



Oregon Coordinated Aquatic Bird Monitoring:
Description of Important Aquatic Bird Site

Alsea Bay
BCS number: 47-1

Site description author(s)

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Site location (UTM)

Datum: NAD83, Zone: 10, Easting: 416348, Northing: 4921449

General description

Alsea Bay is a coastal estuary consisting predominantly of open water, mud and sandflats at low tide, and some tidal salt marshes on edges and islands. This bay may be one of the most pristine estuaries on the Oregon Coast owing to lack of industrial activity. The Alsea River Watershed drains approximately 475 square miles of land, and is home to fall Chinook salmon, elk and river otter. It contains a number of haul-outs for harbor seal basking, birthing, and nursing. The IBA is designated primarily for waterbird and shorebird foraging areas and includes all tidelands and submerged lands of the Alsea River, (the IBA designation includes approximately the last two miles of Drift Creek before its' confluence with the Alsea River), the Alsea/Bayview oxbow at the north end of the Bay, the last half mile of Starr Creek (TNC owned and restored), Eckman Lake at the south end of the Bay, and Lint Slough. Alsea Bay and its tributaries and sloughs encompass over 1000 hectares and 2700 acres. Approximately half of the Alsea River basin is managed by BLM/US Forest Service (Siuslaw National Forest-much of which is designated Late Successional Reserve under the Northwest Forest Plan).

Boundaries and ownership

Boundaries:

Alsea Bay proper as well as Bayview Oxbow, last ½ mile of Starr Creek, last 2 miles of Drift Creek (up to lower Drift Creek Bridge), and Lint Slough.

Ownership:

Submerged areas (below Mean Low Water) owned by State of Oregon Department of State Lands, and mudflats, sandflats, and lower salt marshes between Mean Low Water and Mean High Water at Alsea Bay mostly owned by government agencies other than the State.

USDA Forest Service owns Siuslaw National Forest land and tidal marsh adjacent to Drift Creek.

US Forest Service and Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife both own land adjacent to Lint Slough.

Port of Alsea Bay owns various pieces of land around the Bay.

Water levels

Alsea Bay is tidally influenced. Water levels fluctuate both daily and seasonally, and according to storm events.

Oregon Department of State Lands' *Filled Lands Analysis 1972* and Cortright et. al., 1987 (incomplete source citation from the DRAFT Alsea Bay IBA Action Plan) indicates an approximately -59% change in tidal wetlands from 1870 to 1970 and about a -21% change in total acreage in the estuary during that time frame.

Focal species use and timing

| Focal Group/Species | Wintering | Breeding | Migration |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Secretive Marsh Bird Group | Present | Unknown | Present |
| Colonial Nesting Bird Group | Present | Present | Present |
| Migrating Shorebird Group | Present | Present | Present |
| Ground-based Waterbird Group | Present | Present | Present |
| American Bittern | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| American White Pelican | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Barrow's Goldeneye | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Black Tern | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Black-crowned Night Heron | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Black-necked Stilt | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Bufflehead | Present | Unknown | Present |
| California Gull | Present | Present | Present |
| Caspian Tern | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Clark's Grebe | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Common Loon | Present | Unknown | Present |
| Dusky Canada Goose | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Eared Grebe | Present | Unknown | Present |
| Forster's Tern | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Franklin's Gull | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Great Blue Heron | Present | Present | Present |
| Greater Sandhill Crane | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Green Heron | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Least Bittern | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Lesser Sandhill Crane | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Long-billed Curlew | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Pied-billed Grebe | Present | Unknown | Present |
| Red-necked Grebe | Present | Unknown | Unknown |
| Snowy Egret | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Sora | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Upland Sandpiper | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Virginia Rail | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Western Grebe | Unknown | Unknown | Present |
| Western Snowy Plover | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| White-faced Ibis | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Yellow Rail | Unknown | Unknown | Unknown |
| Least Sandpiper | Unknown | Present | Unknown |
| Dunlin | Unknown | Unknown | Present |
| Black-bellied Plover | Unknown | Unknown | Present |
| Black Turnstone | Unknown | Unknown | Present |
| Long-billed Dowitcher | Unknown | Present | Unknown |

Location of Type 1 and 2 habitat within the site

| Functional Group | Type 1 Habitat | Type 2 Habitat |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Ground Based Aquatic Birds | Open water, Eckman Lake (?) | Solid edge nesting habitat (??) |
| Secretive Marsh Birds | Tall emergent marsh | Open water |
| Colonial Nesters | Rookery unknown, but foraging occurs in Lint Slough, Bayview Oxbow, Drift Creek, Starr Creek, and Eckman shoreline. | Emergent grassland both north side and south side of the bay due north of Eckman Lake and east. |
| Migrating Shorebirds | Mudflats and sandflats along north side of bay at low tide, south side just east of Eckman Lake, oxbow west at low tide, and Starr Creek at low tide. | Unknown whether shorebirds are using any secondary habitat here |

Access to Type 1 and Type 2 habitats

Bayview Road from Hwy 101, north side of Alsea Bay provides viewing access to mudflats, tidal marshes viewing area, and Starr Creek wetlands. Also allows access to Oxbow west and east where it meets the bay.

Highway 34 from the town of Waldport gives access to less than 1 mile of north section of Lint Slough. Further limited access to Lint Slough by foot (less than 1 mile). Trail building and viewing platform in the future. Otherwise by non-motorized kayak or canoe due to shallowness of waterway. Approx 3 miles east of Waldport, road access to east and west side of Eckman Lake. Off of Hwy 34 (Eckman Lake Road and another road on south side). Visibility across lake is good from strategic locations. Tidegate prevents access to Eckman Lake via Alsea Bay, but a non-motorized boat would allow access.

Drift Creek access is via Forest Service roads which allow access to lower Drift Creek or kayak from boat launch site on south side of Alsea River just west of Eckman Lake.

Access to Starr Creek and marsh area is quite limited (via Bayview road on north side of Bay). Road provides access only along north side of bay and only at one pullout. Marsh is deep muck making walking (even in waders) difficult. No boat access.

Access to Bayview Oxbow possible from South Beaver Creek Road approximately 1 mile from Bayview Road. Viewing area of wetlands. Oxbow is presently walkable for surveys (with permission), but conditions of Oxbow are likely to change with new land management considerations and possible hydrological changes with opening of tidegates.

Audibility/visibility of focal species

Describe any issues that would diminish the detectability of birds. e.g secretive marsh birds are difficult to detect due to hwy noise

Unknown

Conservation issues

Highest threats are considered to be abandonment of and reduction in land management conservation plans, consequential disturbance to birds by boats and recreationalists, and filling in of wetlands for agricultural purposes.

Conservation measures taken, in progress, or proposed

The Estuary Management Plan for the Alsea Bay has identified and inventoried 6 sites for potential restoration:

Site 1. Lint Slough—roughly 2005-present, dike removal by MidCoast Watershed Council and ODFW partnership

Site 2. Bayview Oxbow—2007 TWC acquisition and assessment, potential restoration 2010, 2009-2010 Phil Williams & Associates is in process of a modeling exercise to develop a tidal marsh restoration plan involving potential tide gate and historic levee removal.

Site 3. Eckman Lake—still a priority but no restoration thus far.

Site 4. Drift Creek—USDA Forest Service acquisition of land adjacent to Drift Creek. Subsequent completion of Lower Drift Creek Restoration Plan, Siuslaw National Forest, 2008.

Site 5. Barclay Meadows—still a priority, but no restoration so far.

Site 6. Kent-Malcom Property—status unknown.

Past and current surveys

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) contact Roy Lowe, 541.867.4550 midwinter waterfowl surveys annually beginning of January cover entire coast (and inland to a limited extent), including Alsea Bay.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) David Young 541.867.4038 Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Assessment.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Doug Cottum 541.867.4741 Establishes fishing and hunting regulations for salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout, waterfowl, crabbing and clamming.

Potential survey methods

Description:

Highly variable conditions. Some walking surveys (transects or GRIDS in Bayview Oxbow), open water boat access (bay flyover or boat-based transects), canoe and kayak (boat transects up both Lint Slough and Drift Creek).

Selection bias:

Surveys will vary based on relative accessibility and sheer size of the bay itself, Lint Slough, Starr Creek, Eckman Lake, Drift Creek, and Bayview Oxbow. Starr Creek itself will be largely inaccessible. Drift Creek and Lint Slough should be navigable by canoe or kayak. Bayview Oxbow may allow on-foot access.

Measurement error and bias:

Not applicable(?). Of the areas where access is possible, visibility should be uninhibited and should not produce measurement error. Neither are there numbers sufficient enough to impede direct counting.

Potential pilot studies

Unknown

Literature Cited

Google, Inc. 2010. Alsea Bay. Google Earth (Version 5.1.3533.1731) [Software]. Available from <http://earth.google.com>. Accessed May 7, 2010.

Google Map. 2010. Map of Alsea Bay, Oregon. <http://maps.google.com/>. Accessed May 7, 2010.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2010. National Wetlands Inventory website. U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. <http://www.fws.gov/wetlands/>. Accessed May 7, 2010.

Figure 1: Google Earth (2010) map of Alsea Bay with the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (2010) layer.

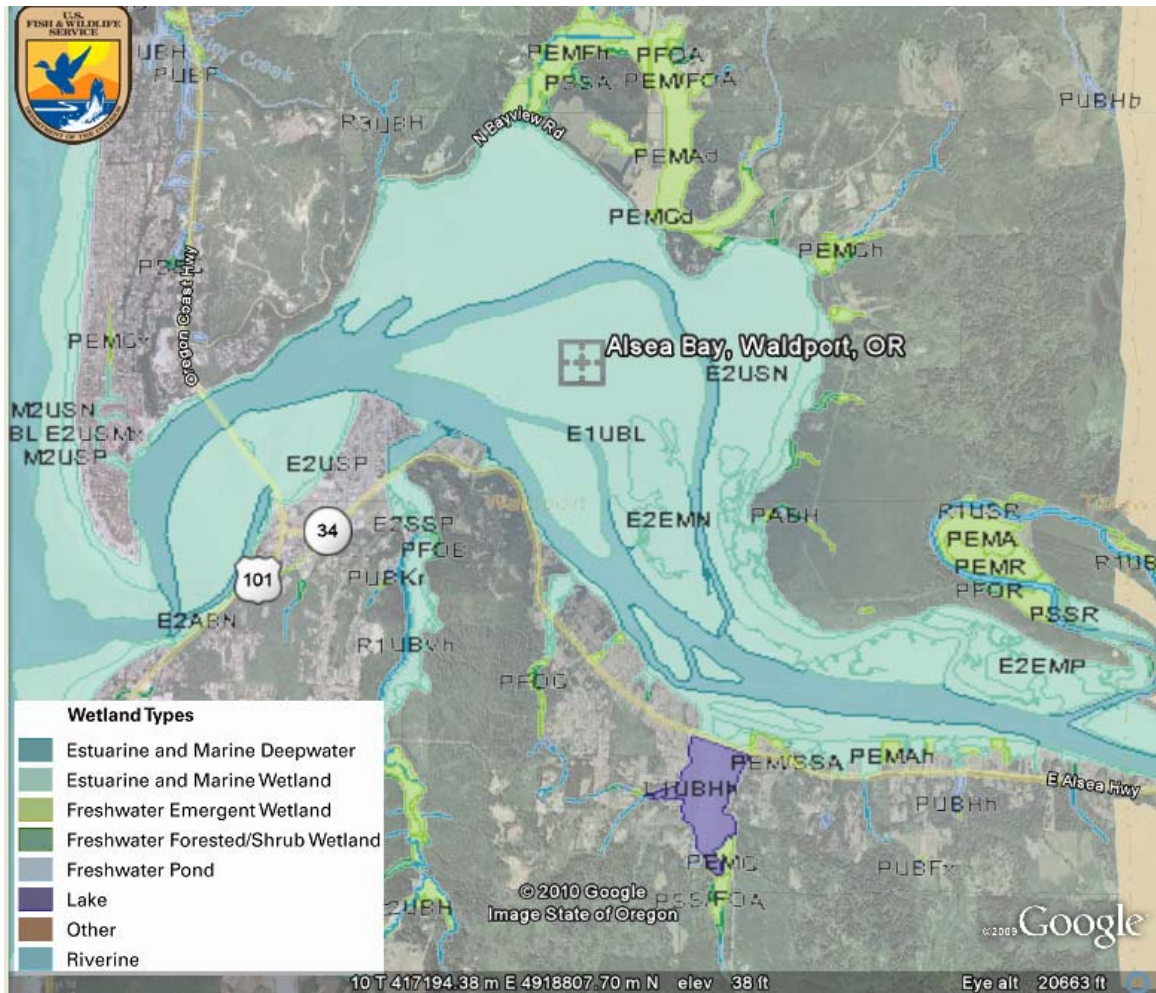


Figure 2: Google Map (2010) road view of Alsea Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

