where they regrouped over burgers and beers. They were on the job early the next day at the aptly named Loon Lake. The decoys and recorded calls worked this time, and an adult bird, keyed up for a dance-off to drive away his foe, entered the trap. A technician leapt from behind the camouflage netting and yelled "Dive!" The bird did exactly that, entangling itself in the mist net below. (He could've yelled anything—the goal was to startle the bird into attempting an underwater escape.)

Fifteen minutes later the loon, now with leg bands and short a couple cubic centimeters of blood, swam away, free to tend its nest, to fish, to sing.

At that pond and at thousands of others in loon country, when the wind calms and the stars pop, the birds open their throats. They wail like coyotes to locate a mate, yodel and emit the kooky laugh that warns off intruding birds, or coo the small hoots of family members having a chat.

For a loon, it's all part of the business of breeding and rearing. To human ears, it's magic. And if Joe Ricketts and David Evers have their way, the enchanting calls of the Common Loon will spread throughout the north and play on for generations to come. ■

Loon Lake Loon Association Membership Application

Membership Categories

Single Loon (<i>individual</i>)	\$15
Territorial Pair (<i>couple</i>)	\$20
Loon Family (<i>family</i>)	\$30

I would like to make a donation to the Loon Lake Loon Association in the amount of

Name _____

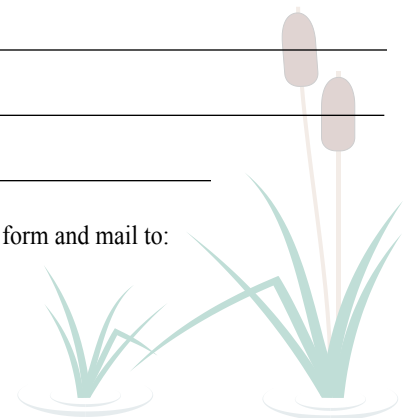
Address _____

Telephone _____

Total enclosed: _____

Please make checks payable to LLLA. Clip this form and mail to:

**Loon Lake Loon Association
PO Box 75
Loon Lake, WA 99148**



Where are all the Grebes?

by Jeanie Wagenman

I am sure many if not most Loon Lake property owners, well remember the Red-necked Grebes that graced our shores for many years. Seeing the little baby Grebes follow mama Grebe was always a joy to me and my family. But over the years, those Grebes have slowly disappeared, with only about five being sited last year on the lake. It is with sadness, that at least in my bay (Larson Beach) last summer I didn't see any Grebes.

Sometime ago, if the reader recalls, the Loon Lake Loon Association along with Petitioners Jeanie Wagenman made a proposal to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to nominate the Red-necked Grebe as a Species of Local Significance. Growth Management allows for this recognition under Critical Areas. In fact counties are required to designate Species of Local Importance in their Critical Areas Ordinance. The Loon Lake Loon Association proposed this to the BOCC, with the Commissioners simply denying it. Documented nesting Grebe sites were presented, along with the data (science) for the decreased numbers of fledglings over a few years. Subsequently the BOCC then raised the fee for this nomination to \$1500, the most expensive application of all other applications in the Planning Department.

The Loon Association, based upon expert opinion, submitted in their proposal that where nesting platforms exist, (2



bays) motor boats would limit their speed and distance during nesting season. This was simply to prevent the waves from washing the eggs off the nest and provide some privacy to the nesting Grebes. Well the response from the county and a few members of the community, (majority of the community supported it) one would think what was being suggested was that a nuclear reactor be built at Loon Lake.

Hindsight is always 20/20, but now we have a situation where the Grebe population is so reduced that the question arises will they survive and will they still remain a historical part of our community? Private "property rights" should not endorse or include the "right" to do whatever you want and wherever you want with your boat.....IF that action impacts others and even wildlife to their detriment. So if you happen to see any Grebes this summer, please give them some distance and support. ■

Loon Gift Shop Prepares to Close

by Joan Easley

The Loon Gift Shop in the Old Schoolhouse will be closing at the end of this summer. Started 30 years ago, it is with sadness we will close shop. The first gift shop was mostly out of our homes and tailgate sales, until we found space in various businesses: Bev's Hairloon, the old Branding Iron Tavern and the Historical Building, where we shared space with the Loon Lake Historical Society. All proceeds from the gift shop have supported the preservation and education efforts of the Loon Lake Loon Association.

When the library district was formed in the county, the club library in the Old Schoolhouse was discontinued and the Historical Society was able to move into their own room, giving the gift shop more room for gift items. We have had tremendous success with the gift shop, thanks to the many supporters over the years.

The Historical Society will begin a new venture with the Loon Lake Museum. Over the years there have been many artifacts from the community donated or loaned with no place for storage. We will be asking the community to look in their attics for Loon Lake treasures to share either by donation or loan. The Loon Association will continue to have a small gift shop with some of the past favorites, along with the Leanin' Tree cards that are sold by the Historical Society.

The Loonsday Walk will continue, donating those funds to community projects. ■

Loon Gift Shop

in the Old Schoolhouse
4000 Colville Road
Loon Lake, WA

- CLOSING AT THE END OF THE SEASON •
- SPECIAL SALES THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER •



509-233-2222

APRIL – AUGUST

OPEN SATURDAYS

10 AM TO 2 PM

•
JUNE – AUGUST

ALSO OPEN TUESDAYS – 4 TO 8 PM

Loon Lake LAMIRD — from page 1

During the Planning Commission hearing on 9/4/14, the public asked the Planning Commission to retain a LAMIRD inside Loon Lake town as well as portions of the West Kettle LAMIRD. The Planning Commission in turn recommended to the BOCC, that the county would sit down with all Petitioners and mediate the issues.

Mediation occurred on October 16, including Mr. Eric Davis, who also had filed a Petition for Review with the Growth Board, opposing the county's action of the enlarged Loon Lake LAMIRD. The gist of the proposed compromise presented by Petitioners (Wagenman & LBN) during mediation was essentially the same proposal submitted by Petitioners to the BOCC in August 2014 but not responded to. Fortunately all parties, including Mr. Davis, were able to find common ground and agreed upon the new LAMIRDs, signed into effect on January 20, 2015. Kudos to everyone involved.

Now what? Why would it take 8 years to bring the county into compliance? The cost of the county's resistance has to be in the millions. There is yet another GM

case contesting the County's Title 3 regulation, in which the Growth Board asked the county to address storm water runoff and impervious surfaces, inside critical areas. It remains to be seen, if the BOCC will honor their commitment to the Loon Lake community made in 2005 and allow sub-area planning. This is noteworthy, because if the BOCC had allowed the Loon Lake community to plan, as promised, then no challenge to the Comprehensive Plan would have been necessary. It is difficult to understand why the BOCC would later ignore the voice of the community as well as the science of limitations and place a LAMIRD clear around the lake.

What is clear, is that the voice of Loon Lake's citizens still needs to be expressed and heard. As the county goes forward soon in revising their Shoreline Master Program, once again the county will be making decisions that affect the long term future of Loon Lake. I only hope that the voice of the citizens will be raised again and that once again, the BOCC not turn a deaf ear to the community of Loon Lake. Without true citizen participation and the willingness of the Commissioners to hear our voice, the long term future of Loon Lake is at risk for generations to come. ■

Adopt-a-Highway Project

by Chuck Schilling

Once again we see the new sprouts of spring and think about spring cleanup. Each year we bag up 200 or so pounds of trash on each of three Saturdays per year from our two-mile stretch of highway 395. It has been a worthwhile project of our Loon Association for 20+ years for which we all are proud.

If you can contribute to this effort for one hour on one, two, or three Saturdays a year from 7 to 8 a.m., please call Chuck at 509-998-7003.

We would love to have you lend a hand if you are so inclined and no experience necessary. Dates for 2015 are April 18, July 11, and Sept 12.

Loonsday Walk 2015

Join in the fun for this year's annual Loonsday Walk on June 6 at 7:00 am. The fun walk starts and ends at the Old Schoolhouse, 4000 Colville Road, in Loon Lake.

All participants need to register in advance. Fill out the entry form, make your check out to Loonsday and mail to Loonsday, PO Box 75, Loon Lake, WA 99148.

Shirts and bandanas are the same price as last year. In order to guarantee a Loonsday shirt or bandana, participants must mail the entry form by May 29. Proceeds from the walk are donated to community projects.

Friends of the Loon Lake Library will have a book sale in the basement of the Old Schoolhouse and the Food Bank sponsors a breakfast at the Loon Lake Elementary School from 7-11 am. ■

