

Superlatives of the Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge

The 40,885-acre Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) contains one of the largest remaining freshwater marshes in the Pacific Northwest. It is further described by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as one of the largest and most pristine high-elevation marshes in the Intermountain West.

13,889 acres of sedge/wet meadows occur on the Klamath Marsh NWR. Sedge meadows represent a native plant community that is underrepresented within the landscape of other wetlands within the Klamath Basin. Sedge and wet meadows are relatively healthy and intact on Refuge lands and provide important shallow water habitat for Federal and state conservation targets such as spring migratory waterfowl, nesting sandhill cranes, and nesting yellow rails.

The Klamath Marsh NWR has been identified as having the largest, most extensive acreage of potential yellow rail habitat in Oregon and generally appears to be the center of distribution for this disjunct population of the Rocky Mountains.

Greater sandhill cranes also have a long history of nesting on Klamath Marsh NWR, with the Refuge being one of the most important breeding sites in eastern Oregon. (On Klamath Marsh NWR, cranes also nest over shallow water in dense clumps of hardstem bulrush.)

The Klamath Marsh NWR has been designated by the Audubon Society as an “Important Bird Area” (IBA) for the following reasons:

- It hosts approximately 50 percent of the western U.S. yellow rail breeding population.
- It is used by thousands of waterfowl during migration.
- There are records of least bittern.
- The Refuge supports about six percent of Oregon’s nesting greater sandhill cranes.
- It supports a significant number of shorebird species, particularly during spring migration it is one of the highest in Oregon.
- It supports breeding Forster’s and black terns.

The Refuge is used by numerous other waterbirds, such as shorebirds, grebes, gulls, terns, and herons. Several species are identified as species of concern as determined by the USFWS, Partners in Flight, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the American Bird Conservancy.

At least 20 species of shorebirds have been documented using the Refuge for migration or breeding. Additionally, the refuge’s extensive emergent aquatic stands of cattail and bulrush provide important nesting and foraging habitat for species like sora rail, American bittern, least bittern, and marsh wrens.

There are 13 species of concern that may occur on or near the Klamath Marsh NWR.

The American bald eagle, still an Oregon state-listed threatened species, nests and winters on Klamath Marsh NWR. Six species of sensitive mammals are known to occur (or potentially occur) on the Refuge: long-legged myotis, silver-haired bat, fisher, pine (American) marten, white-tailed jackrabbit, and western gray squirrel. In addition, one fish, three amphibians, and two reptiles have been documented on the Refuge or are thought to occur there based on literature reviews. These are Miller Lake lamprey, Oregon spotted frog, western toad, Cascades frog, northwestern pond turtle, and western painted turtle. The Refuge is also home to 10 state-designated sensitive birds: bufflehead, northern goshawk, yellow rail, greater sandhill crane, flammulated owl, great grey owl, blackbacked woodpecker, Lewis's woodpecker, whiteheaded woodpecker, and olive-sided flycatcher.

The Oregon spotted frog which occurs on the Klamath Marsh NWR, is a "List 1 species" in Oregon and a candidate for Federal listing by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Recent surveys suggest that this species no longer occurs in 70–90 percent of its once far greater historic range.

In general, the remaining wetlands in the entire Klamath Basin support one of the largest concentrations of waterfowl remaining in North America, with over three million ducks and a half-million geese passing through annually. The area is a critical migratory staging area for 80 percent of all Pacific Flyway waterfowl, and the Klamath Basin provides Oregon's only permanent nesting areas for red-necked grebes and yellow rails (ODFW 2006). In general emergent marshes in eastern Oregon (such as is found in abundance at the Klamath Marsh NWR) provide some of the most important migratory bird habitat in the Intermountain West and play a critical role in sustaining several dozen priority species ranging from tri-colored blackbird and white-faced ibis to eared grebe, American avocet, trumpeter swan, and northern pintail (Eastern Oregon Working Group and Oregon Habitat Joint Venture 2005).

Finally, the Klamath Marsh NWR is bordered by three big game management units (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife): Fort Rock, Silver Lake, and Sprague management units. In addition to mule deer and Rocky Mountain elk, approximately 300 pronghorn antelope utilize the Fort Rock Unit, some of which are occasionally sighted on Klamath Marsh Refuge, particularly in the summer and fall. Edges of Klamath Marsh provide excellent fawning and calving habitat due to adequate forage, cover, and security.

Other common mammals observed are coyote, muskrats, river otter, beaver, striped skunk, raccoon, bobcat, porcupine, black bear and a variety of chipmunk and squirrel species.