



BIG OAKS

Newsletter of Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge & Big Oaks Conservation Society

FALL 2009

President's Column

by Jim Leveille

Every season has its highlights, but it is safe to say that autumn is my favorite time of year at Big Oaks. The weather is never better and, as the leaves transition from summer's green to fall's orange, the view only gets better. Cool nights signal the onset of bow season, and hopefully, I'll get a chance to spend some quality time helping to reduce the refuge's abundant deer population. With the successful completion of all our summer events behind us, we can take pride in our contributions to the refuge. Dianna Swinney deserves kudos for her chairmanship of our OWBO event, as does Bob Dixon for Take-A-Kid Fishing Day. The longest running and most labor-intensive activity of late summer was the work done at Old Timbers Lodge. The OTL Preservation Committee of Bill Hughes, Jack Smitha, Bruce Franks and Bob Hudson have spent over 400 hours of their summer at the Lodge. Bruce Franks, as the lead electrician on the project, has multiplied (by several factors) the value of the grants we received from the Ripley County Community and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundations. His donation of time, coupled with the assistance of Bill and Jack has resulted in significant improvements to the Lodge's electrical systems. Bill Hughes' knowledge of plumbing and drain systems was put to especially good use during our water line project. Many of us support the Lodge, but these three individuals have gone way beyond

what any of the rest of us have done - digging trenches in the sun, crawling under the Lodge to hang conduit, and teetering on ladders as they ran new wire. All those who value the Lodge and what it represents to our community owe them thanks. With hunting season comes our final push to support Dr. Robb and the refuge staff. We are grateful for the assistance he, Dan Matiatos, Ashley Anderson and the rest of the staff have provided us this summer. Besides our partnership for joint refuge activities, they have also provided valuable support of our Old Timbers stewardship. With the addition of Rusty Pike, Joe's staff is now at 8.5 funded positions - a great improvement over a few short years ago. We have had excellent conversations with Congressman Hill, and he has supported and will continue to support our pursuit of a refuge visitor center and office complex. Obtaining this complex, as well as continued improvements at Old Timbers, will keep our officers and committees busy this winter. Have a great holiday season.

BOCS Board Elects New Vice President

Gary Stegner, a former employee of Jefferson Proving Ground, was elected Vice-President of BOCS at the October Board of Directors meeting. Gary recently retired from federal service as the Director of Communications and Public Affairs for the U.S. Department of Energy's Ohio Field Office. He is currently a part-time employee of the SM Stoller Corporation at the Fernald Nature Preserve. Gary holds a Masters Degree in Public Administration from Ball State University. In addition to being a member of several national conservation organizations, he is a member of Muscatatuck Wildlife Society, Indiana Audubon Society, Ohio Ornithological Society, Ox-bow Inc. and the Cincinnati Bird Club. He and his wife Sally reside near Friendship.

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2009 Outdoor Women at Big Oaks

By Diana Swinney, OWBO Chairperson

At the dawn of June 6th, as the sun rose over the tree-tops and began to shine upon Old Timbers Lodge (OTL), we knew one of our greatest hopes for the day had been fulfilled....the weather was magnificent! The 5th Annual Outdoor Women at Big Oaks (OWBO) event was ready to go....after months of coordination and effort by the Planning Committee. The hard work and preparation paid off with a successful day that was fun, safe, enjoyable, and educational for all the participants. And as I sit here and reflect, I truly believe hard work pays off and the day was deemed a success.

Sixty-two participants registered for the event. As they began to arrive at OTL for registration and a continental breakfast, one could not help but get caught up in their anticipation and excitement! The ladies were searching through their goody bags, reviewing the class assignments, checking out the classroom map, and for sure....looking over the raffle items. There were a wide variety of high quality and high-dollar value items included this year...and ticket sales of over \$1000 was a true testament to the interest the raffle generated. A special thanks to Jean Herron and Lisa Jones for their creative touch and effort in making the raffle presentation spectacular!

In addition to the classes that had been offered at previous events, 2009 brought some new offerings....Bike Riding, Tomahawk Throwing, Beadwork, and Cooking Wild Game. At the end of the day, we knew a "tree cookie" was something you throw a tomahawk at and those two guys from Ohio knew how to give wild turkey and venison a delicious gourmet touch that can be replicated in our own kitchen or backyard. The post-event evaluations proved that the classes and instructors were highly rated by the participants. We tip our hats to the volunteer instructors, for they always come with well planned learning opportunities and the dedication and patience it takes to conduct the classes. Their help allows us to meet two of the primary goals of the OWBO event: an introduction to the refuge and participation in outdoor activities to women who may never otherwise experience them.

I speak for the Planning Committee with heartfelt

thanks and appreciation to everyone who helped to make the 2009 OWBO event a success! Without the generosity of our volunteer's time and effort, donations, community contributions, and corporate sponsors, the event would not be a success. A special word of thanks goes to Dr. Joe Robb and the entire refuge staff for their generous support in planning, instructor acquisitions, set-up and event day assistance. Thanks also to the members of BOCS for their May OTL cleanup day and the "grounds grooming" just days before, helped make OTL the ideal site for this event.

So where do we go from here? Hopefully, we will begin to plan for our 6th event. Many of the participants from this year plan to return again! Significant interest was expressed in expanding the event to allow for more classes....so we have much to ponder as we move into 2010. I believe....if we plan...they will come!





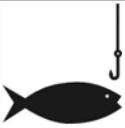
Google Earth Includes Refuge Boundaries

Google Earth allows users to display high-resolution aerial and satellite imagery of virtually any place on earth – and now the boundaries of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The basic free version of Google Earth includes dozens of data layers with an assortment of mapping information such as roads, geographic pictures, famous places, businesses, 3D buildings and picture galleries. When a layer is turned on, icons appear with links to additional information.

To view the Refuge System, first download the most recent version of Google Earth from <http://earth.google.com/index.html> and click “download Google Earth 5.0.” To activate the Refuge System boundaries, in the “layers” panel on the bottom left of the screen, scroll down to “places of interest” and click the plus sign (+) to expand the list. Scroll down again to the “parks and recreation areas” and expand this list. Click in the empty box to the left of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Refuge System boundaries are now turned on.

By pressing Ctrl+Alt+C, users can copy a screen image for use in documents or presentations. More advanced options available in the free version of Google Earth include adding customized information, recording a personalized flyby tour, advanced viewing option such as 3D terrain and ocean bathymetry, and adding map plug-ins to Web sites. GPS tracks, including from many Garmin, Magellan, and NMEA-compatible devices, can be uploaded to Google Earth, allowing a user to visualize running, hiking and biking trails.



BOCS Hosts Seventh Annual Take-A-Kid Fishing Day

On June 13, 2008, Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge hosted its seventh annual Take-A-Kid Fishing Day at Old Timbers Lake. The 167-acre lake provided plenty of action for the youth and their families on a perfect weather day.

The refuge event was co-sponsored by the Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS), which prepared free meals and organized the event, and by RKO Enterprises of Madison, whose generous donation paid for fishing prizes for the kids. Other sponsors included Madison's Wal-Mart and DMF Bait Company, who donated food and bait for the event. Volunteers from Versailles Boy Scout Troop 607 helped with set up, bait distribution and clean up. Every participant received a free fishing supply kit. The day ended with a casting contest and a random drawing for door prizes. This year's prizes included numerous fishing poles, tackle boxes, and other various fishing equipment. And thanks to our generous sponsors, every child who attended received a prize.

For the past seven years, Take-A-Kid Fishing Day has proven to be a very popular way to introduce kids to fishing and families to Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge. The annual event encourages families to visit the refuge lake and provides an opportunity to fish at no charge. Volunteers assist inexperienced anglers, and the refuge provides rods and reels, as well as bait, free of charge.



Prize winners at the 2009 Take-A-Kid Fishing Day

ULSTER PROJECT Teens Visit to Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge

by Bob Hudson

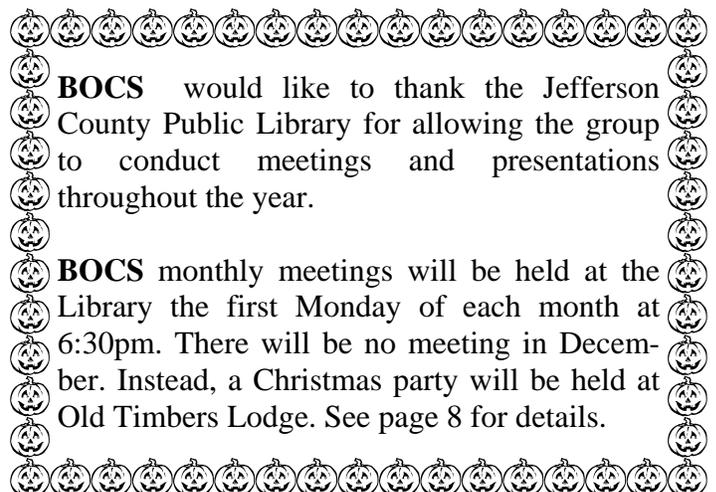
On July 2, 2009, 24 teenagers, 12 each from Ireland and the United States visited Big Oaks. They were escorted by their adult leaders to learn about our wildlife refuge, the history of the Jefferson Proving Ground (JPG), and to do a work project for Big Oaks Conservation Society (BOCS). The standard briefing for all visitors was given by Dan Matiatos, Refuge Operations Specialist. This was followed by a presentation by Zack Walker, a naturalist from Hardy Lake, about raptors and snakes. The kids showed great interest and handled the snakes without fear.

Following the presentation, they were taken to Old Timbers Lodge to do a work project.

The kids toured the lodge and ate lunch before getting to work. BOCS volunteer, Bill Hughes, provided the materials and supervised the teens as they stained numerous picnic tables recently acquired by BOCS. Approximately five gallons of stain were applied, greatly improving the tables. A few of the tables were kept at the lodge for future events, while the rest have been distributed throughout the refuge, primarily around Old Timbers Lake.

Upon departure, the Ulster kids toured the lake and the north end of the refuge before returning to Madison and their parents/ sponsors. The kids had a good time and were thankful for the day's visit.

A big thank you goes out to Dr. Joe Robb and his refuge staff for hosting the group and to the Ulster Project kids for their work at the lodge.


BOCS would like to thank the Jefferson County Public Library for allowing the group to conduct meetings and presentations throughout the year.

BOCS monthly meetings will be held at the Library the first Monday of each month at 6:30pm. There will be no meeting in December. Instead, a Christmas party will be held at Old Timbers Lodge. See page 8 for details.

ICE CREAM SOCIAL HELD AT OAKDALE SCHOOL

by Ken Knouf

On a warm summer July 6th evening, approximately 75 BOCS members and friends gathered at Oakdale School, just north of the Morgan Road gate at the south boundary of the refuge. It was a perfect evening to hand-turn homemade ice cream. Thanks go to BOCS Vice-President Dave Bear and several other determined “crankers” as well as Wilma Hughes, Amber Fields, Judy Schafer, and others who contributed pastries. The group reveled in the camaraderie and did not worry about calories.

Oakdale is one of the few pre-military historic structures remaining on the refuge and proved an ideal location for July’s meeting. The event attracted several potential new members, and there were at least two attendees who actually went to school there before the Army closed it in February of 1941. The simple one-room limestone school structure was built in 1869 and stands as one of the few stone one-room school buildings left in southern Indiana. For over 70 years, Oakdale teachers provided a good education to kids who attended from 1st through 8th grade. Records indicate that in one year, 55 students were squeezed into the small building---hard to imagine even with students sitting together at double desks.

Local teacher Pam Zehren attended the event and mentioned to the group that her mother Francis Yancey is the last surviving teacher to have taught at Oakdale. Pam will be presenting a more in-depth look at Oakdale at the November 2nd BOCS meeting at the Madison Library.

Oakdale School was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991. The school was partially restored by the Army for JPG’s 50th anniversary and has received some more recent repairs thanks to the Jefferson Preservation Council. There are plans to re-plaster the inside and to re-paint the room with a more historically accurate green paint. Although the current vivid green was based on paint chips removed from the 1991 restoration, returning students who attended as kids are quick to point out that they don’t remember the classroom being quite that dramatic. We’ll get it right this time.



Summer Projects at OTL Complete

by Jim Leveille

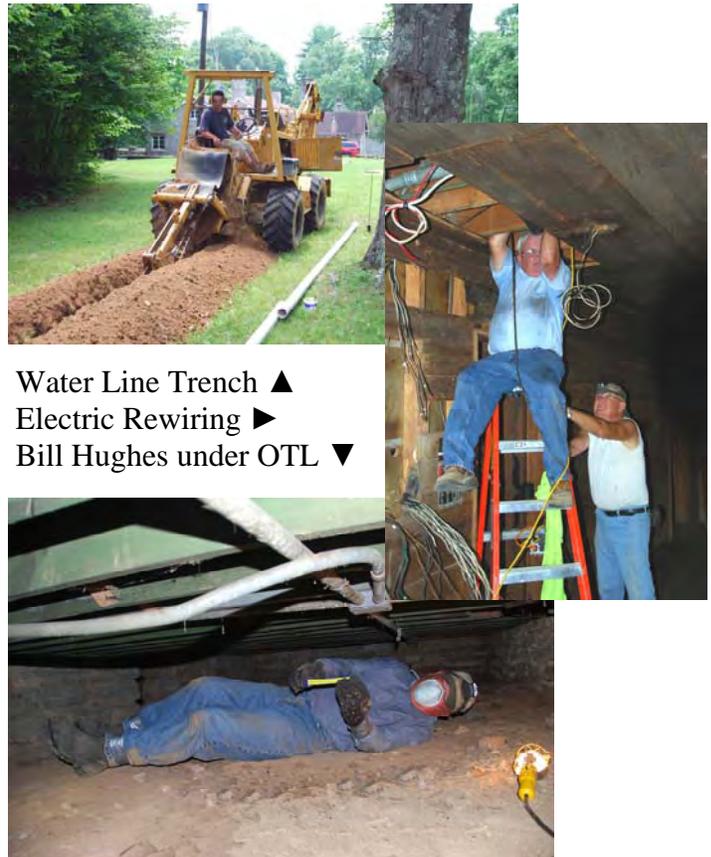
As reported last spring, BOCS received grants totaling \$25,000 for work at Old Timbers Lodge (OTL) from the Ripley County Community Foundation (RCCF) and \$15,000 from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF). For much of the summer, the sounds of backhoes, power saws and tractors swirled about the normally quiet grounds of the Lodge. The process that allowed these electrical and water line improvements actually started much earlier. Last winter, BOCS volunteers, including grant writer, Donna Errett, contacted RCCF and NFWF to obtain information on the grant process. Permission was obtained from the Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer to dig in the areas affected by the water line replacement. The Army also granted permission for the project, as it must do any time excavation occurs on the refuge. With those clearances in place, Donna built a package detailing the BOCS' goals of replacing the existing water line and rehabilitating and modernizing the electrical systems of the Lodge.

The project was divided into two phases: the first being the replacement and installation of multiple electrical components. The second, which ran concurrently, was the replacement of the existing three-inch water line, which ran from K-Road to the Lodge. Phase one required the services of licensed electrician and BOCS member, Bruce Franks. He was assisted by BOCS volunteers, Bill Hughes and Jack Smitha. The 77-year-old Lodge was a hodgepodge of old wiring and components that had been modified over its six-decade control by the Army. The work required the removal and rerouting of multiple wires and components. The first step was the installation of a double pole, double throw, top-pole disconnect device. This device, allowing the power to be disconnected from outside the Lodge, is required by current electrical code, and permits an electrician to de-power the Lodge for electrical work. The top-pole disconnect also permits a fire department to easily disconnect power in the event of a fire or electrical problem. With the disconnect device in place, obsolete components were replaced with new ones. A full 400-Amp capacity was installed with two new breaker boxes. Old wire not in conduit was replaced with new wire in conduit. New junction boxes, wiring troughs, outlets, and smoke and carbon monoxide detectors were installed. As work progressed, we were able to optimize Bruce's expertise with the assistance of Bill and Jack, who did the yeomen's work of running wires in conduit, removing and replacing boards and installing fire detectors. In all,

BOCS members contributed over 400 hours of work and allowed the successful completion of the project with most grant money spent on new components in lieu of labor.

With Phase 2, BOCS replaced the current leaking water line with a new 3-inch schedule SDR21 pipe. Marking wire was installed along the 1700' length of the line. This work, along with the installation and rerouting of two external faucets, a new flush hydrant and valve boxes was accomplished by our contractor, Mike Holman Excavating, Inc. The hydrant was located so as to provide a water-refilling source for firefighting vehicles. BOCS volunteers accomplished the grading and reseeded of the disturbed soil, including the removal of rocks and broken pipe, and the application of straw to prevent erosion. They also added rock and gravel where required to reinforce collapsing soil at a ridge crossing point and to replace sections of the driveway that were dug up. Work also included the repair and/or replacement of various drain lines that were cut when the water lines were trenched.

While Bruce, Bill and Jack labored in the trenches (and under the floor)of the Lodge, they not only improved Old Timbers , they also were able to learn a great deal about what work had been done before, and most importantly, what work will need to be done in the future if the Lodge is to be preserved and improved.



Water Line Trench ▲
Electric Rewiring ►
Bill Hughes under OTL ▼

Aerial Spray Project at Big Oaks NWR Goes Off Without a Hitch.....

by Beth Black

Big Oaks NWR has some amazing grasslands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages those grasslands for nesting birds such as Henslow's sparrows and meadowlarks. We also manage the grasslands for wintering birds and other species of wildlife that use grasslands. Keeping woody vegetation out of grasslands is one of our main habitat management tasks. We accomplish this with prescribed fire and occasionally, aerial herbicide application. This year, approximately 300 acres, located around D Road and Cottrell, were determined to be in need of treatment. Invasive woody plants treated were black locust, sweetgum and autumn olive.

On Monday, September 14th the weather, equipment and most importantly staff were all in place in order to pull off one of the biggest habitat management projects of the year. The spray crew arrived a day early from Maine with the helicopter in tow. This early arrival did not fluster Big Oaks staff one bit. Instead, everyone mobilized to take the project on. First it was determined that more herbicide would be needed. Wildlife Refuge Specialist Ashley Buchanan was "dispatched" to Muncie to pick up several gallons of the herbicide. Brian Winters, Dave Jones and Paul Killian, (Big Oaks fire crew) kept the project "flowing" by hauling water. They hauled 3,000 gallons of water using the dump truck and a 1,000 gallon tank and another 2,000 gallons of water using the fire engines. Thanks to their precision water hauling, there was never "down time" waiting for water. Ashley arrived from Muncie just in time; the first batch of herbicide had just run out. The crew from CPS (Crop Production Services) was well organized and knowledgeable and willing to work into the evening in order to see the project through to completion in a single day. Oftentimes a project like this will take several days. With everyone working as a team, the task was finished in a single day.

Meanwhile, the refuge was open for public use, so the rest of the staff covered those duties. Assistant Manager Dan Matiatos said, "This was a big project and to finish it all in one day was great". Dan went on to thank the crew for giving the project their complete attention.

Fighting Fire With Fire

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has turned to the medium that kids love -- video games -- to encourage them to go outside and learn about the environment. Designed for youngsters 8 to 11, the online game, *Neighborhood Explorers*, is available at the Service's Let's Go Outside! Web site, <http://www.fws.gov/letsgooutside>.

Neighborhood Explorers provides an excellent educational opportunity. By participating, kids learn about nature and are encouraged to spend more time outside. Children can also learn about problems that the environment is facing and ways to help solve the problems.

The journey through the game begins when you meet three children -- Mia, Lucy and Steve -- who gather in a tree house and talk about all the fun outdoor activities they did over the summer. They form a Neighborhood Explorers Club, called the NX Club, and share information about planting gardens with native plants, backyard bird watching and urban wildlife. By exploring the tree house with the cursor, kids can learn about endangered species, conservation heroes and threats to the natural world. Then they can play a Jeopardy-like trivia game.

Other activities include recording nature sightings in their backyards, a race against time to find a missing praying mantis in the midst of an urban neighborhood, and identifying birds. At the end of the game, youngsters can receive a gold, silver or bronze patch, depending on points scored. Every game is a fun challenge as well as a valuable educational experience. Players can also receive patches for documenting environmental projects and local wildlife.

When kids earn all five patches, they can receive a free tree from the Arbor Day Foundation. After earning all five patches, youngsters will be directed to the Arbor Day Foundation Web site, where they can provide name and address to get the free tree and directions for planting. Only 450 trees are available.

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E-mail: bigoaks@fws.gov
Website: www.fws.gov/midwest/bigoaks

REFUGE STAFF

Dr. Joe Robb - Refuge Manager
Dan Matiatos - Wildlife Refuge Specialist
Ashley Buchanan - Wildlife Refuge Specialist
Perry Williams - Wildlife Biologist
Brian Winters - Fire Management Officer
David Jones - Lead Range Technician
Casey Mefford - Range Technician
Beth Black - Park Ranger
Lisa Jones - Park Ranger
Laura Lake - Park Ranger
Rusty Pike - Maintenance
Paul Killian - Fire Intern
Andrew Hoffman - Intern

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Would you like to become a Big Oaks Volunteer? Opportunities are plentiful to assist refuge staff in their management of the sprawling 50,000-acre refuge. There are a variety of positions available.

Those who enjoy fieldwork and the outdoors are needed to lead wildlife and educational tours at the refuge. Individuals or community-minded groups are also needed for bi-annual litter pick-ups along the refuge roadsides. Both of these tasks permit volunteers the opportunity to access Big Oaks at no cost and to see areas of the refuge not commonly viewed by typical visitors. If indoor tasks are more your cup of tea, then consider the refuge's need for speakers who can visit schools and civic groups to speak about Big Oaks. Those interested in becoming ambassadors for Big Oaks would receive instruction and training in the history and on-going projects associated with the refuge. For individuals who don't care to wander Big Oaks vast spaces, or are intimidated at the prospect of speaking to strangers, then the friendly U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff could always use help in their office. This could involve checking in visitors, answering phones, or aiding in the refuge's safety-briefing program. The opportunity to become involved is open to all.

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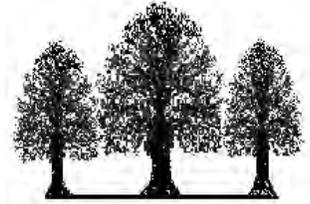
BIG OAKS Conservation Society

in support of

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge

Newsletter Editor
Lisa Jones

Special Thanks to:
Joe Robb and
Big Oaks Staff



BIG OAKS Conservation Society Membership Benefits

-  10% discount on merchandise
-  opportunities to participate in special refuge events
-  contribute to the improvement of the refuge for all visitors
-  Big Oaks Newsletter

VISITOR INFORMATION

All visitors must annually view a safety video and sign an acknowledgment of danger form. This will give you access to the areas designated for public use. There is a daily access fee, or users may purchase an annual pass. The day use area covers 4,170 acres. An additional 22,500 acres is open to the public for special hunts and guided tours. The public may access the refuge from mid-April to the end of November every Monday and Friday, and the second and fourth Saturdays from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

BIG OAKS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Mission Statement: To support the goals of wildlife conservation and habitat restoration at Big Oaks NWR; develop environmental education programs; enhance public awareness; encourage use and appreciation for the natural and cultural assets unique to Big Oaks.

**BIG OAKS
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
2009 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

| | |
|-----------|--|
| January | River Otters slide in the snow |
| February | Great Horned Owls nest |
| March | Prescribed burning |
| April | Migrating birds, wildflowers, fishing begins 18th youth turkey hunt workshop, 19th youth hunt |
| May | 16th Lodge Cleanup! |
| June | 6th Outdoor Women at Big Oaks, 13th Take a Kid Fishing Day ****JUNE 15th - JULY 15th REFUGE CLOSED**** |
| July | 18th Butterfly survey |
| August | 15th Squirrel season starts |
| September | Migration begins! |
| October | Deer archery season, Winterize Lodge |
| November | Deer shotgun season, Youth Deer Hunt |
| December | Christmas Bird Count |



**Big Oaks
Conservation Society
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Board Members

Jim Leveille - President
Gary Stegner - Vice President
Jean Herron - Secretary &
Business Manager
Natalie Gilpin - Treasurer
Bill Hughes - Board Member
Bob Hudson - Board Member
Ed Schaefer - Board Member
Joe Robb - Executive Secretary

www.bigoaks.org



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