

Loonapalooza Learning Series 2026



Sponsored by Friends of Seney National Wildlife Refuge

This summer, the Friends of Seney National Wildlife Refuge invites the community to learn, explore, and be inspired at the 2026 Loonapalooza Learning Series—continuing a three-year tradition of bringing engaging, educational, and entertaining events to the community. The series will feature a lively mix of history, wildlife, conservation, film, music, and storytelling, all designed to deepen our connection to the natural and cultural heritage of the Great Lakes region.

All events are held at the Pine Performance Center in Curtis, on the Erickson Center for the Arts campus. Programs are free and open to the public; donations are appreciated and support the mission of the Friends of Seney National Wildlife Refuge.

Whether you're a longtime refuge fan, a bird lover, a history buff, or simply looking for a meaningful summer evening out, this year's lineup promises plenty to discover. We hope you can join us!

Contact Friends of Seney NWR

Email: friends@friendsofseney.org

Website: friendsofseney.org

Tuesday, June 16

James McCommons, author, *The Feather Wars and the Great Crusade to Save America's Birds*



Author and Northern Michigan University professor emeritus James McCommons will share the story behind his acclaimed new book, *The Feather Wars: And the Great Crusade to Save America's Birds*. Released in March, the book has drawn praise for its vivid storytelling and its exploration of the passionate, colorful, and sometimes contentious movement that helped rescue America's birds from the brink of devastation.

McCommons' presentation will bring to life a remarkable era when birds faced mounting threats from fashion trends, market hunting, habitat destruction, and widespread public indifference. Through the efforts of reformers, scientists, writers, conservationists, and ordinary citizens, a powerful movement emerged that would eventually transform the nation's attitudes toward wildlife protection.

Blending history, storytelling, and conservation insight, McCommons will explore the surprising personalities and pivotal events behind this early environmental crusade—and why the lessons of that movement remain deeply relevant in today's world.

Tuesday, July 21

Return of the Trumpeters with Film Producer Steve Devon



Guests will enjoy a screening of *Return of the Trumpeters*, a moving documentary that chronicles the comeback of trumpeter swans from the brink of extinction. The film includes stunning footage of Seney's swans and tells one of North America's great wildlife recovery stories.

Originally scheduled as part of the Winter Film Festival, this special evening comes with an added bonus. Joining us in person will be Steve Devon, the film's producer and an award-winning filmmaker whose work on *Return of the Trumpeters* received Upper Midwest Emmy nominations for Best Historical Documentary and Best Cinematography. Produced for the Trumpeter Swan Society, the film has been broadcast on PBS stations and has introduced thousands of viewers to the remarkable recovery of this iconic bird.

Steve will share stories from behind the scenes and offer insights into the making of the film and the conservation success it celebrates.

Tuesday, August 4

Bill Jamerson: Dollar-A-Day Boys — A Musical Tribute to the Civilian Conservation Corps



Popular Michigan storyteller, musician, and historian Bill Jamerson brings the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) to life through music, humor, and heartfelt storytelling.

His program, Dollar-A-Day Boys, celebrates the young men of the 1930s who helped shape parks, forests, and public lands across the country—including Seney National Wildlife Refuge. Here at Seney, the CCC and WPA helped build many of the refuge’s earliest structures and public-use features, leaving a lasting mark on the landscape and visitor experience that continues to this day.

For anyone who has enjoyed Seney’s historic character, this program offers a chance to better appreciate the people whose labor helped shape the refuge in its early years. With songs, stories, and a deep love of history, Bill’s presentation promises to be both entertaining and meaningful.

Thursday, September 3

Dani Fegan: Loon Monitoring at Seney: A Field Season Update



Dani Fegan will bring a unique perspective to the Loonapalooza Learning Series through her work in both Tribal natural resource management and loon monitoring at Seney National Wildlife Refuge.

Fegan is the Director of the Natural Resources Division for the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, where she leads the Tribe's wildlife, fisheries, environmental, and research programs across the 1836 Treaty Ceded Territory. She is also a Ph.D. candidate in Fisheries and Wildlife at Michigan State University. This season, she is leading loon monitoring efforts at Seney.

Her presentation will explore the lives of common loons on the refuge, including current monitoring efforts, nesting activity, and the challenges loons face in a changing environment. Based on her time at Seney, she will offer a closer look at the refuge's loon population and the broader value of long-term monitoring and research at sites like Seney NWR.

The program will also share Tribal perspectives on wildlife stewardship, co-stewardship within the 1836 Treaty Ceded Territory, and the cultural importance of protecting natural resources across the Upper Peninsula.

Thursday, October 8

Elliot Nelson: Seney to Superior: Wetlands, Fisheries and Great Lakes Connections



Elliot Nelson will join the 2026 Loonapalooza Learning Series for a fascinating look at the connections between Great Lakes fisheries, wetlands, and invasive species. As an educator with Michigan Sea Grant and Michigan State University Extension, Nelson will explore how wetlands like those at Seney National Wildlife Refuge help protect water quality, support fish and wildlife habitat, and contribute to the long-term health of Great Lakes fisheries.

His presentation will also examine the dramatic and often irreversible changes caused by invasive species, non-native fish introductions, and wetland degradation across the region. At the same time, Nelson will highlight encouraging conservation success stories and restoration efforts that are helping ensure healthy fisheries and aquatic ecosystems for future generations.

From local refuge wetlands to broader Great Lakes challenges, this engaging program will connect science, conservation, and community stewardship in ways that are both informative and accessible.

Nelson is based at the Lake Superior State University Center for Freshwater Research and Education in Sault Ste. Marie, where he works alongside regional partners on coastal tourism, aquaculture education, birding programs, tribal partnerships, and Great Lakes ecosystem outreach throughout Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula and beyond.