Ridgefield Wildlife Refuge, WA

Vicinity Location:
About 14 miles north of Vancouver, WA.**Directions:**
From I-5, drive to Milepost 14 and take the Ridgefield/Pioneer Street exit #14 and drive west on Pioneer Street. You will drive through three roundabouts and continue heading west for a total of 2.9 miles from I-5.Turn right at the flashing red light in Ridgefield and drive north on Main Avenue. Use the Ridgefield Wildlife signs to help direct you. After about 1 mile, turn left at the brown sign for the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge, Carty Unit. Follow the gravel drive and park near the trailhead sign.

There is a pit toilet at the trailhead.

There is a self-closing gate at the entrance of the parking. The gate closes as early as 5:00PM in the winter, so be sure to check the posted sign and don't be caught in the parking lot after dusk! When the days are longer, the gate closes at 6PM.

No dogs, no bicycles, no jogging is allowed in the refuge.

Note: A $3 use fee is required to enter the refuge. The fee doesn't apply if you hold a valid permit for Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge annual pass, Golden Access Passport, Golden Eagle Passport, Golden Age Passport, Duck Stamp, Washing and Oregon Recreation Pass, or a National Parks Pass with a Golden Eagle sticker.

Trail:
Gee Creek Wetlands Trail with connections to Oaks to Wetlands Trail.

There is a geocache along trail at: N 45° 49.886 W 122° 44.962 Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map

Length and Elevation:
4 miles round trip. Elevation gain of 100 feet and loss of 100 feet round trip. Elevation at the trailhead at 70 feet, highest point is at 80 feet. Lowest elevation is 5 feet.

History: This is also known as Gee Creek Wetlands. The refuge was established in 1965 because a violent earthquake in Alaska in 1964 impacted the Copper River Delta in Southcentral Alaska. This is area has the world's highest concentration of Dusky Canada Geese nesting. The earthquake caused the delta to be uplifted about 6 feet. Large portions of the swampy delta drained and became meadows and are now turning into open forests. This allowed eagles, brown bears, foxes, coyotes, and wolves to prey on the adult, eggs, and goslings. Nesting islands have been created in the Copper River Delta and the establishment of this refuge along with 3 other refuges in the Oregon Willamette Valley were an effort to provide vital winter habitat for dusky Canada geese.

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Park in the lot and get a map and wildlife checklist from the kiosks at the trailhead. Cross over the wooden arched bridge across the 3 tracks of the Burlington Northern Railroad and walk across the grass at the far side of the bridge towards the west. The trail crosses the meadow and drops down to an old service road heading generally west. The road crosses Gee Creek on a wooden plank bridge. Gee Creek is a slow-moving creek, which drains McCarty Lake and flows north and west into the

Columbia River. Look for turtles sunning themselves along the creek.

Following the service road across the meadow there is a large row of blackberries which hides an old fence-line. Turn right at the hedge, J9, N 45° 49.790’ W 122° 45.374 and head northwest along the east side of the blackberry hedgerow.

After a few tenths of a mile pass waypoint GT1, which is a gate that is normally left open. Shortly after the gate, the trail enters a long, narrow meadow paralleling Lake River, bordered by blackberries and trees on either side. The views of the nearby lake and river are obscured by the bordering forests. Follow the meadow .5 mile and at the end of the meadow, enter the woods at MDWE, turning to the northeast.

The trail turns to the right and goes on the edge of a very large meadow with hummocks of trees. After about .2 mile is a gate that is normally closed, with a ladder to climb over the fence into the next meadow.

After climbing the ladder over the fence, the trail enters an open woods consisting mainly of cottonwood and oak trees. Walk east and then a bit south to a knoll surrounded by oak trees. From here are views south overlooking a large lake in the refuge and other nearby ponds.

On a clear day you have a good view of Mt. St. Helens from this area and the meadow is a great place to spend time looking at the wildlife.

While you’re walking, be alert for the deer that browse on the grasses and other 4-legged animals in the refuge.

Be careful to return using the same route you took as there are several service road junctions. If you get on the west side of the blackberry hedgerow then you will have to retrace your steps back to waypoint J4.

Enjoy the Photos!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve