



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



## McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge

BCS number: 48-19

### Site description author(s)

Howard Browsers, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Mid-Columbia River Refuges Complex  
Kate Halstead, Field Technician, Klamath Bird Observatory

### Primary contact for this site

Howard Browsers, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Mid-Columbia River Refuges Complex. Phone: 509-546-8300. Email:  
[Howard\\_Browsers@fws.gov](mailto:Howard_Browsers@fws.gov)

### Site location (UTM)

Datum: NAD83, Zone: 11, Easting: 360090, Northing: 5051790.

### General description

“Nestled between the plains and the Blue Mountains of eastern Oregon, McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge offers habitat for rare and endangered species and is a haven for breeding and migratory birds. The lack of other local wetland habitats elevates the importance of this refuge as a home to a variety of wildlife and plant species in an arid environment.

Aquatic habitats serve as resting and feeding areas for wintering waterfowl, while surrounding shrub-steppe and riparian corridors provide habitat for small mammals, mule deer, songbirds, and birds of prey. Osprey nest in cottonwoods; and bald eagles are seen in the area in fall and winter. During late summer, exposed mud flats provide a source of food for migrating shorebirds. Situated only 5 miles south of the town of Pendleton, Oregon, the refuge receives almost 50,000 annual visitors, most during the summer months. Upland bird hunting remains popular, with as many as 500 hunters each year pursuing pheasant and quail. Other visitors simply enjoy driving, walking, picnicking or observing the abundant wildlife and scenic beauty (USFWS 2008)”.

**Boundaries and ownership**

*Boundaries:* McKay Creek NWR is directly east of the town of Sparks, and approximately 5 miles south of the city of Pendleton. See figures below.

*Ownership:* McKay Creek NWR is an overlay refuge – the Bureau of Reclamation manages the water resources, while the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) manages non-lake, upland portions of the refuge. The USFWS manages public access to the refuge. See Figure 1 for BLM Vale District ownership map.

**Water levels**

The reservoir fills up in fall and winter, and is drawn down in spring and summer for irrigation. It is not known to go dry, but may be lowered drastically from its high winter volume.

**Focal species use and timing**

<b>Focal Guild/Species</b>	<b>Wintering</b>	<b>Breeding</b>	<b>Migration</b>
Secretive Marsh Birds*	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Colonial Nesting Waterbirds	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Ground-based Aquatic Birds	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Migrating Shorebirds	Present	Maybe	Present
American White Pelican	Maybe	Unknown	Unknown
Barrow’s Goldeneye	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Black-necked Stilt	Absent	Maybe	Maybe
Bufflehead	Present	Absent	Present
Dusky Canada Goose	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Franklin’s Gull	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Greater Sandhill Crane	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Long-billed Curlew	Unknown	Unknown	Most likely
Snowy Egret	Absent	Absent	Absent
Red neckec grebe	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Upland Sandpiper	Absent	Absent	Absent
Western Snowy Plover	Absent	Absent	Absent
Yellow Rail	Absent	Absent	Absent
Bald eagle	Present		

\*The focal species for Oregon’s aquatic secretive marsh bird monitoring are PBGR, LEBI, AMBI, VIRA, SORA, YERA.

## Location of Type 1 and 2 habitat within the site

Functional Group	Type 1 Habitat	Type 2 Habitat
Ground Based Aquatic Birds	Unknown	
Secretive Marsh Birds	Unknown	
Colonial Nesters	unknown	
Migrating Shorebirds	Lake shoreline	

There may be a small habitat for secretive marsh birds at the south end of the reservoir. See Figure 2 for Google Earth (2008) map of McKay Creek NWR with the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (2008) layer.

### Access to Type 1 and Type 2 habitats

On the lake, surveys can only be done with a boat (non-motorized or electric-motor). Lake shore areas are accessible only on foot; however flooded conditions and dense vegetation could inhibit access to these areas. It would be best to contact the refuge before planning a survey, as they can give permission for access and suggest access methods. See Figure 3 for general road access to the site.

### Audibility/visibility of focal species

There is no noise from highways or other roads. Vegetation can be very dense, which may obstruct audibility/visibility of birds.

### Conservation issues

The drastic drawdown of water during the spring and summer is of concern.

### Conservation measures taken, in progress, or proposed

Some upland weed control has been done.

### Past and current surveys

Periodic aerial surveys occur once per month in November, December, and January. There are also mid-winter bald eagle surveys, and the Christmas Bird Count, that occur at McKay Creek NWR.

### Potential survey methods

*a. Description:* Useful potential surveys would include secretive marsh birds and colonial breeding birds, on which there is no information.

*b. Selection bias:*

*c. Measurement error and bias:*

Manning and Hartley (2006) suggest that a ground-based survey for all aquatic birds would be valuable would probably need to be conducted by staff. Whether a aerial waterfowl survey would be beneficial has yet to be determined.”

### Potential pilot studies

## Literature cited

Bureau of Land Management, Vale District ownership map.

<http://www.blm.gov/or/districts/vale/images/ValeDetailedMap.jpg> . Accessed March 20, 2009.

Google Earth version 4.3. 2008. Image: McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon. Accessed October 23, 2008.

Google Map. 2009. Map of McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge, Oregon.

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Manning, Ann and Laura Hartley. March 2006. Important sites for aquatic birds in Eastern Oregon. Version 2.0.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 2008. McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

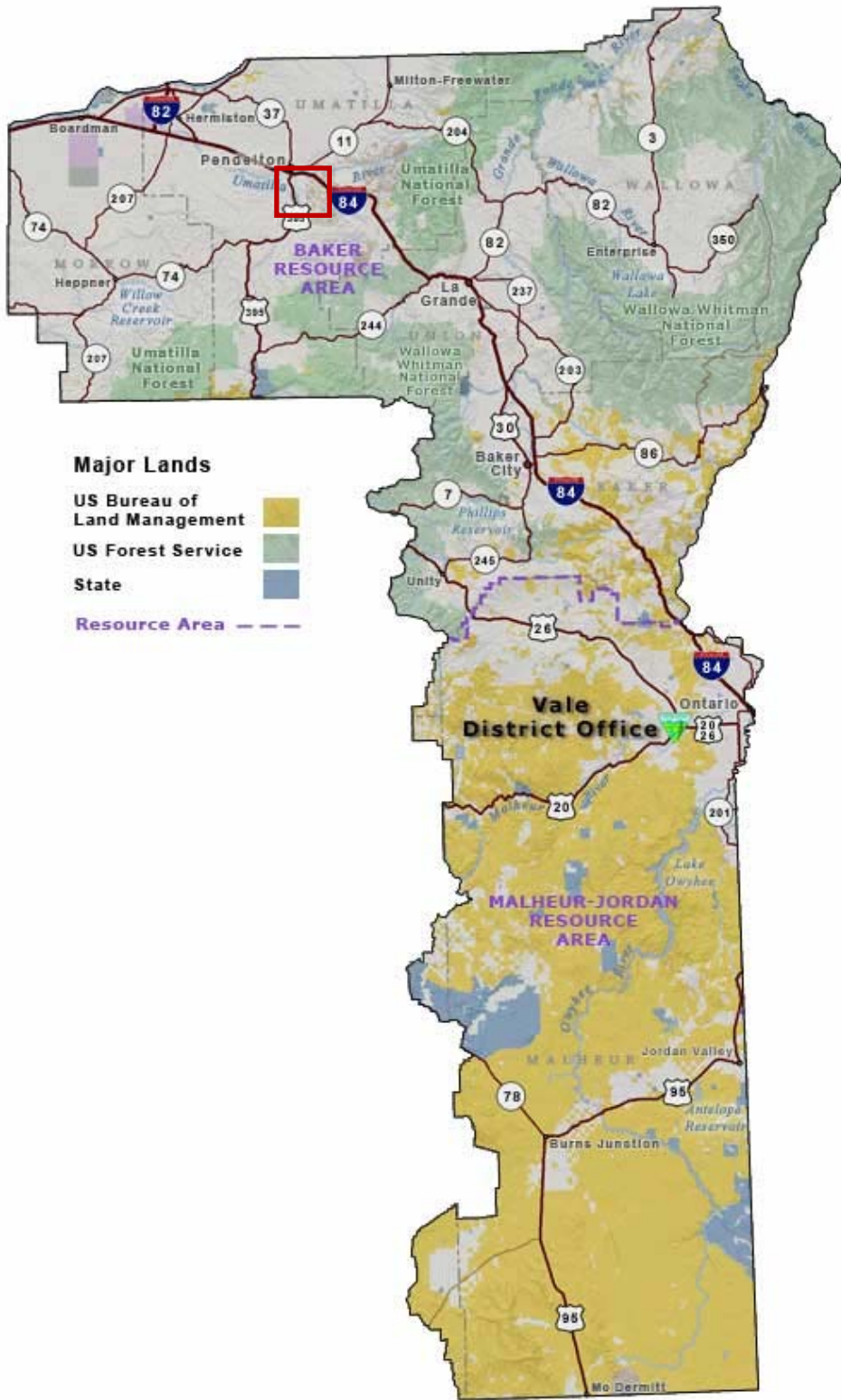
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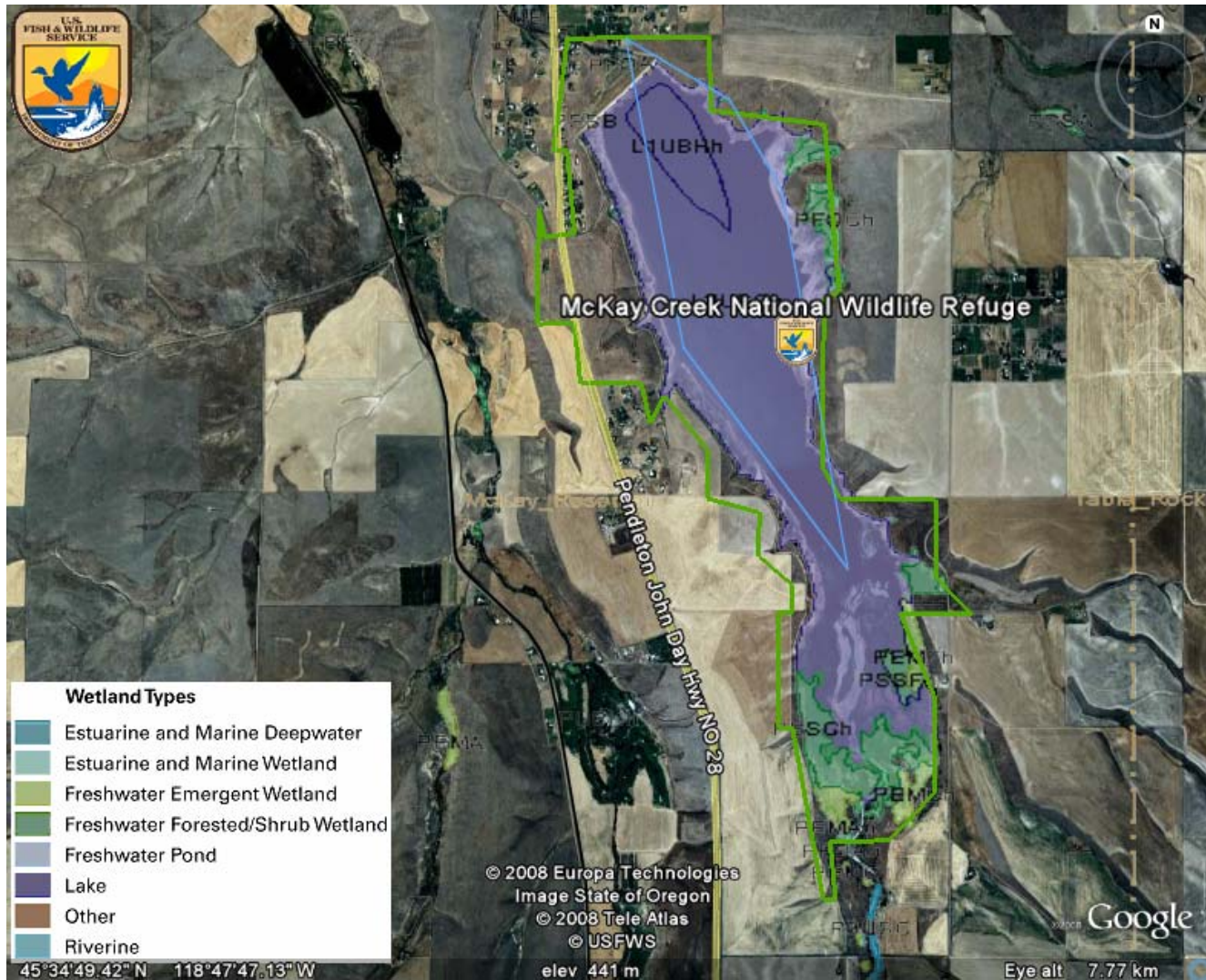
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**Figure 1:** BLM Vale District ownership map. The red box indicates McKay Creek NWR.





**Figure 2:** Google Earth (2008) map of McKay Creek NWR with the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (2008) layer.



**Figure 3:** Google Map (2009) road view of McKay NWR.

