

Volunteer Pilot Spotlight



Janice Newman (Portsmouth, NH)

In December 2009, Janice learned of LightHawk from her friend, and LightHawk board member, Tom Haas. Then they loaded three rare Mexican wolves into a brand new Pilatus PC-12 and flew their first LightHawk flight together.

"I can't remember when I didn't have the flying bug," explains Newman, "On a flight to Florida when I was 12, I got to sit in the cockpit with the captain, I thought that was so much better than the week at Disney World!"

Newman has been flying for 31 years, and professionally for 25. She's been a flight instructor, a captain in a Cessna Caravan for an overnight freight company, flew as captain in a PC-12 for a fractional share company, a scheduled airline, and over in Europe. She now spends her time as a PC12NG mentor pilot and has her own flight school specializing in glass cockpit aircraft. Newman was recognized for her teaching as the Eastern Region Certified Flight Instructor of the Year for 2010.

In the rare moments when she's not flying, Newman can be found enjoying camping, photography, backpacking with her two Weimaraners, motorcycle riding, playing tennis, and traveling.

Asked why she donates flights for LightHawk, she explains, "I have a great time meeting new people, learning more about the environment and flying airplanes. LightHawk lets me combine all three and rewards me with the satisfaction that I'm helping others and making folks aware of the environment, its resources and habitats."

Tipped Wings and Turning Tides View from Above Helps Wetlands Rebound



The successful growth and colonization of salt marsh plants grown by local schools is just one aspect of estuary restoration understood in an instant on a LightHawk donated flight (below).

For decades, wetlands have borne the brunt of development and commerce. Marshes have been drained for farmland, polluted by runoff and worse, or allowed to drown and die without much thought given to these important watery ecosystems. Wetlands minimize impacts from flooding, control erosion, purify water, and provide essential habitats for fish and wildlife valuable both ecologically and commercially. There are some who are not content to let past practices continue, and for those groups, LightHawk provides a 1,000 foot view to support their work. There are many stories of wetlands reclaimed and revitalized thanks in part to LightHawk; this is just one.

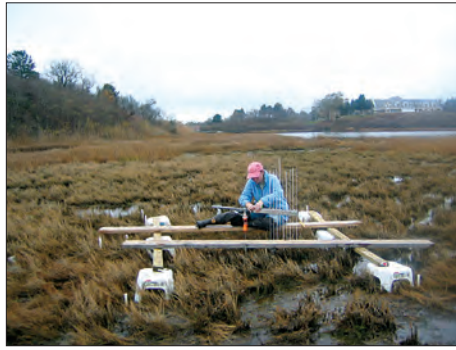
Jack Kelly has lived in Newport, Rhode Island all his life. Each day, he'd walk along the peaceful marsh at Goose Neck Cove enjoying the quiet water and wading birds. Over time however, he started to notice that the marsh just didn't seem right, and, as he discovered, it certainly didn't smell right either.

Goose Neck Cove lies along a craggy coastline famous for the Newport mansions that attract tourists each summer. Named for the sinuous curving channels that stretch - like a goose neck - from a wide main body of water out to the Atlantic, Goose Neck Cove had been the site of





Save The Bay



Save The Bay

Before restoration efforts restored the tidal flow in and out of Goose Neck Cove, salt marsh vegetation drowned and the marsh became a mucky mess (left). Save The Bay scientists (right) monitor the growth of renewed marsh grasses that have taken root and are elevating the wetlands.

countless field trips over the years that deposited schoolchildren into the wetlands for a lesson in coastal ecology. But as of the mid-nineties, those days had passed.

Goose Neck Cove had become a stagnant marsh, degraded and subsiding. Construction many years ago of a small dam and narrow culverts under a roadway restricted the tidal movement of salt water into the wetlands. "Salt water would come in, but wouldn't drain out so you'd have all this standing water on the marsh," explains Marci Cole Ekberg, Coastal Ecologist for LightHawk partner Save The Bay. "And just like houseplants, if they're overwatered, they die." With so much plant life dying, the result was a mucky mess.

When marsh vegetation dies, the roots stop accumulating and trapping sediment so the marsh sinks. "You can lose a marsh fairly quickly this way. It can go from once vegetated, into a flat marsh of disgusting goo," says Cole Ekberg. In fact, from 2004 to 2009, Save The Bay monitored Goose Neck Cove and found parts had sunk by 3 inches - quite a loss when 2 millimeters can be cause for concern. Unhealthy wetlands are inhospitable to wading birds and toxic to juvenile fish that rely on estuary environments for food and safety.

Although rich with volunteers and staff to gain on-the-ground data about the state of Goose Neck Marsh, Save the Bay needed more "lift" to get a complete picture of the wetlands as a whole system and to monitor the progress of their restoration efforts. That's when LightHawk's Eastern Region Program Manager, Kelley Tucker knocked on their door.

Tucker knew that flights could play an important role in Save The Bay's wetlands restoration work. She began talking with Save The Bay about how the aerial perspective could help them gain a more comprehensive understanding of the wetlands they worked to protect and restore.

Save The Bay is one of 11 wetlands conservation groups that fall under the umbrella of Restore America's Estuaries (RAE), a group dedicated to restoring coastal wetlands and estuarine habitats in the U.S. In 2010, RAE recognized LightHawk's work in helping protect wetlands with its President's Award and the groups are moving quickly toward a strategic partnership to further link their conservation efforts.

"It's really important for us to get up in the air," Cole Ekberg explained, "Rhode Island is a pretty tiny state, so you can pretty much see the entire state when you're in an airplane." Understanding how wetlands connect and how man-made obstacles impede water flow is easily grasped while aloft on a LightHawk donated flight. Advances made in restoration work are also readily seen from this vantage. Local schools who partner with Save The Bay grow wetland plants during the school year, then put on their mud boots and get a lesson in hands-on conservation. Once the plants have taken root, LightHawk flights are able to show, at a glance, how the plants have spread and grown, which is incredibly time-consuming to do on the ground. This aerial validation supports further restoration projects and provides a historical record of wetlands, data that is especially important as sea levels rise.

As the tides once again ebb and flow in Goose Neck Cove, images taken during LightHawk donated flights confirm that Save The Bay's restoration efforts were successful. By removing a dam and installing larger culverts under a roadway, a more natural exchange of salt water allowed Goose Neck Cove to rise up and bounce back from further decline.

"LightHawk flights help put what we do in context," says Restore America's Estuaries Executive Director Jeff Benoit. "When you're working on a restoration project, you go to one little spot and you don't see how that area fits with the rest of the wetland. With the aerial perspective, you see the whole picture."

What's New



Greg Bedinger/LightHawk

Thank You We wish to thank the many donors who contributed to LightHawk between October 1, 2010 and January 31, 2011 including:

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Volunteer Pilots

Our heartfelt thanks to the many volunteer pilots who donated their time, expertise and use of their aircraft to fly for LightHawk during this period.

at Lighthawk?

Sun 'N Fun(nel) in Florida

Billed as "Spring Break for pilots," Sun 'N Fun 2011 in Lakeland, Florida proved to be all that and more. While introducing pilots to flying for conservation, LightHawk and sister organization, SouthWings experienced a super cell microburst storm that featured severe weather, including tornadoes, in the area. "Pilots love a good weather event," observed Hume Davenport, SouthWings' executive director. But the experience had a hefty price tag as 69 aircraft were damaged during the storm. Wind gusts up to 95 mph treated planes as if they were light toys. Thankfully, no major injuries were reported.

The following days more than made up for the washout. The Blue Angels and vintage aircraft of all stripes roared in the clear skies overhead, thousands of attendees visited hundreds of exhibitors, and acrobatic aircraft - including the only helicopter in North America that can fly upside down - made the dramatic events of the day before a memory. That is, until the "I survived Sun 'N Fun 2011" t-shirts - complete with tornado graphic - were unveiled. Although appealing, LightHawk opted to bring home the names of several pilots interested in volunteer flying instead.



Our thanks to Unites Airlines for providing free travel vouchers for our program in Latin America.

Get Involved!

Pilots: Join our volunteer pilot corps; the minimum requirement is 1000+ hours as pilot-in-command.

Donors: Your gift helps fuel our operations and protect land, water and wildlife.

Matching Gift Programs: Double your gift or make your flight missions for LightHawk go even farther if your company offers a matching gifts program.

Honor Someone: Consider giving a gift to LightHawk in honor of an avid pilot or conservationist among your friends or family.

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LightHawk Pilots + iLCP Photographers = Tripods in the Sky



Klaus Nigge, an iLCP photographer, flew with LightHawk volunteer pilot David Cole for the first Tripods in the Sky mission.

If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is there to document it, does it matter? LightHawk pilots and the iLCP (International League of Conservation Photographers) have partnered to make sure it *is* documented, so that it *does* matter. These two conservation pioneers are embarking on missions to bring back images of threatened landscapes and animals before it's too late.

Tripods in the Sky missions pair skilled, adventurous pilots with world-class photographers to highlight the conservation activities of LightHawk and the iLCP, a consortium of the world's top nature photographers. This strategic partnership between LightHawk and iLCP is shaping up to be a game changer for conservation throughout much of North and Central America.

Flying under the banner of Tripods in the Sky, LightHawk pilots and iLCP photographers break through the cacophony of information overload by bringing back compelling images from conservation's front lines. Through iLCP's relationship with The Huffington Post, images, interviews and information from Tripods in the Sky flights are shared with an audience of millions.

This close partnership of LightHawk and iLCP is the result of several similarities between the two groups. The two non-profits both enlist dedicated volunteers who leverage their skills for the protection of wild nature. They both work with conservation groups, leading scientists, policy makers, government leaders and those charged with the protection of our planet, yet neither is a political organization. Their work centers on fueling the conservation efforts of their partners. Tripods in the Sky is just one way they work together to tip the

balance in favor of conservation. LightHawk had provided flight support for several iLCP-driven RAVE events (Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition) over the past two years. RAVEs bring a group of photographers to successfully create a media blitz around a certain conservation initiative.

The very first Tripods in the Sky mission saw LightHawk and iLCP in the air over the Yucatan Peninsula in southeast Mexico. Volunteer pilot David Cole traveled from Meeker, Colorado to meet with up Eduardo Galicia and Klaus Nigge. Eduardo is a Mexican scientist conducting aerial flamingo surveys for Niños y Crias and Pronatura Yucatan and Klaus, a German photographer, is a Fellow of the iLCP and a contributing photographer for National Geographic Magazine. Eduardo and Klaus met the previous year during a RAVE where iLCP and LightHawk created a snapshot of the region to call attention to the rapid development from tourism, agriculture and human growth. This Tripods in the Sky mission allowed Eduardo to get very important scientific information about flamingo distribution during this time of the year. Klaus was able to take stunning aerial images of the birds and the coastal wetlands they call home.

Information and photography obtained during Tripods in the Sky flights will provide a spark for on-the-ground conservation to promote the protection of land, water and wildlife. Through Tripods in the Sky, the unique combination of skilled, passionate pilots and talented photographers will shine a brighter light on the challenges to conservation and yield more successful outcomes for wild nature.



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From the Cockpit *A pilot's seat perspective*



Pilot Joy Covey (right of center in green jacket) at the end of a long day of flying to bring a rare Mexican wolf to a release site in the Arizona wilderness.

Before January 2011, pilot Joy Covey didn't know much about the Mexican wolf. Then she loaded one from the tarmac of the Spirit of St. Louis airport (KSUS) into her Pilatus PC12 bound for Springerville, Arizona (D68).

by Joy Covey, Volunteer Pilot

Flying a rare Mexican wolf was my first mission as a LightHawk volunteer pilot. We began at the Endangered Wolf Center in St. Louis, where our wolf passenger, Zeke, had been living with his pack. Our job was to deliver Zeke to the Fish and Wildlife Service team so they could introduce him to a pack that had lost its alpha male the season before. The hope was that with Zeke, this pack could become a breeding group again.

Our mission team included my son, Tyler and friend and professional pilot Brad England. We welcomed Zeke and his handler, Jackie Fallon, onto our plane for the 4.5 hour flight. During the

flight, sunlight illuminated the mesh covering the crate to reveal Zeke's outline. Tyler and Jackie ensured he was comfortable by peeking into the crate periodically while we kept the cabin at a wolf-comfortable 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

As we taxied in to Springerville, AZ on a beautiful clear afternoon, we were met by a large welcoming group including a National Geographic crew from Grizzly Creek Films shooting an episode about the Southwest. After thanking us for the flight, they invited us to join them for the remainder of the day. With some difficulty were able to arrange a large 4WD pickup truck to rent ("Keys will be in the gas cap, ma'am."). Later, we'd find the 4WD invaluable!

As the day progressed, we truly grasped the significance of our flight for the Mexican gray wolf reintroduction effort. Without LightHawk, Zeke would have had to travel by commercial air cargo, or even FedEx, a very stressful experience. Instead of landing close to the release site, he would have

arrived in a commercial airport much further away. Along the way, he'd have experienced long waits in cargo areas, plane changes, and possibly harassment from curious people. In today's high-security atmosphere, Zeke's handler would have been unable to ensure his comfort and safety along the way.

Zeke was fitted with a tracking collar; the FWS team first allowed my son to write a good luck note on it. Hours later, after a long drive along a deeply rutted, muddy and at times snowy road, we reached the interim release site where Zeke would wait for the alpha female. By that time, it was fully dark and a stunning full moon was rising through the bare branches of the surrounding trees. Our hearts were in our throats as we saw Zeke released. He was resplendent in his thick coat standing under that full moon deep in the wilderness.

For the next 10 days, we lived our lives as normally as possible, but somewhere in the back of our minds, we were thinking of Zeke. Our emotions were a mix of hope and fear, almost like having one's child out in the world experiencing something new and a bit frightening. We hoped for the best, but feared some mishap. Finally we heard: Zeke was back in his enclosure! He hadn't found the pack and had been trying to survive alone, in the middle of winter with an unusually deep snowpack. We hear they'll hold him until spring, pair him with an alpha female, and release them together when the snow has receded and elk calves make for an easier introduction to hunting. There's still hope for Zeke, and we stand ready to contribute our PC12 and its capabilities if the Mexican wolves need us in the future.