



Vernita Bridge Unit

Fact Sheet • August 2002



FWS photo: Pete Schmidt

Unit Size
800 acres

History and Administration

Since 1943, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has held title to the lands that make up this and all other units that became part of the Hanford Reach National Monument in 2000. Since 1971, the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has managed this unit for public access under a use permit from the DOE. Currently this is the only Monument unit managed primarily by WDFW.



To Contact the Monument

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Location

This is a narrow unit between the Columbia River and State Highway 24, just northwest of Vernita Bridge.

Habitats

The river cobble in this area makes the vegetation sparse. Bunchgrasses that grow well in sandy soils do well in the area. Sand dropseed and Indian ricegrass combine in a patchwork across the site. Gray rabbitbrush forms the dominant overstory shrub layer. Riparian areas support both native cottonwoods and introduced mulberry trees, providing shade and structure to the river shore areas.

Rare Plants

A Washington state-sensitive species, shining flatsedge, is relatively common along the river shore, as is Robinson's onion, which is presently on the state's watchlist.

Wildlife

Trees in the riparian area attract migrant songbirds. Red-winged and Brewer's blackbirds, Bullock's orioles, and yellow-rumped warblers are some of the more commonly seen species. Occasionally, great blue herons or black-crowned night herons are spotted hunting in the shallow areas along the river edge. Cliff swallows use the Vernita Bridge as a nesting site and forage over the water. Killdeer often attempt to nest in the gravelly river cobble; their distinct call can be heard throughout the area during the spring.

Fish

In addition to important salmonid runs, other fish found in the Hanford Reach include reddsides shiners, carp, largescale suckers, northern pikeminnow and peamouth. Several bass species are known to migrate as much as 200 miles

from the Yakima River to spawn in the Hanford Reach. Mountain whitefish and smallmouth bass are common and support a recreational fishery.

Public Uses

The 800-acre unit is open to the public year round. Primary uses are river access, boat launching and bank fishing. No restrooms or potable water exist on the unit.



FWS photo: Dave Goeke

Cultural Resources

This area has been a traditional use area and fishing locale for native people for thousands of years and is still used today by local and regional fishers. There is evidence of Chinese placer mining and post 1900 homesteads in this unit. The historical community of Arrowsmith was just north of the present highway bridge, and a ferry crossing was just downstream of it.



FWS photo: William Radke