



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

Sauvie Island Wildlife Area  
BCS number: 47-28

**Site description author(s)**

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**Site location (UTM)**

Datum: NAD83, Zone: 10, Easting: 517208, Northing: 5065297

**General description**

Sauvie Island Wildlife Area (SIWA) is one of several wetland-focused wildlife areas managed by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). The wildlife area is located in Columbia and Multnomah Counties, south of the confluence of the Columbia River and Multnomah Channel, approximately 12 miles from downtown Portland. The wildlife area presently encompasses 11,543 acres.

SIWA is one of Oregon's outstanding natural treasures, supporting diverse species and habitats. SIWA is an important part of the Pacific Flyway for migrating and wintering waterfowl, attracting peak concentrations of more than 150,000 ducks and geese in the winter. It is a keystone of the Portland/Vancouver regional natural resource complex and a Conservation Opportunity Area within the Oregon Conservation Strategy.

**Boundaries and ownership**

*Boundaries:*

Sauvie Island Wildlife Area is located on the north end of the 24,000 acre Sauvie Island. The island is located at the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. The island is bordered by the Willamette River on the south, Columbia River on the east and Multnomah Channel on the west. The wildlife area is 12 miles from downtown Portland.

*Ownership:*

Sauvie Island Wildlife Area includes 11,543 acres, of which 8,053 acres are under fee title to the ODFW and 3,490 acres of state owned waters are managed through a cooperative agreement with the Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL).

**Water levels**

There are 4,563 acres of wetlands on SIWA. Of that total, 286 acres are located inside two levees that provide protection against flooding from the nearby Columbia and

Willamette river systems. The remainder, including the 3,000 acre Sturgeon Lake, is located outside those levees. Wetlands in areas protected behind levees provide staff a higher degree of water level control and therefore greater flexibility to create and manage for specific habitat types. Those wetlands located outside protective levees are greatly influenced by the adjacent Columbia and Willamette Rivers and by tidal influences on a daily basis; consequently, management on these lands is more difficult and this limits management options. River levels are highly dependent of USACE hydroelectric / flood dams on both the Columbia and Willamette Rivers.

### Focal species use and timing

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

\* Currently four Great Blue Heron rookeries are located on SIWA.

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

Functional Group	Type 1 Habitat	Type 2 Habitat
Ground Based Aquatic Birds	Unknown	Unknown
Secretive Marsh Birds	Moist soil managed units	Wetland located outside levees
Colonial Nesters	Riparian zone	Fragmented Riparian zone
Migrating Shorebirds	Tidal wetlands	Moist soil managed units

The Type 1 habitats are located within the Eastside levee adjacent to the Columbia River. Type 2 habitats are located through the wildlife area.

### Access to Type 1 and Type 2 habitats

Access by foot and boat is open May 1 through September 30. Most portions of wildlife area are closed from October 1 through April 30. Vehicle access is limited and by ODFW permit in most areas. All wetlands can be accessed via foot and by vehicle during dry weather.

### Audibility/visibility of focal species

Noise from farm machinery and overhead aircraft are the primary issues. Visibility for secretive marsh birds is problematic due to dense vegetation in the moist soil managed unit.

### Conservation issues

Invasive plant species are a major issue on the wildlife area. Reed canarygrass occurs in Wetlands and Himalayan blackberry is prevalent in all upland locations. River level fluctuations vary greatly both from year to year and by season. In areas which are tidal, these fluctuations may have impacts to all habitat types which aquatic birds occur. A Negative impact would be flooding during nesting season and a positive impact would be large exposed mudflats during low flow periods.

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

Wetland restoration projects are a high priority and will continue as funding is available. Wetlands which are located inside levee areas are in moist soil management to produce high quality for aquatic birds. Invasive plant species control is ongoing, especially for reed canarygrass, Canada thistle, tansy ragwort, purple loosestrife, and Himalayan blackberry.

### Past and current surveys

Bimonthly aerial bird counts are conducted as weather permits and Oregon State Police aircraft availability. The species which are counted during these aerial flights include waterfowl, cranes, herons, egrets, eagles. Weekly goose surveys are conducted when winter geese are present. (September-mid May). Point counts are conducted in the wildlife area's oak woodlands and waterbirds are counted if observed flying over. An annual Sandhill Crane roost count is conducted in October. The annual Christmas Bird Count is conducted on the wildlife area.

### Potential survey methods

*Description:*

Secretive Marsh Birds surveys would be valuable for wetland management purposes such as inundation/drawdown timing. Colonial Nesters have just recently started using the wildlife area in relatively large numbers and nests surveys would be valuable for riparian zone management issues. Many of these surveys could be conducted by trained volunteers through the Audubon Society of Portland, Important Bird Area program.

*Selection bias: (Discuss the potential for selection bias when designing a survey in the future, especially when sub-sample of the site will be studied. Point out how bias could be introduced and recommend ways to prevent this)*

Not applicable.

*Measurement error and bias:*

Moist-soil managed wetland units are difficult to survey visually due to dense vegetation. These wetlands would be well suited for audible bird surveys.

**Potential pilot studies**

Unknown

## **Literature cited**

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). 2006. *The Oregon Conservation Strategy*. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Salem, Oregon.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW). 2010. *Draft Sauvie Island Wildlife Area Management Plan*. Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Salem, Oregon

Figure 1. Sauvie Island Wildlife Area Draft Management Plan (ODFW 2006)

