

National Elk Refuge News - October 21, 2016

Historic Miller House Work Wraps Up for the Season



Refuge volunteers Tony Hough and Pete Thilmany assist Jack Shinkle with fitting a new log onto the south wall of the Miller House.

Historic preservation work at the Miller House is wrapping up this month, with the Refuge's premier cultural resource now sporting new logs that will help maintain the structure's integrity.

The aging wooden buildings known as the Miller Ranch have been on site since the turn of the 20th century. The Miller House and surrounding land was the first property purchased by the Federal government to become part of the National Elk Refuge, which was established in 1912. The Miller House is open during the summer season, allowing visitors to step

back in time and listen to stories of homesteading, ranching, and conservation.

The historic ranch house underwent extensive rehabilitation in 2007, though most of the work focused on the interior. Refuge staff recently noted some of the exterior logs, particularly those on the south side of the building, were beginning to rot. Through another project underway on the Refuge, staff met up with a carpenter skilled in log work who eventually went on to become the lead in the Miller House preservation work that began late this summer.



A cross section of a sill log reveals the rotting.



Jack Shinkle measures the end of a log prior to cutting the lap joint corner.

Earlier this year, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and Union Sportsmen's Alliance came together to donate services, materials, and labor to construct a shed that will be used to store antlers prior to each year's elk antler auction held on Jackson's Town Square. One of the Union Sportsmen's Alliance volunteers involved in the planning and logistics for the shed project was Jack Shinkle, who has spent much of his career specializing in high-end home log carpentry. Most recently, he was employed through a 5-year contract at the Western Center for Historic Preservation in neighboring Grand Teton National Park.

Once Deputy Refuge Manager Cris Dippel met Shinkle and learned of his specialized skills, he asked if Shinkle would assess the logs on the Miller House and determine the scope of work needed to replace them. Shinkle, born and raised as fourth-generation in the Jackson Hole valley, was eager to

assess the historic structure.

Recognizing the expertise needed to follow guidelines for restoration work on historic structures, Dippel subsequently contracted with Shinkle to complete the work on

the Miller House. "We were very fortunate Jack was available for the project," Dippel said.

Shinkle followed *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, which calls for replacing removed materials with those of the same type and style. It also requires use of the same craftsmanship. Consequently, all the replacement logs were handcrafted without the use of power tools.

Shinkle regularly teaches the craft of log building using only hand tools. Refuge volunteers and staff who helped on the project were able to learn from the mentor and develop log replacement skills of their own. Auto Mechanic Fernando Escobedo, who worked on the project for several weeks, cherished the learning opportunity. "It's a great trade to know," he said, "and the hands-on experience was fantastic." He added, "You can't get this kind of experience from just taking a class."



Fernando Escobedo hews the flat side of a log to fit against the backside of the wall's interior paneling.