

## National Elk Refuge News – May 14, 2013

*Refuge Increases Jackson District Boy Scout Revenue*



*Several Scouts line up to take turns carrying antler bundles onto the stage during the annual antler auction on Jackson's Town Square.*

With this year's annual antler auction only days away, both National Elk Refuge staff and Jackson District Boy Scout leaders are busy making final preparations for Saturday's event. The renowned sale on the Jackson Town Square generates critical funding for Refuge habitat projects. This year, the Scouts will see an increase in the percentage of revenue they receive from the Refuge for assistance with the auction.

The partnership between the National Elk Refuge and Jackson District Boy Scouts is long-standing and is supported

by a 1985 Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Boy Scouts of America. The agreement states the Department will be involved in Boy Scout program activities to the extent they pertain to the conservation, management, and development of the nation's natural resources. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a bureau within the Department of the Interior, also expresses support for Boy Scout educational programs through a policy that encourages Service employees to foster communication with Scout leaders and offer guidance and support for Scout programs and

activities related to conservation and natural resource management.

The Jackson District Boy Scouts play an integral role in the collection and sale of antlers from elk wintering on the Refuge. This year's antler auction on May 18 will be the 46<sup>th</sup> consecutive year for the event that showcases the unique partnership between the Jackson District Boy Scouts and the National Elk Refuge.

Each spring, Refuge staff begins collecting antlers as soon as they start dropping, or "shed," in early March. Not only does this reduce the incidents of illegal poaching,



*A Scout proudly holds up his find during the spring antler collection.*

but it helps avoid damage to equipment that could occur if the antlers are accidentally run over during refuge management operations like supplemental feeding, spring harrowing, or irrigating.

Through an annual special use permit, the Jackson District Boy

Scouts are allowed to help Refuge staff pick up antlers in late April and early May, making a final sweep for antlers to sell at the auction. Approximately 100 Scouts and their leaders participate in the spring antler collection.

Several weeks later, the Scouts

take center stage during the annual auction, held each year on the Saturday before Memorial Day weekend. Alone or in groups of two, Scouts carry antlers up to the stage bundle by bundle as bidders vie for ownership of the sale item.

Wedged in between the two visible activities are hundreds of hours of preparation rarely seen by the public, behind-the-scenes work that couldn't be accomplished by the Refuge staff alone. In addition to preparing the antlers for sale, Scout leaders help advertise the event through an ElkFest web site, register bidders, make logistical arrangements for the sale, and coordinate with dozens of Scouts and leaders to assist on the day of the auction.

A week before the auction, Scout leaders begin preparing the collected antlers for sale. Volunteers sort the antlers, separating out those that are broken, non-typical, or heavy six, seven, and eight-point in size.



*Sorting the antlers and creating individual sale lots is a full day's work, completed by a large pool of Scout volunteers.*



*A Scout volunteer matches a pair of antlers to sell as a set at the auction.*



*Groups of antlers are weighed and tagged in preparation for the auction.*

Individual antlers are grouped into various sized bundles, then taped or tied together to create a cluster that will be sold as one auction item. Scout leaders look for antlers that have the same curvature, color, and texture with

the tines coming off the main beam in roughly the same place for those buyers who will build chandeliers, lamps, or other items where similarity between the antlers is important. Volunteers also make up matched pairs whenever

possible, coveted by individuals or vendors who may resell them.

After the bundles are created, Scout leaders weigh and tag each group. During the auction, the antlers are sold per pound, so bidders need to know the total weight of any lots they may be interested in purchasing. As soon as a bundle of antlers is weighed, a tag listing both the lot number and the total weight of the antler bundle is attached. The laborious process takes many hours and is spread out over several days.

“When it’s all said and done, the Jackson District Scouts donate around 2,000 hours every spring towards the preparation and sale of antlers,” explained Refuge Manager Steve Kallin. “That’s the equivalent of a full-time employee working a 40-hour week for a full year.” For their work, Scouts have historically received 20% of the auction proceeds to go towards their Friends of Scouting fees.



*Once bundles of antlers are ready for sale, they are loaded onto pallets and trucks to be transported to the Town Square on the morning of the auction.*



*Antlers are laid out on the Town Square and available for viewing prior to the start of the auction.*

This spring, Kallin revised a Memorandum of Understanding with the local Boy Scout district to increase their share of proceeds to 25%, reflecting the increase in dues the local district has struggled to pay. “We recognize the extent of their work and the extraordinary effort it takes to pull this off an event of this scale,” Kallin added.

Cliff Kirkpatrick, who chairs the antler sale committee for the Jackson District Boy Scouts, acknowledges the importance of the increased share of revenue. “The additional funding will help us cover the fees required to even offer scouting here in Jackson,” he explained. “It will also help us to continue supplementing fees for day camps, leader and Scout training, Eagle Scout and leader recognition dinners, and other district activities.” Other districts rely on donations by parents, leaders, community members, and businesses to pay the Friends

of Scouting fees.

This Saturday, Scout leaders will start their morning at 5:00 am, loading up antlers to haul to the Town Square and have set up by 7:00. Prospective buyers have

several hours to look at the selections prior to the auction’s 10:00 start. Though the auction itself lasts several hours, the work for many Scout leaders will not end till the last chores are completed in late afternoon or early evening.



*Two scouts stand on the stage with an auction lot during the bidding process.*