

National Elk Refuge News – February 7, 2014

Refuge-Inspired Artwork on Display



Artists Mike Nordell (seated) and Barbara Hayton (standing, right) share their experiences with visitors.

It was a change of pace at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center last month as a temporary exhibit focused less on the biological aspects of wildlife and habitat and more on the inspiration they provide to artists.

An artist himself, Refuge winter naturalist Mike Nordell set up a temporary exhibit featuring the work of four local artists. Hesitantly, he included himself in the line-up. “Our goal was to spotlight the artwork of people that have a special relationship

with the Visitor Center and Refuge,” he explained. “I saw it as a chance to branch out from a standard interpretive program.” He humbly added, “This was the first time I’d ever publicly shared my graphite sketches.”

Nordell set up the exhibit in the Visitor Center’s small theater, transforming the dark, tight space into a lovely little gallery with wall panels and additional lighting. Tables and walls were covered with photography, ceramics, sketches, and other art pieces. Throughout the first week, winter

naturalists took turns staffing the exhibit. The featured artists also stopped in the Visitor Center for a few hours at a time to mingle with guests and share their stories of inspiration.

Guest artists included:

Mike Nordell – Refuge winter naturalist

Nordell’s contribution included both photography and illustrations, works that stem from his connection with the area’s natural world. Nordell discovered he could take his photographs to

another level when he used them as references for his sketches. Nordell has a great appreciation for wildlife and the difficult lives animals lead, noting how human behavior can profoundly impact their survival.

This winter is Nordell's second winter as a seasonal naturalist for the Refuge. He holds a degree in wildlife biology.

"I enjoy educating others about the importance of conservation and respecting wildlife – the same values as the National Elk Refuge and Refuge System. Their mission is to unselfishly protect land for the sake of wildlife." – Mike Nordell

Barbara Hayton – seasonal Grand Teton Association bookstore clerk at the Visitor Center

A passionate photographer, Hayton had four photos on display including a collage of goslings as they jumped from the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center roof.

Hayton describes the Refuge as an oasis of pure, raw nature and believes in enjoying the Refuge from its periphery in order to maintain the conservation of the habitat and wildlife. As an avid nature photographer, she feels inspired looking out over the marsh, the winding path of Flat Creek, and the buttes. In her role as a store clerk, she loves the sense of giving back she feels when she helps visitors gain an understanding of the purpose and importance of the Refuge.

"Not only do I find inspiration for my photography, but I find a sense of serenity that energizes my soul." – Barbara Hayton

Kathy Erickson – visitor services agent for the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce

Erickson enhanced the exhibit with several mediums, including graphite and color sketches, a scratchboard, French dye and silk, a decorated gourd, woodcut prints, and painted leather.

Erickson notes that Refuge guests are inspired and thrilled as they take a winter sleigh ride, learn from the displays in the Visitor Center, explore the ponds and wetlands in the summer, watch birds, and more. She cites many creative ideas and projects stemming from visits and time spent working at the Visitor Center. Whether with her camera, paints or other mediums, she's continually amazed at the beauty and wildlife that is so abundant.

"Having the opportunity to live and work in such a beautiful place has deeply inspired me to seek out and capture the grandeur of the scenes that surround me." – Kathy Erickson

Tenley Thompson – special use permittee on the Refuge as a wildlife tour manager

Thompson provided a few pieces of nature-inspired pottery and ceramics for the exhibit, an interest she pursues in addition

to photography. Thompson believes the Refuge is particularly inspirational and sees her artwork as a way to express her biological perspectives through creative processes. Thompson described how she is inspired daily by the landscapes of the area, hoping to help casual visitors fully appreciate the uniqueness and complexities of this ecosystem.

"Our landscape is a land of change and an extraordinary place from which to draw creativity." – Tenley Thompson

In conjunction with the displays provided by the artist, a special exhibit was set up to honor J.N. "Ding" Darling. Darling authored two books and twice won the Pulitzer Prize for cartooning, in 1923 and again in 1942. He used his satirical pen to promote issues of conservation and to bring national attention to environmental concerns. A video entitled "America's Darling: The Story of Jay N. Ding Darling" ran throughout the day, exemplifying the theme of how art can inspire conservation – and conservation can inspire art.

The art exhibit was originally scheduled for the week of January 20 only. However, due to its popularity, the exhibit was extended an additional week. "We were very pleased with how well received the program was," Nordell said. "We look forward to expanding it next year." An estimated 650 people fully explored the exhibit and interacted with a naturalist or artist in the exhibit area.