

# Bitter Lake News

January 2025

## UPCOMING EVENTS AT BITTER LAKE NWR

**Saturday, January 18, 12:00: Winter General Membership Meeting** at the Visitor Center. The main dish of brisket will be provided but call to RSVP at 575-244-6256 and please bring a side dish or dessert to share.

We will have 2 presentations all about the birds! Our guest speakers will be Danica Cooke from Bureau of Land Management, who will share a presentation on the endangered prairie chicken and their status in New Mexico and in general. Our other guest speakers are from the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies who are working to tag and track wintering grassland birds in New Mexico. They will cover bird banding, the Motus tracking system, and how conserving winter habitat can have an impact on birds even after they have set off on their migration. Learn about tagging technology and about the birds that were tagged last year and tracked! They are looking for volunteers too!

### **Friends of Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge**

4200 E. Pine Lodge Rd., Roswell, NM 88201 Contact phone: 575-244-6256

e-mail: [bitterlakefriends@gmail.com](mailto:bitterlakefriends@gmail.com), <https://www.friendsofbitterlakenwr.org/>



Friends of Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge

## **President's Corner**

**By Merideth Hildreth**

Happy New Year Y'all! It's been a landmark year in celebrating conservation in 2024. As we reflect back in 2024, it marked the 100 Year Anniversary of the congressional designation and management of over 3 million acres of western forests, mountains and rangelands between Kingston and Silver City known as the Gila National Forest. Conservationist Aldo Leopold was instrumental in proposing this designation, the first such wilderness in the United States (managed by the U.S. Forest Service) – right here in New Mexico!

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gila/learning/history-culture/?cid=fseprd1103416>

On November 17, 2024, President Biden visited the Amazon and proclaimed the first International Conservation Day. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2024/11/17/a-proclamation-on-international-conservation-day-2024/#:~:text=BIDEN%20JR.%2C%20President%20of%20the,2024%2C%20as%20International%20Conservation%20Day.>

We are so fortunate to have Bitter Lake so close and accessible to residents of Roswell, Chaves County, and visitors from the region and abroad. The Dragonfly Festival held at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge in September was so much fun for everyone who visited, volunteered, or were vendors. Also, thank you to our many sponsors who made the Festival possible! Thank you to Jim Montgomery for another successful expert presentation on the lesser sandhill cranes during the November 9th Cranes and Cocoa event.

Join us in the New Year for the General Membership Winter Meeting and potluck at 12:00 p.m. on Saturday, January 18, 2025 at the Visitor Center. Please RSVP by calling the Visitor Center at 575-244-6256. It's important that enough members show up at the meeting to vote in a new board member, provide input, and stay connected to the Refuge. You may pay your dues in order to be a member in good standing and eligible to vote. Dues are \$25.00 for an individual, \$35.00 for a family, and \$50.00 for a business. Plus, here's your chance to purchase some birthday, Valentine's Day, and just-because gifts at the Nature Store.

We are always looking for new members, so please invite your friends and family to join us at the meeting. We need to increase our membership, volunteers, and sponsors. The membership and profits from the Nature Store support educational and outreach activities as well as habitat restoration and other vital projects. The Friends could do so much more if we had more members and volunteers. Let's strive for 300 members in 2025!!! The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is underfunded. Friends groups support Refuges and Fish Hatcheries across the United States and provide additional revenue streams to protect threatened and endangered species and conserve habitat.

The mission of the Friends of Bitter Lake NWR is to uphold the refuge's creation and stewardship of quality wildlife habitat: the refuge's environmental, educational and scientific projects: projects and programs to increase the public's understanding and enjoyment of the refuge: and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge system.

We look forward to seeing you at the Membership Meeting on January 18!

Merideth Hildreth, President

Friends of Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge



Friends President, Merideth Hildreth, with a Redwood

## **Oxbow Trail Flood Damage**

The floods that raged through the Roswell area in October affected parts of the refuge and broke some levees, damaging the Oxbow Trail, and other areas. Repairs are not expected to be completed until summer, but the trail is not closed. If you decide to hike the Oxbow Trail use caution and be aware that you are using the trail at your own risk.



## **Meet Your Bitter Lake RV Volunteers**

Helen and James Ward have been volunteering at Bitter Lake for a few months now. They have made themselves an integral part of the team by helping in the bookstore and out on the refuge. As a couple, camping has always been a part of their life, and now they have decided to add volunteering to expand their involvement in the outdoors. Helen says her parents were camp hosts and enjoyed it, so it seemed a positive step in her and James's own lives.

The Wards hail from Gatesville, TX, which is in the Waco area. They wanted to find a place to volunteer that was close to their daughters. One lives in Lubbock, and another is in Ruidoso. That made Roswell an ideal location.

Bitter Lake is Helen and James's first volunteer post. They say they love the area. They describe the refuge as being extremely peaceful and they love meeting the people that come to visit. They are hoping to stay with us for awhile. Thank you for what you do to help Bitter Lake be its best!

## **Saving Our Birds With Dots!**

The next time you come to the Visitor Center, you will notice thousands of dots on the large beautiful windows that provide the dramatic vistas of Bitter Lake. As people, we enjoy these spectacular views, but for birds flying by, these windows are a life-threatening hazard. They unwittingly fly into these huge panes of glass as it looks like a clear area to fly through or shows the reflection of the sky or trees or grass to reach to

and are stunned or killed by the impact of the glass. These dots were painstakingly applied, one row at a time, to protect our feathered friends from this danger.

Bird collision window film standards recommend a visible pattern on the exterior of a window that is at least ¼ inch wide and spaced no more than 2 inches horizontally and 4 inches vertically. This pattern helps birds see the glass and reduces the likelihood of collisions. Thank you to SKG Tinting LLC for working with the refuge and finding the best solution to fit our needs.



Above: Window stickers affixed to the glass to deter birds from flying through the glass, which stuns or kills them.

Left: Contractor working to affix the strips of the dots to prevent bird collisions. The main entrance windows, side windows and back exhibit windows overlooking the refuge all have the dots affixed to them.

## Save the Fish!

In 2024, there was a continuation of a severe drought in Chaves County until the record-setting rain (5.78 inches) arrived on October 19, which led to the historic flash flooding in parts of southeast New Mexico, including Roswell and Dexter. Up until that point in August, there was approximately 3 inches of total rainfall for the year. According to NOAA, Roswell averages 10.4 inches of rain a year and 13 inches of snow a year.

Last summer, these less than favorable conditions with continuously long hot weather, and little or no rainfall or precipitation, led to drier conditions for small creeks and streams, including Bitter Creek. Our biology team monitored Bitter Creek, which has threatened and endangered species in it, including small fish like Pecos gambusia. Since 2020, parts of Bitter Creek started drying up, but the most severe drought case came in 2024, where half of the stretch of Bitter Creek dried up. This sparked action by the refuge biology team, FWS Ecological Services, BLM, and the Southwestern Native



Aquatic Resources and Recovery Center (SNARRC) in Dexter. In August 2024, staff and volunteers worked to collect 800 federally endangered Pecos gambusia for an emergency salvage to transfer to a holding pool/aquariums at SNARRC to hold, feed, and monitor until the water levels returned in October. The fish that were collected were trapped in low or drying shallow pools or runs. Solar aerators were deployed in larger pools in Bitter Creek to help increase the dissolved oxygen for the remaining fish and shade cloths were raised to help lower the temperature of the water by shading critical sections, which worked. The fish at SNARRC were returned in October when the water levels returned in Bitter Creek. Staff will continue to monitor in the future.



Refuge staff, Steve Alvarez, collecting Pecos gambusia from a shallow drying section of Bitter Creek.



L to R: Tub of Pecos gambusia fish counted and waiting to be transferred to the federal fish hatchery: Southwestern Native Aquatic Resources and Recovery Center in Dexter, NM; staff and partners bringing buckets collected back to be counted.

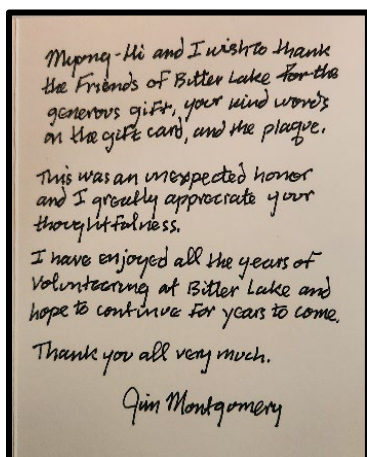
## **Bird Conservancy of the Rockies Are Here Now!**

The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies group from now through February conducting mist netting on various lands, including the refuge, BLM and TNC property, to trap and fit radio transmitters on specific grassland nesting birds, for their project "Great Plains and Chihuahuan Desert Regional Motus Network". They've reached out to see if anyone from the Friends was interested in going out to volunteer with them, even if it is for a day (or more!). The species they are tracking are Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Sprague's Pipit, and Thick-billed Longspur. Basically, you would help walk slowly flushing birds towards the nets and learn about how they capture and tag the

birds. If you are interested in volunteering while they are here through February, call the Visitor Center at 575-244-6256.

## Honoring a Very Special Volunteer Jim Montgomery

The Friends group and staff of Bitter Lake honored Jim Montgomery with a dinner at Peppers following the November Cranes and Cocoa event. Jim has been a terrific supporter, Friends board member, and volunteer for Bitter Lake for over 40 years! His deep knowledge and willingness to share what he knows has been an enormous asset to our refuge. We appreciate you, Jim, and hope you continue to be a part of our group. In other words, don't completely retire!



## Cranes and Cocoa 2024

Cranes and Cocoa, held on November 9, was a huge success! Over 100 attendees came to the Visitor Center to have cookies, enjoy cocoa and spiced tea, enjoy the exhibits on display, and listen to Jim Montgomery's presentation on cranes. Attendees then had the opportunity to caravan to the southern part of the refuge loop drive and watch the cranes settle themselves for the evening. Thank you for coming and we will see you next year!







Waiting for the sandhill cranes to return to roost at Bitter Lake NWR after the Cranes & Cocoa presentation! Our next Cranes & Cocoa event will be November 8, 2025 at 3:30 p.m.

## Avian Influenza

There has been a lot of concern related to the outbreak of avian influenza, or bird flu, that began in 2022 and has affected domestic poultry, waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds, other species of birds, and some mammals in many parts of the world. The current strain (H5N1) causes heavy losses to poultry, but is also affecting wild birds, including hawks, eagles, falcons, owls, crows, vultures, shorebirds, game birds, seabirds, and especially waterfowl such as Canada Geese, Snow Geese, and Mallards. The fear is that the flu, and also the warmer weather has been the cause of the lower number of birds migrating to Bitter Lake this year. If the birds have access to open water and food to the north, they don't need to migrate further south. The Platte River Valley in Nebraska where sandhill cranes congregate have shown large numbers wintering there this year, due to a mild winter.

The refuge biology team has been working with USDA biologists with trapping waterfowl, banding them, and swabbing ducks for avian influenza. The swabs are sent to a lab so the results are not immediate, but this effort will help with the national effort for monitoring. Monitoring efforts are also occurring throughout the state and nationally.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention considers the public health risk from avian flu to be low. However, if you come upon a sick or dead bird, contact your state wildlife health agency. If you are at the refuge, please stop by the Visitor Center and let someone know.

*Information sourced from Cornell Lab: All About Birds*



USDA biologist swabs an American wigeon at Bitter Lake NWR for avian influenza before release. The duck also was banded.

Friends of Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge



Membership Form

- ☐ Individual \$25    ☐ Family \$35  
☐ Business \$50

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in volunteer opportunities? ☐ Yes! ☐ No

Mail to:

Friends of Bitter Lake NWR

4200 E. Pine Lodge Rd.

Roswell, NM 88201

Friends of Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge  
Membership Form Instructions

Just two easy steps to join:

1. Complete the form on the left side of the sheet and mail it with your dues to the Refuge.
2. Complete the Membership Card below and keep it for your records.

(Fold Here)



Friends of Bitter Lake  
Membership Card

[www.friendsofbitterlakenwr.org](http://www.friendsofbitterlakenwr.org)

(575) 244-6256

E-mail: [bitterlakefriends@gmail.com](mailto:bitterlakefriends@gmail.com)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\*Membership expires 1 year from above date.

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