



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Refuge Management at Ridgefield NWR

Just the Facts

Ridgefield NWR is located in Clark County approximately 15 miles north of Portland, Oregon. The Refuge was established in 1965 and currently includes 5,218 acres. It is part of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex in the Pacific Region (Region 1) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Refuge borders Ridgefield, Washington to the east and the Columbia River to the west.

Who's Working Around Here?

Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is staffed by one full-time Refuge Manager. There are several other full-time employees who work for all of the Refuges in the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The Complex consists of Ridgefield NWR, Steigerwald Lake NWR, Pierce NWR, and Franz Lake NWR. These employees include a Wildlife Biologist, two Heavy

Equipment Operators, an Outdoor Recreation Planner, a Budget Technician, and a Complex Project Leader.

Water Works

Each September, the Refuge pumps water from Bachelor Slough into the River "S" wetlands. The native vegetation in these wetlands provides sustenance for a wide variety of wildlife, and filling the wetlands also creates habitat necessary to provide opportunities for hunting and wildlife observation. To avoid flooding hunter blinds or the auto tour route, the Refuge must begin pumping water off the Refuge once the rains arrive. The Refuge continues to pump water off the Refuge at a sufficient rate to keep water levels optimal at each hunt blind. In the spring, the water in most wetlands is slowly drawn down. As the water subsides, exposed mud flats become a fertile feeding ground for migrating shorebirds. Later in the season plants germinate in the drying mud, which will become food for waterfowl after floodup in the fall.

The biggest threats to the Refuge wetlands are exotic and invasive plant species. Two of the most prevalent exotics/invasives are reed canarygrass and ricefield bulrush. When it is possible, the Refuge discs each wetland every **5(?) years** to curb the growth of reed canarygrass. To avoid the spread of ricefield bulrush, the Refuge has temporarily eliminated several wetlands from this discing regime.



Infestations of ricefield bulrush are treated by hand-pulling or through application of herbicide. In 2005 alone, volunteers pulled more than 11,000 ricefield bulrush plants. This effort is solely funded by grant monies which will expire in 2007.

The Grass Is Greener...

In the past, much of the Refuge was farmed. This provided high energy food for Canada geese early in the fall. Unfortunately, by early winter this food source was depleted, leaving little behind but mud. To provide a high quality food source from fall to spring, the Refuge decided to move away from crops and toward managed pasture grasses. These pastures provide resources used by other wildlife, such as great blue herons, nesting waterfowl, and hunting raptors, as well. To keep this habitat healthy, the two Heavy Equipment Operators mow approximately **X acres** of pasture on Ridgefield NWR alone. Most years approximately 100 acres of food crops are planted to provide a variety of food sources. These crops also benefit other wildlife species, like sandhill cranes.



Like in wetlands, invasive and exotic plant species are also the biggest threat to Refuge pastures. The Refuge combats a wide variety of non-native plants including Canada thistle, cheatgrass, tansy, teasel, poison hemlock, and reed canarygrass. The Heavy Equipment Operators spend many hours treating pastures to kill these invaders. The loss of several staff position has hampered the Refuge's response to outbreaks of non-native species.

Why Isn't That Grass Mowed?

Waterfowl and songbirds often nest on the ground or in tall grasses. To keep from destroying their nests, pastures and areas bordering wetlands and waterways are not mowed until the beginning of July. The young produced by these nests can be in wetlands around the Refuge throughout the summer. Some buffer areas around wetlands, water delivery ditches, and sloughs are left undisturbed year-round to provide cover for young animals and migration pathways for amphibians.

What Can We Do? (Refuge Purposes and Compatibility)

Every Refuge is mandated to fulfill the purposes for which it was established, and not to allow any use that will materially detract from the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System or the purposes of the Refuge. We are also required to allow six priority wildlife dependent public uses where they are compatible with the purposes of the Refuge. Ridgefield NWR currently allows all six of these uses, which are hunting, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and fishing. By law, a refuge is closed to other uses unless it is formally

opened for those uses. The Refuge must take into account potential conflicts with other refuge uses; indirect, future, and cumulative effects of the use on wildlife and habitat; maintenance and monitoring costs; and off-refuge opportunities for the same uses. The scientific analysis and final decision are called a **compatibility determination**. Very few refuges have adequate funding, staff, facilities, equipment, and supplies to fully achieve their first two management priorities. This can make it difficult for Refuges to open new secondary public uses.

Managing Recreation

Most of the six priority public use programs involve time and money to maintain, improve, and implement. To provide the hunt program, the Refuge hires check station staff, creates a water delivery plan, mows trails and areas around hunt blinds, cleans out water delivery systems, removes invasive species, turns pumps on/off day and night, continually changes gate times, and operates a hunter check station. Refuge staff, with the help of

volunteers, also repair and camouflage hunt blinds, and replace signage. In order to allow for an enjoyable wildlife observation experience, Refuge staff and volunteers mow and clean trails, plan and conduct bird walks, grade and repair refuge roads, remove invasive species, maintain a volunteer contact station and clean the observation blind. These are just a few examples of the many necessary things that the Refuge is happy to spend time and money doing to make the use of the Refuge enjoyable for visitors.

An Eye to the Future

Because Ridgefield NWR will always be here to provide habitat for wildlife and wildlife for people, the Refuge must be managed with an eye to the future. Decisions that are made today, will affect the look and function of the Refuge for years to come. We look forward to hearing your feedback on the Refuge's current programs and creating improvements that will benefit wildlife today, for the next fifteen years, and forever.

