

# President's Column

By: Jim Jackson



Big Oaks Conservation Society has experienced a significant resurgence since our last newsletter. Our summer and early autumn events have been very successful.

Outdoor Women at Big Oaks was sold out again this year, with many “first time” attendees. Another of our premier events, Take A Kid Fishing Day drew well over 100 enthusiastic youthful fisherman (and gals), many enjoying the pleasures of fishing for the first time. The August Ice Cream Social at the one-room stone Schoolhouse, Oakdale School, was very well attended (despite being hidden behind the stands of corn). Again, the ice cream was delicious, hand-made on the spot, and the pitch-in desserts were tasty.

Lodge Days, a new event, was added this year; Old Timbers Lodge was opened to the public for the first time since the inception of BOCS. As this was a new endeavour, it was uncertain how well it would be attended. Expectations were that over 80 visitors would be a good turnout, and 100 or more would be exceptional; we were pleased that approximately 300 persons visited the Lodge. Many of the attendees had never seen the Lodge or visited the refuge. Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge enrolled some new volunteers, BOCS added several new members, and over \$800 in merchandise was sold as a result of this activity. The new indoor facilities were in use by Lodge Day, thanks to the efforts of Fred Swinney, the Lodge committee and hard-working volunteers.

**BIG OAKS CONSERVATION SOCIETY**

**NEWSLETTER OF BIG OAKS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
& BIG OAKS CONSERVATION SOCIETY**

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## President's Column Cont.

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As of the writing of this column, the BONWR Youth Deer Hunt has just taken place – it continues to be the largest youth deer hunt of its kind in the nation, and planning for the annual Christmas Party at Old Timbers Lodge is underway.

As successful as these events have been, something more important is happening within Big Oaks Conservation Society. A membership committee was activated this year and with the efforts of the committee and the successful events noted above, our membership is growing again; we are very fortunate to now have a new board member with youthful enthusiasm and much needed skills. An introduction to our new director, Jessica Stewart, is found elsewhere in this issue. Other new members are bringing the skills to assist BOCS with the upgrading, development, and maintenance of what will soon be a dynamic new website.

In our successes of this summer and fall, BOCS has affirmed that as a Friends group to our Refuge, we have much of value to offer the public, the Refuge, and our members. We are growing - adding new members, enjoying the return of some former members. We are learning what it takes to better promote our events to the public, and to attract new faces and new families to experience the treasures of our Refuge (some for the first time). We take pride in what we at Big Oaks Conservation Society have to offer.

The challenges to our organization have been well detailed in previous editions of this newsletter. The above successful events and resurgence of energy and enthusiasm this summer and autumn have brought to BOCS the realization that we can continue to successfully meet our challenges, and the understanding that we must continue to do so. Bring it on!

## Birding in the National Wildlife Refuge System

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From Bald eagles and blue-winged teal to sand hill cranes and puffins, thousands of birds show their colors and their intriguing habits on our national wildlife refuges. Now, the National Wildlife Refuge System website has new pages devoted to birding, to encourage and assist more refuge visitors in their birding activities. At [fws.gov/refuges/birding](https://fws.gov/refuges/birding) visitors can find special events and birding festivals, activities for families, and discover how refuges protect birds and their habitat. A section on backyard birding tells about food preferences for wild birds in North America by region. This website also provides links to Bird Tracker, which shows current bird sighting at refuges. There is even a section outlining what refuges and refuge Friends groups can do to enhance and improve the birding experience. This is a very helpful website for those interested in birding activities on our National Wildlife Refuges.



# Old Timbers Lodge Update

By: Fred Swinney, Chairman  
OTL Committee

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I am sitting at my desk looking at a calendar that tells me it is October 30<sup>th</sup>. Makes me wonder what happened to August and September and at the same time makes me admit there is long list of things that did not get done this summer. On the brighter side, I have a OTL task list for 2015 already started! It feels good to be ahead of schedule, for once....

2014 has been a year of significant changes at OTL. The biggest change was the instillation of the mound sewage handling system that began in October 2013 and was completed in the spring of 2014. That project included replacing all drain lines inside the lodge to their original locations. No other plumbing lines or repairs within the lodge were included in the original project.

One of the main goals was to eventually have operational restroom facilities inside the lodge once again. The BOCS Board of Directors formulated a plan to repair and replace restroom fixtures for two restrooms in an effort to meet the end goal. BOCS has provided all the materials and labor for the project and slow, but continual progress is being made. Everything is being put back in the same location and will work out just fine. We will be working to finish up the wiring, installing the hot water heater, and shower completion before December. Numerous BOCS members have been involved in this work project along the way and the help has been greatly appreciated! I can only say “thank you” for your help and it doesn’t happen without you.

Two clean-up days were conducted this year, with the most recent one having been moved up to September in an effort to prepare the lodge for the open house event. We had some new faces in attendance in September, along with the usual participants. While the overall work crew number continues to be a bit small, the group is always extremely efficient and productive! Everyone seems to have an area or job they like to perform and come with a “can do” attitude and things just happen. At the end of the day, the house was clean, the windows sparkled, the perennial bed was groomed, and the grounds were in tip top shape!

The Women in the Outdoors event was big this year as always. We had nothing but good feedback about the Lodge and grounds. It does make a person feel good when things like this are noticed and someone acknowledges the efforts!

Perhaps one of the greatest rewards was the OTL Open House turnout in September. The Board of Directors are always trying to get more people interested in BOCS and look for ways to make this happen. Some ideas work and others do not, but the Open House was a huge success, far exceeding our expectations! We estimate 250-300 people came to visit that day. This was a great idea and hopefully an event that will continue to be conducted in the future. We are thankful to the volunteers who helped make this happen. A special thanks to Dr. Joe Robb and his staff for set-up assistance, gate access, manpower, and oversight. Activities of this nature simply cannot happen without the Refuge support and involvement.

The last big OTL event for the year will be the Christmas Party on Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup>. Modern, operational restroom facilities will be a welcome surprise to those in attendance this year! There will be plenty of work to be done to prepare for the one evening of festivities. Feel free to let us know if anyone has some free time they want to donate to the cause!

As we close out 2014, we look toward 2015 and new projects to put on our OTL “wishlist”. If anyone has an idea for a project to be considered, please feel free to talk to me or any other Board of Director member so we can get it into the conversation. Once again, I want to say thank you to everyone who helped this year and look forward to working with you in 2015.

# 2014 Big Oaks NWR Deer Hunting Season Report

By Ben Walker

The deer hunt season at Big Oaks NWR was a huge success; hunters harvested a total of 500 deer from the refuge which is spot on with our management target! Early gun hunters experienced unseasonably cooler temperatures and snowfall that is typical in the late season deer hunts in Indiana. Despite the low temperatures, a total of 133 determined youth hunters were present on November 1<sup>st</sup> and Big Oaks NWR was at maximum capacity during the first three gun hunts! New the past two years was the refuge's Primitive Muzzleloader Hunt in October, which allowed the public an early gun hunt with a firearm more commonly used in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Refuge staff members were not able to accurately gauge the popularity of this hunt due to last year's government shutdown. It proved to be a very popular event with just under 300 hunters participating in the two-day hunt. The success of the deer hunting season at Big Oaks NWR would not be possible without the tireless efforts of the Big Oaks Conservation Society and our volunteers; a big thank you goes out to all that helped make this a great season!



**Kyle Yoder, successful Youth Hunter**

## *BOCS Annual Holiday Party 2014*

Another year has blown by like the cold winds that we have had to endure in the recent past. With that being said the Big Oaks Conservation Society got to celebrate the season with a very festive Holiday gathering at Old Timbers Lodge. Rolling Pin catered the event and there was wonderful food, merriment, and memories made.



## Big Oaks NWR is now on Facebook!

By Ben Walker

In an effort to further reach the public, the staff at Big Oaks NWR manage a Facebook page to provide updates on the refuge's activities. To date, we have had over 700 people "Like" Big Oaks NWR's page and have reached thousands of people through weekly updates. Popular posts include community events such as Outdoor Women at Big Oaks, Lodge Days, and the Big Oaks NWR Deer Hunts. In addition to community events, the staff documents progress on different refuge projects to give an "inside-look" at the happenings of a National Wildlife Refuge. During the past year, followers received updates on wetland management and restoration, crawfish frog fieldwork, acoustical bat monitoring, and prescribed fire season! Check back often for page updates and event reminders and please "Like" us to receive updates, as 2015 will be a year you won't want to miss!

<https://www.facebook.com/BigOaksNWR>



## Meet your new board member

At the annual meeting of BOCS at Capability Farm, three directors were elected to the BOCS board of directors; current board members Dave Bear and Fred Swinney were re-elected to serve another term. Our new director is Jessica Stewart. We welcome Jessica to the Board, and are eager to experience the expertise, energy, and innovation Jessica will bring to our organization.

Jessica, age 30, resides in Hanover with her husband, Jason, as well as three cats, 6 ball pythons, a dog, and her uncle, Arnold Tilley, who retired from JPG. Jessica is a Madison Consolidated High School graduate (2002); she obtained a BA degree in Psychology from Indiana University (2006), and earned an MS degree in Human Services from Capella University in 2010. Currently, Jessica is employed by the State of Indiana, and has been the manager of the Madison WorkOne since May 2011.

Jessica states, "Since I grew up in Madison I spent a lot of time on JPG – watching the mini-boat races and hunting Morels. My husband and I love the outdoors and often go camping. We actually camp in tents, too! We also fish, and Jason is an avid hunter and outdoorsman. I am glad to be a part of this group and hope my youthfulness can bring some more of the younger generation in to help us with our mission. I would love to see more millennials involved. I hope I can bring new and fresh ideas to the table and help with all the great programs that are already in place. Thank you for choosing me to be a part of the BOCS family."



If you would like to join or rejoin the Big Oaks Conservation Society to support the refuge, please fill out this membership form and send along with your check to:

CHECK HERE FOR RENEWAL

CHECK HERE FOR NEW MEMBER

**Yearly Membership Form (Oct 2014-Sept 2015). Please select a category above.**

\_\_\_ Youth \$5

\_\_\_ Individual \$15

\_\_\_ Family \$25

\_\_\_ Supporting \$25

\_\_\_ Lifetime (per individual) \$150

\_\_\_ Corporate \$500

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

If you would like to join, or rejoin, the Big Oaks Conservation Society, please fill out this membership form and send along with your check to: **Big Oaks Conservation Society, P.O. Box 935 Madison IN 47250**

#### **Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge**

1661 W. JPG Niblo Road

Madison IN 47250

Phone: 812-273-0783

E-mail: bigoaks@fws.gov

Website: www.fws.gov/refuge/big\_oaks

Like Us on Facebook: Big Oaks NWR!

#### **REFUGE STAFF**

**Dr Joe Robb**– Refuge Manager

**Mardean Roach**– Administrative Asst.

**Ben Walker**– Wildlife Biologist

**Brian Winters**– Fire Management Office

**Casey Mefford**– Fire Range Technician

**Kerry Brinson**– Maintenance Worker

**Kim Brinson**– Maintenance Worker

**Lisa Jones**– Park Ranger

**Beth Black**– Park Ranger

**Keith Tyra**--Experience Works Employee

**Kelsey Flowers, Todd Gerardot, Cassy**

**Schaad, Jonathan Spiess**– Interns

#### **Big Oaks Conservation Society**

##### Newsletter

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Jessica Stewart

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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



Big Oaks Conservation Society  
P.O. Box 935  
Madison, IN 47250

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## **BIG OAKS NWR**

### **2015 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**February 2 BOCS Meeting Jefferson Cty Library, Jason Lewis, Ottawa NWR 6:30 PM**

**March 2 BOCS Meeting Jefferson Cty Library, Bill McCoy, Patoka River NWR 6:30 PM**

**March 17 Crawfish frogs start singing!**

**April 6 BOCS Meeting Jefferson Cty Library TBA; Safety Briefing shown.**

**April 17 Public Use Re-Opens at Big Oaks NWR!**

**April 18 Youth Turkey Hunt Workshop, Noon**

**June 6 Old Timbers Lodge Cleanup Day**

**June 13 Outdoor Women at Big Oaks**



**Big Oaks Conservation Society  
P.O. Box 935  
Madison, IN 47250**

#### **Board Members**

**Jim Jackson**– President

**Fred Swinney**– Vice President

**Yvette Hays**– Secretary and Business Manager

**Ellen Mulford**\_ Treasurer

**Dave Bear**– Board Member

**Gary Stegner**– Board member

**Jessica Stewart**– Board Member

**Joe Robb**– Executive Secretary

**[www.bigoaks.org](http://www.bigoaks.org)**