

The Pygmy Owl

Volume 32
Issue 3
Nov. 2023

The Newsletter of the
Spokane Audubon Society



Nov. 8, 2023 7:00 p.m.

This meeting will be a “hybrid” – you can attend in-person at the Finch Arboretum, 3404 W. Woodland Blvd. (off Sunset Hwy., just west of downtown Spokane), in the Willow Room of the Woodland Center, or you can attend virtually on-line via Zoom link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89997444562?pwd=Y1prMWJOL0ZoSDcrNUJnbU53SkVUdz09>

Meeting ID: 899 9744 4562 Passcode: 375100

A Glimpse into the Lives of Solitary Bees

Presented by Dave Kollen

A Xerces Society Ambassador involved in education and outreach work, Dave Kollen will present information about native bee life cycles, including an exploration of the typical life of a solitary female bee, and how to help native bees.

Dave will first introduce The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, which is an international nonprofit organization based in Portland, Oregon, that protects the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats. (The name comes from the now-extinct Xerces blue butterfly, *Glaucopsyche xerces*, the first butterfly known to go extinct in North America as a result of human activities.)

He will cover the biology, nesting strategies, and threats to and enemies of solitary native bees. He also will talk about Xerces Society conservation principles and available resources, and explain the opportunities for anyone interested in further involvement to conserve bees and other pollinators.

Dave is an Oregon Master Naturalist and Master Melittologist Apprentice. His involvement in community science includes the Pacific Northwest Bumble Bee Atlas, the California Bumble Bee Atlas, and the Oregon Bee Atlas. Dave also writes pollinator-focused articles for the Oregon State Federation of Garden Clubs newsletter, Mahonia.



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The Pygmy Owl, the newsletter of the Spokane Audubon Society, is published monthly, September through June.

Spokane Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9820
Spokane, WA 99209-9820

Owl illustrations on pg. 1 and 11 © Jan Reynolds.



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Membership Report

by Alan McCoy

Update of Members' Status September 21, 2023 through October 19, 2023:

Welcome and thanks to our **new members**:

Individual: Katy Willard

Contributing: Lori Omsted

Many thanks to our **returning members**:

Individual: Peggy Goodner-Tan

Supporting: Thomas & Francis Light

Contributing: David Goss

If you change your email address, please send your new email address to me, Alan McCoy, at ahm2352@gmail.com and I will make sure you get the Pygmy Owl in your email inbox. Another way to get the Pygmy Owl is to go to our website: <https://www.audubonspokane.org/the-pygmy-owl>

Instagram Account

Spokane Audubon now has an Instagram account! Follow Spokane Audubon to learn facts about our resident and migratory birds, as well as information on field trips, community events, and more.



Shenandoah Marr

SAS Shrub-steppe Conservation ALEA Grant Update

By Lindell Haggin

Spokane Audubon Society shrub-steppe conservation fund provides matching dollars for habitat restoration in its ALEA volunteer grant project.

SAS successfully competed for its 6th ALEA volunteer grant project that kicked off in July. Since 2013, Spokane Audubon ALEA volunteer grants have provided funding to support travel and meals for participants in its project, “Lek surveys and other prairie grouse recovery activities.” Administered by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, grant funding is drawn from the statutorily provided Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account. ALEA volunteer grants are awarded competitively to individuals and groups for activities or projects that improve habitat, do research regarding wildlife and their habitat, and conduct educational activities, among other things.

Our project has centered around Swanson Lakes Wildlife Area and the populations of Greater Sage and Sharp-tailed Grouse that can be found there. When this project began, our main focus was on tracking grouse that recently were brought to the area to supplement the existing populations as well as

surveying the lek sites each spring. A lek is an area where the males congregate to “dance” and display to the females. Lek surveys are the methodology used to monitor population estimates of these two state-endangered species.

Unfortunately, the fire in 2020 over the Labor Day weekend took a heavy toll on both the habitat and grouse in the area. Since that time, a big part of our effort has gone into habitat restoration projects on the wildlife area. We have had several “planting parties,” putting thousands of dollars worth of young shrubs and forbs into the ground. In this new biennium, the ALEA grant application committed a match from the Spokane Audubon Society shrub-steppe conservation fund to purchase shrubs and trees to plant in the riparian and wetland bottom areas of Lake Creek, the major drainage that flows through the wildlife area. These plantings are essential for winter forage and cover for the Sharp-tailed Grouse. Grant funds will support travel and food for planting parties in spring 2024. Project partners for this major habitat restoration project include WDFW which will purchase additional trees and shrubs with Bonneville Power Administration mitigation funding, and Pheasants Forever. We will keep you up to date as to when the plantings will take place in the spring.



Beginning Birding and the Christmas Bird Count

by Bea Harrison

Do you like to watch birds and want to learn more about them, but feel a little intimidated because you are a beginner? You are not alone. Birds are the most accessible, charismatic and varied group of animals that you easily can connect with. But, while birds are accessible, often birding isn't. There are many barriers to birding; it often feels like an intimidating 'elite' club to join and, at times, not very welcoming, which is a shame. However, a wonderful opportunity for beginning birders is on the horizon, the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, (CBC).

The CBC is a census of birds, performed annually by volunteer birdwatchers. The purpose is to provide population data for use in science, especially conservation biology. The CBC is the longest-running citizen science survey in the world. It has been held for 123 years.

The CBC is a great opportunity to start birding or to enhance birding skills because anyone can participate. You will be teamed up with more experienced birders who will be glad to help you get started. You can learn how to identify birds and learn what kind of binoculars to buy, how to use them and where to go to find birds.

Often a barrier to birding is the fear of not knowing what that little brown bird barely showing in the undergrowth is or the difference between a crow and a raven. These are things even experienced birders struggle with. Give yourself a break; your typical 'birder' may have been birding for decades; furthermore you can enjoy seeing a bird without having to identify it by species.

Some of my earliest and most enjoyable bird watching experiences came from participating in the Christmas Bird Count. This annual event is not only for gathering scientific data, but is a winter social event for many people around the country.

I have very fond memories of the annual CBCs I have been on. That is where I met many people who became lifelong friends. That is where I became passionate about birding. It is where I learned how to identify birds, from more experienced participants. Some of my favorite birding memories are from CBCs, lakes full of wintering ducks, Great Horned Owls in tall trees, Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings in

a Spokane neighborhood, Bald Eagles in the snow. Participating in the CBC forces me to get out of my warm house and into the field for a winter adventure day.

The Christmas Bird Counts in our area are coming up in December. Birders of all experience levels are encouraged to join in.

- You will be birding with a group of bird enthusiasts
- No prior knowledge or experience is necessary
- Having additional people to spot or hear birds is very helpful
- New people are more than welcome, so we can share our knowledge and love of birds
- Any age can participate.
- Some routes are walking, some are driving, most are a little of both

To find out more and possibly join the Spokane Count contact Alan McCoy at (509) 999-9512 or ahm2352@gmail.com. For the Cheney Count contact Michael Woodruff at (509) 496-7973 or mkd.woodruff@gmail.com. The Cheney Count will be on Saturday December 16th and the Spokane CBC is scheduled for Saturday December 30th.



CBC Jim Harrison, Ann Brinly, Tina Wynecoop
photo by Bea Harrison

Field Notes

Bird Sightings for the Inland Northwest, compiled by Jon Isacoff

While this is written, we're still having late summer weather, but it's not likely to last. Passerine migration is winding down toward its end, while waterfowl migration is just starting to kick into higher gear. Gray-crowned Rosy Finches and Bohemian Waxwings have made an unusually strong migrant push through the region. It will be interesting to see if this is its "own thing" or if many/most of these birds will spend the winter in the region. Similarly, it's been an excellent fall for Blue Jays so far. Of especial note is a Spokane County first record of BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER, observed by Alan McCoy. Also noteworthy was a historic number of BROAD-WINGED HAWKS that moved through the region, including a Washington state record high count of 28 individuals in a kettle. Especially rare birds are in all caps.

Anna's Hummingbird: Spokane Valley (10/9-MC)

Black-bellied Plover: Cow Lake (10/3-JI)

American Golden Plover: Saltse (10/20-TO); Kootenai NWR (10/1-JR)

Short-billed Dowitcher: Central Ferry HMU (9/22-RB)

Sabine's Gull: Mica Bay (10/6-eBird)

Great Egret (very rare in Boundary County): Bonner's Ferry (10/11-JR)

Broad-winged Hawk: Pullman (9/22-eBird); University of Idaho (9/30-eBird); Spokane (9-24/MW); Sand Road (9/30-eBird); Colfax (9/30-eBird); St. John (10/1-RB); WSU (10/1-eBird);

Blue Jay: Sandpoint (9/21-FC); Samuels (9/27-RDC); Colfax (9/30-eBird); Ponderay (10/3-JR); Holmberg Conservation Area (10/8-eBird); Newport (10/9-eBird); Moscow (10/10-eBird); Bonner's Ferry (10/14-JR); St. John (10/15-RB); University of Idaho (10/15-eBird); Blaine (10/15-KD); Spokane (10/16-eBird); Pullman (10/17-eBird)

Pine Grosbeak: Mt. Spokane SP (10/7-SS); Pullman (10/10-eBird)

Lesser Goldfinch: Spokane (9/23-MG)

White-throated Sparrow: Moscow (9/21-CS); Davenport (9/29-MC); University of Idaho (9/30-GL); Colfax (9/30-eBird); Paradise Prairie (MW); Garfield (10/3-CH); Pullman (10/6-eBird); (10/11-MW); Palouse (10/13-GL); Hayden (10/15-eBird)

Golden-crowned Sparrow: WSU (9/21-eBird); Washtucna (9/22-eBird); Davenport (9/23-MC); Viola (9/24-GL) Pullman (9/29)

Swamp Sparrow: Slavin Ranch (9/28-JI); Pullman (10/1-eBird)

Lapland Longspur: Mt. Spokane SP (9/30-eBird); Clark Fork Delta (10/3-RDC); Cow Lake (10/3-JI); Pullman (10/12-eBird) Palouse (10/17-RB);

BLACK-THROATED GRAY WARBLER: Hooper (9/22-eBird); Paradise Prairie (10/11-AM)



Black-throated Gray Warbler
© Mark Daly

Observers: RB-R.J. Baltierra; BB-Ben Bright; MC-Marlene Cashen; JC-Jeffrey Colburn; FC-Forest Corcoran; RC-River Corcoran; WC-Warren Current; RDC-Rich Del Carlo; KD-Kas Dumroese; TD-Tim Durnell; SE-Shannon Ehlers; JE-Jacob Elonen; MG-Micah Grove; LH-Lindell Haggin; BH-Barb Hubbard; CH-Cameron Heusser; JI-Jon Isacoff; SJ-Steve Joyce; BK-Bob Kemp; DK-Dave Koehler; GL-Greg Lambeth; AM-Alan McCoy; CiM-Cindy McCormick; CM-Curtis Mahon; MM-Mason Maron; BM-Ben Meredyk; NM-Nancy Miller; WM-Will Merg; TO-Tim O'Brien; NP-Neil Paprocki; JR-Jethro Runco; SS-Sandy Schreven; CS-Charles Swift; NT-Norma Trefry; AT-Andrew Thomas; DW-Doug Ward; WY-Will Young; MW-Michael Woodruff

Carlene's Turnbull Moose Trek

On Saturday, October 7th, I left really early in the morning to see if I could see moose on the auto route at Turnbull. Unfortunately, the only thing I saw was a coyote who dashed across the road in front of me just as I was nearing the boardwalk area. After it ran across the road, it turned and looked at me for a brief moment and then went on its way. Looks to me like it had a nice coat of fur for the upcoming winter.



I finished the auto route and went to the parking lot to begin my walk to Cheever Lake to see if the cygnets had begun to fly. On the way there, I spotted a chipmunk with its snack and since it looked like it was posing for me, I took its picture. Then I saw two birds with white bellies high up in a tree. Turns out they are goldfinches in molt.

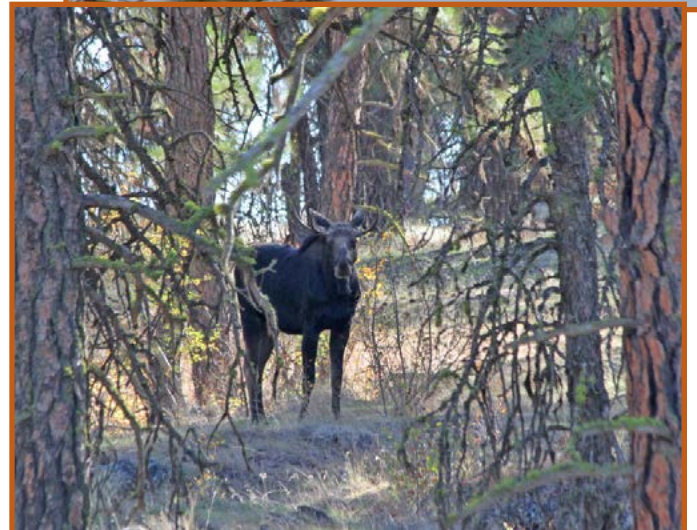


One thing I noticed on my walk down the dirt road was that the sun was highlighting some of the vibrant fall leaves on some of the trees. Also, I was rather surprised to see a large gaggle (yes, that's the term!) of geese standing around in a field. As I walked by, they took flight.



I finally arrived at Cheever lake only to hear the airborne swan family calling to each other, off somewhere in the distance. So I waited for an hour or so to see if they would return. I had just started my walk back when I heard Trumpeters honking! I caught a glimpse of them flying back to Cheever where their nest was. I got a couple pictures of them in the air and it looks like one of the cygnets was leading the family!

As soon as they landed, I was able to get a family picture of them. There are only two cygnets now since they lost one of them a few weeks ago. Surprisingly, two other adult Trumpeter swans also were circling towards Cheever to land. But the swan parents on the lake trumpeted their warning to not land on their territory and the outsider swans kept on going.



I am happy to say that I finally did see a moose on my walk back to the car! It was up an incline and into the woods, but I was able to get a few pictures of it, enough to see that it was a bull moose. I got to see one!

All photos by Carlene Hardt

Our Cape Disappointment Summer

By Jim Harrison



Cape Disappointment
photo by Bea Harrison

While we were visiting friends on the Washington coast during the Christmas holidays, our friend Aaron Webster, who manages the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center, offered my wife and me jobs as “Interpretive Assistants” this summer. Bea and I have worked for Aaron in this capacity at least a half dozen times in the past. Cape Disappointment is one of our favorite places in the world. The view over the mouth of the Columbia River is amazing and we spend a lot of time outside explaining to visitors from around the world what they are seeing nature-wise. We also lead various types of nature hikes from birds and plants to tidal pools. Sometimes we even talk about Lewis and Clark, but we prefer talking about nature.



Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center overlooks
the mouth of the Columbia River
Photo by Bea Harrison

The mouth of the Columbia River itself is amazing because of its size and as a crossroads for so much wildlife. With an average flow of 123 million gallons a minute, the nutrient-filled fresh water impacts the

salinity of the ocean for three hundred miles. The Columbia River plume (the fresh water flowing out of the river) functions as a magnet for marine mammals, fish, and birds. It is the largest river on this continent that flows into the Pacific. Historically, the river was the access point for anadromous fishes, such as salmon, that populated seven states and two Canadian provinces.

To illustrate the importance of the Columbia River geographically, there is a pelagic bird, the sooty shearwater, that visits the mouth of the Columbia each summer. This species nests mainly in New Zealand. Each year their migration around the Pacific is about 40,000 miles. Some scientists claim this is the longest yearly migration of any animal. The New Zealanders historically have harvested shearwater chicks from the nesting burrows. They are called “mutton birds”. Back in 2007 a New Zealander was cleaning a chick to eat and found an electronic tag. He sent the tag off and he was told it came from a steelhead smolt that had been tagged in the middle of Washington state!

Various marine mammals also populate the mouth of the Columbia. Our residents include California and Steller sealions, harbor seals, harbor porpoise, river otters, gray whales, humpback whales and orcas. Orcas are unusual, but this summer we had two males come right below our overlook where they killed a California sealion.

I’ve never been to a place that is such a dramatic example of the power and complexity of nature. You can’t imagine the amazing things I have seen over the years, standing at the overlook.

Because you are over 200 feet above the water, you have eagles, ospreys and pelicans soaring directly below as they surf the updraft of onshore winds hitting the cliffs below. We observed the daily drama as Pelagic, Brandt and Double-crested cormorants tried to nest and raise chicks on the steep cliffs while they were harassed daily by bald eagles, gulls and crows. On any given day, sea birds like Surf Scoters, Marbled Murrelets and Pigeon Guillemots might be seen in the water below the cliff. I’ve watched a Steller

sealion and a bald eagle have a tug of war over a large salmon. They ended up tearing it in two!

The U.S. Coast Guard Rough Water Training Station is located on the Cape. Several years ago, I was watching a training session where a helicopter was practicing hovering low over the stern of a 40' Coast Guard boat. It was hovering about twenty feet up and creating a large disturbance on the surface of the water. Suddenly a humpback whale with his huge mouth wide open rolled right below the copter and the stern of the boat. I guess the disturbance on the water made it think there was bait there or perhaps there really was bait attracted by the activity. We will never know, but I sure wish I'd had a camera ready that day!

One of Bea's favorite hikes to lead is to the tidal pools below Northhead lighthouse. Unfortunately, over the years, we have seen a steady decline in marine creatures in the tide pools, due to warming waters, stronger winter storms and increased human disturbance. This was a very popular hike, nevertheless. Normally we have about a dozen people appear for hikes, but Bea had sixty-seven people show up one morning. Luckily there are several tidal pools for people to spread out to. Bea would just go around identifying what they were looking at.



Bea Harrison leads a tide pool hike
photo by Jim Harison

Cape "D" is covered with dense temperate rainforest. It was where Bea and I first heard the echoing call of the Swainson's thrush many years ago. It took us all day to finally see one in the dense forest. When we arrived back this May, they were there to welcome us.

The forest is so dense that the regular "park" animals prefer to walk along the road instead of plowing through the woods. One day I was driving a state vehicle in the park and a lady pulled in front of me and jumped out of her car. She ran up to me and yelled, "A mom just dropped a baby in the middle of the road"! I was immediately thinking, "Call 911", but I thought to ask her if it was a "human" baby. She looked at me like I was crazy and said, "No, it's a deer". This summer we had several deer that chose to have their fawns on the roads.

People ask me if I get tired of telling new visitors about the amazing natural treasures of Cape Disappointment. The answer is "no". I am glad to identify and describe the various birds nesting or flying by. Bea and I feel that the more the public knows about our natural world then perhaps they will be more willing to help protect it. But over the years, we have seen a steady decline in the number of birds we see there. I did notice that many more people this summer were complaining about climate change. Perhaps things will change.

Bea and I have been very lucky to have been able to live and work in some wonderful places, doing conservation related work since we retired from our "real" jobs 25 years ago. Cape Disappointment is pretty high on our list of favorites.



Sea Caves walk led by Jim Harrison
photo by Bea Harrison



Spokane Audubon Society Volunteer Form

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Email: _____

Volunteer opportunities: *(Check any that interest you.)*

- Monthly meetings (1-3 hours, once a month, 7 months of the year)
 - Assist in room set up and take down
 - Zoom hosting
 - camera operation
 - A/V tech support back-up – helping with A/V equipment
 - speaker handling back-up – helping speaker with Zoom and PowerPoint
 - hospitality – personally greeting attendees, signing them in, offering refreshments
- Field trip leader or co-leader – expert birding skills not required, but basic people skills, some birding and nature knowledge and a passion for wildlife needed.
- Educational events – in-the-field teaching about nature, birds, ecology, etc. working with all ages.
- Outreach events – making presentations to outside groups or helping engage people and answer questions at events with chapter display table/booth
- Save-A-Bird response team – capture and transport injured birds to a cooperating vet, re-nest nestlings. Necessary training provided.
- Occasional field work with partner organizations with such tasks as planting, weeding, restoration, trail maintenance, fire prevention work, etc.
- Writing articles of local interest for our monthly (Sept – June) Pygmy Owl newsletter.
- Helping with specific campaigns including bird/window collision prevention, cats indoors, night lights out, etc.
- Serving as liaison with other local organizations.
- Creative folks – creating various items for marketing and education such as posters, tri-fold handouts, educational props,
- Other _____

Mail this form to:

Spokane Audubon Volunteers:
Attn: Alan McCoy
615 W Paradise Rd
Spokane WA 99224

Alternatively:

Scan or photograph it and email it to
Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com.

Questions? Contact Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com or (509) 999-9512.

Sharp-shinned Hawks

Cornell: All About Birds

Sharp-shinned Hawks are birds of the forest and forest edge, and are not found where trees are scarce or scattered, except on migration. They require dense forest, ideally with a closed canopy, for breeding. While favoring forests that contain conifers, they also nest in stands of aspen in Colorado, oak-hickory forest in Missouri, and the hardwood forests of the East. They occupy a wide range of elevations, from sea level to near treeline. In the winter season, look for Sharp-shinned Hawks at forest edges, in somewhat more open habitats than the dense forests they breed in, as well as in suburban areas with bird feeders.

Songbirds make up about 90 percent of the Sharp-shinned Hawk's diet. Birds the size of American Robins or smaller (especially warblers, sparrows, and thrushes) are the most frequent prey; bigger birds are at less risk, though they're not completely safe. Studies report quail, shorebirds, doves, swifts, woodpeckers, and even falcons as prey. Sharp-shins also eat small rodents, such as mice and voles, and an occasional moth or grasshopper. While nesting, much of the food for their babies is the nestlings and fledglings of other birds.

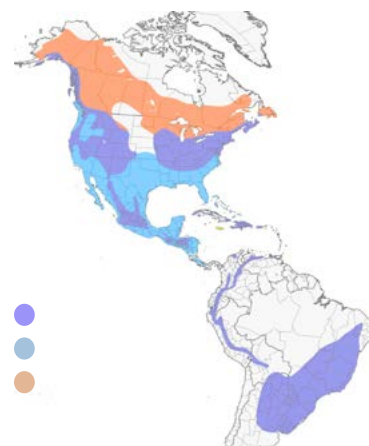
Sharp-shinned Hawks are "pursuit hunters", often surprising their prey on the wing by bursting out from a hidden perch with a rush of speed. They are versatile: small birds may be taken in the air or on the ground; they may pounce from perches as little as 3 feet above the ground to catch rodents; and they catch some insects on the wing. Sharp-shins make great use of cover and stealth to get close to their prey, surprising it at close range rather than diving from great heights. They are agile and acrobatic fliers, navigating dense woods at high speeds by using their long tail as a rudder. In open areas they sometimes fly very low, hugging ground contours to remain hidden to prey until the last moment



Sharp-shinned Hawk with Red-winged Blackbird
© Alan McCoy



Sharp-shinned Hawk
© Alex Lamoreaux



Year-round ●
Breeding ●
Nonbreeding ●

Pygmy Owl Contributions

Spokane Audubon Society members who want to contribute to the Pygmy Owl newsletter can submit articles on, and photos of, birds and bird conservation issues to info@spokaneaudubon.org for publishing consideration.

The newsletter deadline is the 20th of the month for the next month's edition.



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Spokane Audubon Society
P.O. Box 9820
Spokane, WA 99209-9820

The Spokane Audubon Society advocates for birds and their habitats in the Inland Northwest and connects people with nature.

Visit our website:

<https://audubonspokane.org>

Spokane Audubon Society Membership Form

Annual Membership and Donation:

Student (under 21): \$10 per year _____

Individual: \$20 per year _____

Family: \$30 per year _____

Supporting: \$50 per year _____

Contributing: \$100 per year _____

Lifetime: \$500 _____

Other: _____

Annual memberships provide ongoing support for our many conservation and educational activities.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____



Please make check payable to: Spokane Audubon Society

Send this form and your check to:
Audubon Membership
Attn: Alan McCoy
615 W Paradise Rd
Spokane WA 99224

Join us, or renew your membership, online at our website:

<https://www.audubonspokane.org>.

Click "Support Us" or "Join Us" We accept PayPal, credit/debit cards or Apple Pay.

Receiving duplicate newsletters? Errors or other changes to your email address?

Contact Alan McCoy at ahm2352@gmail.com or (509) 999-9512.