

News Release



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Wapato Lake National Wildlife Refuge Releases Final Public Access Plan

PORTLAND, Oregon – The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has published the final environmental assessment for the public access plan for Wapato Lake National Wildlife Refuge near Gaston, Oregon. Over 900 acres, the refuge protects land for wildlife and nature based activities for the public. The public access plan opens the refuge to new activities, including wildlife observation, wildlife photography, environmental education and interpretation. The refuge will be open for wildlife observation and photography, environmental education and interpretation from February-November, seven days a week.

“The public will now have access to a 2.6 mile trail on top of the levee that surrounds Wapato Lake,” said Refuge Manager Rebecca Gómez Chuck. “Open from sunrise to sunset, we are excited for members of the community to be able to enjoy the newest national wildlife refuge in Oregon.”

Wapato Lake NWR was established in 2013 to protect and restore important habitats for the benefit of fish, wildlife, and people. All land management decisions, including restoration and visitor activities allowed on refuges, are evaluated to make sure each activity supports and does not conflict with the purpose of the refuge. The refuge provides important habitat for migratory birds seeking refuge and respite along their migratory route, including songbirds and waterfowl, and resident species such as bald eagles and rough-skinned newt.

For the past 100 years, much of the land included in the refuge was used as farmland - replacing the once shallow lake that provided important wildlife habitat and helped clean the water of the Tualatin River. As part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, refuge staff and partners have been working to restore the shallow water wetlands and the important habitat along waterways since the refuge was established. Restoration projects have included removing invasive species and planting native species in their place. Additionally, the refuge is partnering with the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde to restore wapato, an edible tuber, which the Tualatin Kalapuya harvested there for generations.

“We are planning to welcome the community to the refuge during a ceremony and celebration this spring,” said Chuck. “We are thrilled to be able to invite everyone to participate - all of the people who care for this place - and introduce the refuge and the wildlife that live here to many new people.”

As the spring ceremony approaches, the refuge will share details with the community via their website and social media.

“We are grateful for the support of the community and look forward to the increased opportunities for the public to enjoy the refuge,” said Chuck.

The refuge is a place where people can experience nature and share their outdoor traditions. In addition to the new activities for the public, the refuge is also open to hunting. From February through September, the full 2.6-mile levee trail and 0.25 mile paved entrance trail is open to the public. During October and November, while the state waterfowl hunting season occurs on privately owned lands adjacent to the refuge, the 0.25 mile of paved entrance trail and the northern 1.3 miles of the levee trail are open to the public. To ensure the safety of all visitors and in response to public comments on the draft public access plan, during the months of December and January the refuge will only be open to waterfowl hunters participating in the state season on refuge lands with refuge access permits. Access to hunters is limited to the northern 1.3-miles of the levee trail on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

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