



# Unveiling the great natural spectacle at Willapa Bay

Brad Winn

A prime site in the Hemisphere for Birdwatching and Sustainable Tourism



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From late April throughout May, hundreds of thousands of migratory shorebirds arrive at Willapa Bay. They perform an amazing spectacle.

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- Bird flocks of 10,000 to 100,000 shorebirds, moving on the horizon and occupying the mudflats at low tides.
- Birds are everywhere in Willapa Bay, the second largest estuary on the Pacific coast, where ocean tides and freshwater create one of the richest coastal ecosystems.
- Shorebirds can be seen in several areas around Willapa Bay (Leadbetter Point, Long Beach Peninsula, Willapa NWR, Bay Center, Tokeland Flats and North Willapa Bay).



Tom Rowley



The area plays a critical role as a stopover site for an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 shorebirds each spring. Short-billed dowitcher, red knot, and dunlin pass through in numbers at 10 percent or more of their Pacific Coast populations.

### An economic opportunity

- Total expenditures for fishing, hunting, and wildlife-viewing recreation in Washington State increased from \$3.1 billion in 2001 to \$5.1 billion in 2011.
- A survey in 2012 found that 81 percent of state residents participated in nature activities such as visiting a park and wildlife viewing.
- In 2014, the number of visitors to the Long Beach Peninsula increased 14% and visitors spent nearly \$156 million. Average number of visitors is estimated at 8,671,361 people/year.
- Willapa National Wildlife Refuge has hundreds of thousands of visitors every year.
- Interest in wildlife photography is increasing among younger people, showing an 85% increase between 2006 and year 2016.
- Locations with similar characteristics, have attracted hundreds of visitors during Bird Festivals, generating millions of dollars in revenue, and increasing use of accommodation and services during the high peaks of migration.

## Western Snowy Plover

Breeding on Leadbetter Point (ESA listed species).

## Sanderling

Most likely to see chasing the surf and susceptible to disturbance on Long Beach Peninsula.

## Short-billed Dowitcher

Usually found in salt water on mud flats and tidal marshes during migration and winter. They breed in open marshes and bogs in the boreal forest zone.

## Dunlin

Prime wintering species that relies on Willapa Bay and Long Beach during the non-breeding season.

## Birdwatcher Stats



35% of global consumers are interested in ecotourism holidays



36% of birdwatchers in the USA travel to watch birds, 56% are women

# 53

Average age of birders



25.4 million of Americans are wildlife photographers

## Birdwatcher Economics

# 76

Billion USD in 2016 from wildlife watching activities in the USA

### Of these 76 billion:



15 billion were expenses related to trips,



6 billion were expenses in food and lodging,



4 billion were expenses related to transportation,



and 55 billion were expenses related to equipment

## Community value-added

- Diversify income generating activities and jobs in Willapa Bay.
- Promote the natural attractions of the county and the state internationally.
- Develop new sustainable tourism experiences and opportunities (bird watching, bird festivals, wildlife and landscape photography, and other nature-based tourism like biking, fishing, camping and kayaking).
- Generate local awareness of the nature value and international importance of the healthy estuarine and beaches in Willapa Bay for sustaining hemispheric shorebird populations.
- Increase the number of days that the nature tourist spends in the area.

## Sustainable tourism priorities

- With the support of the Chamber of Commerce and partners, develop a marketing plan to increase birdwatching, wildlife photography and other nature-based tourism in the area.
- Build a new Natural Resource Center by supporting Friends of Willapa National Wildlife Refuge and increase visitors to 200,000 annually.
- Promote Wings Over Willapa Festival, during the peak of shorebird migration in spring and autumn.
- Promote measures for maintaining healthy mudflats and beaches, by combating invasive species and defining best practices for oyster production.
- Establish viewing points and interpretation signs about the great shorebird spectacle, and prevent habitat disturbance by visitors.
- Promote community active participation, through bed & breakfast, restaurants and guides.
- Create joint ventures with state tour operators and international and national birding organizations.



## Willapa Bay, a designated shorebird reserve

- Willapa Bay and the Long Beach Peninsula may be a stretch of southwest Washington shoreline, but the area is a veritable six-lane highway of shorebird migration.
- Shorebirds undertake some of nature's longest migrations. Their ability to travel thousands of miles depends upon a network of critical sites along the way, where they can rest and refuel," said Rob Clay, WHSRN Director. "We are thrilled to recognize Willapa Bay and the Long Beach Peninsula for the important habitats they provide birds between their breeding grounds and overwintering sites."
- Because of the area's importance to conservation, the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) has designated it as a Site of International Importance.

### Importance of the hemispheric network

Red Knots and Western Sandpiper of the Pacific Coast depend on the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN). Today, the network includes key sites for the species, such as Alto Golfo de California y Delta del Rio Colorado, and Complejo Lagunar Ojo de Liebre in Baja California, Mexico, and in the USA Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor in Washington State and Copper River Delta in Alaska. Partners in each site collaborate for conservation of critical stopover habitats. Support these efforts by attending the bird festivals along the flyway.



### About this project

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation's (CEC) 2017-2018 project Conserving Shorebirds through Community Engagement aims to build capacity in communities along North American migration routes to conserve habitat and develop ecotourism linked to bird migration cycles. Bird-related ecotourism can be a source of additional income for local economies and can incentivize communities to sustain conservation efforts.

For more information visit: [www.cec.org/our-work/ecosystems](http://www.cec.org/our-work/ecosystems)  
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