

## Chapter 2

# Ridgefield NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

### ADMINISTRATION

Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the U.S. Department of the Interior. The Refuge is managed from the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex office in Ridgefield, Washington.

### ESTABLISHMENT



The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge was originally established in 1965 to provide wintering habitat for waterfowl, especially Dusky Canada geese. With this mandate, the Refuge was created and approximately 5,300 acres has now been acquired. The Refuge contains a mosaic of seasonal wetlands, permanent wetlands, grasslands, upland forests, riparian corridors, oak woodlands, and cropland. Thousands of ducks, geese, and swans winter on the Refuge. Management emphasis is to provide habitat for wintering waterfowl. Of special concern are the habitat needs for Dusky Canada goose, a subspecies which nests in the Copper River Delta of Alaska and winters along the Lower Columbia River and Willamette River Valley in Oregon.

The Refuge currently manages water levels on about 1,000 acres of wetlands on the River S, Bachelor Island, and Ridgeport Dairy Units. The water delivery system provides water to wetlands during the winter for a variety of water birds, and is used to hold water in some units for vegetation management, rearing of ducks, and to support native amphibians/reptiles. Water is then pumped out in the early summer to promote the growth of desirable moist soil waterfowl food plants.

Cooperating farmers and Refuge staff manage approximately 1,500 acres of grasslands and crop to provide for wintering waterfowl. The refuge allows cooperators to graze cattle and harvest hay between late spring and early fall; and both cooperators and refuge staff mow pasture and canary grass. These activities provide short, tender grass for Canada geese when they are on the refuge from October through April.

The Refuge contains several large blocks of native riparian forests. Riparian forests range from mixed species of native trees to nearly pure stands of mature ash and willow. These habitats are nurtured along the margins of the Columbia River and within the undiked bottomlands of the Refuge. These areas attract a diverse array of neotropical songbirds.

## **PURPOSE**

The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge was established (along with 3 other refuges in the Willamette Valley of Oregon) in 1965 in response to a need to establish vital winter habitat for wintering waterfowl with an emphasis on the Dusky Canada goose whose nesting areas in Alaska were severely impacted by the violent earthquake of 1964.

Recreation is an additional purpose of the Refuge. The Refuge landscape provides sanctuary throughout the seasons for waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, river otter, black-tailed deer, coyotes, herons, and numerous other species of wildlife. The Refuge also offers people a place to keep in touch with their 'wild' neighbors. For many, this is a special place to learn about and appreciate the splendor of the natural areas that once occurred in abundance along the lower Columbia River.

The Refuge offers wildlife-dependent public use in designated portions of the Refuge. The Carty Unit and its 2-mile Oaks to Wetlands Trails are open year-round during daylight hours. The River 'S' offers the 1-mile Kiwa Trail, which is open for use from May 1 to September 30. The River 'S' Unit also contains the 4.2-mile Auto Tour Route and observation blind that are open year-round during daylight hours. A portion of the River 'S' Unit is open to waterfowl hunting during the regular waterfowl-hunting season.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the Refuge, as listed from highest to lowest priority, are as follows:

- To provide and preserve habitat for the enhancement of wintering waterfowl and other migratory birds with emphasis on the Dusky Canada Goose.
- To protect and maintain natural habitats capable of supporting a diversity of wildlife.
- To provide public information, interpretation, and education on the wildlife resources of the Refuge.
- To provide wildlife-dependent recreation.
- To cooperate with other agencies, educational institutions, and private organizations and individuals in providing technical assistance and research opportunities consistent with Refuge objectives and management needs.

## RIDGEFIELD NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

### Fast Facts

- **The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge was established** (along with 3 other refuges in the Willamette Valley of Oregon) in 1965, in response to a need to establish vital winter habitat for wintering waterfowl with an emphasis on the Dusky Canada goose whose nesting areas in Alaska were severely impacted by the violent earthquake of 1964.
  
- **The Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex** is a group of four refuges managed by the same staff from its headquarters at the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. These other three Refuges include: Steigerwald Lake NWR in Washougal WA; Franz Lake NWR near Skamania WA; and Pierce NWR between North Bonneville and Beacon Rock. Steigerwald Lake NWR has a year round walking trail while the other two refuges are completely wildlife sanctuary, unopen to the public. However there are seasonal birding walks and volunteer opportunities that often give visitors a rare chance to see these other beautiful Refuges. Franz Lake also has an overlook off of Highway 14 for people to view the Refuge from the outside.
  
- **Ridgefield NWR is approximately 5,300 acres in size.**
  
- **The Oaks to Wetlands Trail** is located on the Carty Unit. The trail, which is open year round, is a great place to learn more about local plants and wildlife. The dense forested part of the trail is a great place to see many different kinds of birds.
  
- **The Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge** is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting educational programs, increasing public awareness, and cultural resources of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. Volunteers and visitors have seen their work in action when they use the Auto Tour podcast, help with restoration work, participate in educational programs for adults and children, or go to special events like BirdFest and volunteer appreciation gatherings. To learn more about this important organization checkout this website: [www.ridgefieldfriends.org](http://www.ridgefieldfriends.org)

- **The Auto Tour Route** is the most popular visitor destination of the Refuge. The Route transects fields, wetlands, sloughs, and forests. The Route changes considerably with the season. Raptors can be found all seasons with highest concentrations in the fall and winter. Waterfowl are present all year, however, the populations are highest from October to April. Spring brings a bounty of migrant and nesting birds to the River 'S' Unit. Turtles, ducklings, and goslings are visible through the summer months.
- **The Cathlapotle Plankhouse** can be seen along the Oaks to Wetlands Trail of the Carty Unit. Archaeological evidence, historic documents, and the Lewis and Clark journals suggest that the plankhouses of the lower Columbia River were magnificent structures, standing for hundreds of years. In 2005 the Refuge, its partners, and volunteers united to construct a replica Plankhouse to interpret, educate, and recover the natural and cultural heritage of the Refuge. The Cathlapotle Plankhouse is open, pending volunteer availability, Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 4 pm from April through September.
- **Radiocarbon dating has determined** that human habitation here dates back at least 2,300 years, making it one of the oldest inhabited sites known in the floodplain of the lower Columbia River.
- **The Kiwa Trail** is on the River 'S' Unit and can be reached by following the Auto Tour Route past the observation blind. The Kiwa Trail is open from May 1 to September 30 during daylight hours. The Kiwa Trail is adjacent to Oregon ash stands, sloughs, seasonal wetlands, and grasslands. Possible bird sightings include woodpeckers, white-breasted nuthatches, swallows, chickadees, wrens, warblers, wood pewees, waxwings and grosbeaks. Watch the sloughs for wood ducks, herons, and turtles. Close examination of the wetlands may reveal bitterns, rails, and shorebirds.
- **October Festival!** - Join the Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as we celebrate the arrival of fall and the wildlife that make the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge their winter home. BirdFest & Bluegrass is a unique opportunity to enjoy not only the sights and sounds of fall migration but also a festive celebration of music, childrens' activities, food, and fun in the Ridgefield community.