



Friends of

**Malheur**

National Wildlife Refuge

## Malheur Musings - August 2016

### President's Message

#### Current Status of Malheur and this Friends Group - Gary Ivey

Many of you are wondering when Refuge Headquarters will reopen to visitors. The best answer we can get is perhaps sometime in September. However, keep in mind that the rest of the refuge public area remain open and you can drive the 40-mile tour route to Buena Vista, P-Ranch and Frenchglen, you can fish the Blitzen River, and fall migration is already underway.

This has been a rough year for all of us who love Malheur Refuge and enjoy public lands, and has been even rougher on Refuge and Friend's staff. The 41-day seizure of Refuge HQ was a shock and an emotional trauma from which we haven't recovered. Refuge staff are still working with contractors to install state of the art security measures at HQ, to help keep staff safe. Militia types are still lurking in the area.



Common Nighthawk photo by Gary Ivey

Malheur is now on the map, for the good and the bad; it's on people's radar. For the bad, the militia movement supporters see it as a rallying symbol for their seditious cause; this means refuge staff and the community will continue to suffer their presence in the future. Staff safety and refuge security concerns will continue, which means increased Federal funding needs to protect people there. For the good, Malheur is now famous. Thousands of people who have never been to Malheur now want to visit to experience its natural wonders, and these new visitors will help support

the economy of Harney County.

The seizure has been both a curse and a blessing to this Friends Group. We were relatively small, with about 140 members and we struggled to find people to serve on our Board. Because of the seizure, our membership has grown to almost 2000 who have contributed almost \$70,000. Our Facebook page grew from about 120 fans to over 8,000, and during the seizure, our peak weekly post reach exceeded 200,000 people! We have become the largest Refuge Friends Group in the country, which presents many new challenges to our Board. We have expanded our Board and are working to modernize our web page, social media connections and membership management. Because of the HQ closure, we haven't been able to raise funds through our nature store, and our ability to connect with Refuge visitors has been very limited. We see an important need to reach out to the local Harney County community, to help educate them and garner local support for Malheur Refuge.

Malheur Refuge and Refuge system as a whole became an unwilling participant in what has now become a nationwide struggle against the privatization of our public lands. Malheur HQ has become a symbol for the Militia and their anti-federal lands movement, which has spread like cancer to current political agendas. Conversely, it has become our 'Alamo' for opposing giving refuges and public lands to the states. We all need to work together in solidarity to protect our public lands for all of us to enjoy. We Friends have an opportunity to help rally political support for conservation of public lands using Malheur as an icon for a national movement. We are looking for ways to help promote refuges and public lands conservation and we need your help and continued support. Thank you members!

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## Thanking Our Outgoing Treasurer - Kathy Day!

Kathy Day, who has graciously served as our Treasurer for the past 4 years and stepped down in June. We celebrated her dedication and service to our Board and treated her and her husband, Steve at a dinner in Bend in late May. She was presented with this book as a gift. We are ever so grateful for all that you have done for the Friends of Malheur, Kathy!



Steve and Kathy Day, May 2016 - Photo by Gary Ivey

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## The Dry Side of Malheur

Malheur Refuge is a large oasis in eastern Oregon's sagebrush sea. It is known for its vast wetlands, lakes and lush meadows, but there is another side to Malheur that is often overlooked. This photo gallery shows a few of the species that rely on these sage-steppe desert areas.



The handsome Sagebrush Sparrow is a common species of the dry sagebrush flats on and around Malheur. It can survive without drinking water as it can live off of metabolic water from its insect prey. Look for them near Saddle Butte, north of Buena Vista. Photo by Tim Blount.



The Western Fence Lizard is one of the common lizards in the area. Usually tame to approach, they will speed to

shelter when spooked. One of their shelters is an interpretive sign at Buena Vista Overlook. Photo by Tim Blount



This variety of buckwheat (*Eriogonum* sp) is often called Desert Buckwheat. It is found growing in very dry areas of hardpan to sandy dunes. A beautiful summer bloomer in habitats along the Double O Ranch Road. Photo by Tim Blount.



The large-billed Gray Flycatcher is the desert empid of the small flycatcher world. A common breeder in sage flats\_ it is

distinguished by its round head and regularly pushing down its tail compared to the tail bobs of similar species. Saddle Butte\_ north of Buena Vista is also a likely place to find them in summer. Photo by Tim Blount.

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## Forum on Extremism on Public Lands

Executive Director, Tim Blount, was invited by Democratic members of the House Committee on Natural Resources to testify at this forum about the impacts of the siege at Malheur Refuge on refuge staff, the Harney County community, and his personal experiences. His testimony was delivered on June 15th and was well received. Check this link to view those proceedings [here](#).



Panel members at Extremism on Public Lands Hearing, June 2016

Malheur is at the forefront of this public lands debate and we Friends of Malheur are letting our voices be heard. Your continued support will help us in this political struggle to support refuges.

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