

Great Washington State Birding Trail Site Criteria

Adopted: April 14, 2003

Introduction

The Great Washington State Birding Trail is a driving tour to develop nature tourism that is modeled after the successful and popular trails in Florida and Texas.

Development of Site Criteria

As the Great Washington State Birding Trail system is developed for Washington state, consistent criteria is needed to fit both eastern and western Washington. The criteria need to be clear and concise, written in language understood in different parts of our state as well as by our partners and the public.

Audubon used a combination of Florida and Texas Trail criteria on our pilot project, the Cascade Loop. We adapted the criteria to reflect local conditions in western and central Washington. For the Cascade Loop, we accepted only those sites that were partially or fully in native and/or naturalized habitat.

Washington State Conservation Committee adopted statewide site criteria during the spring 2003 Audubon Council of Washington. Thank you to the Chapter Conservation Chairs, the Wetnet Advisory Committee, the SW WA/Coastal ad hoc Birding Trail Committee, and chapter on the Cascades Loop and Coulee Corridor Loop, all of whom helped to develop the criteria.

Great Washington State Birding Trail Site Criteria

A. Ecological Significance

Emphasis will be given to high-quality or significant bird habitats, especially those that contribute to avian diversity on a regional level. (See Appendix A.)

B. Bird-watching characteristics

These should be the "best of the best," where the probability of seeing birds, at least during specified season(s), is high. The main viewing attractions are native, free-roaming bird species. Consideration may be given to species valued by the public for their beauty or rarity. (See Appendix B.)

C. Site resiliency

The site can withstand public use. Fragile ecosystems or habitats should not be included.

D. Physical and legal access

Under Audubon's "Good Neighbor" policy, the site should be accessible to the public. In the absence of guaranteed public access to a private land site, bird watching from a dedicated, legal, public road pull-off may be recommended with the cooperation of all parties involved.

- **Public ownership.** Landowner will give permission in writing to be a Trail site.
- **Private Ownership.** Landowner will give permission in writing to be a Trail site.

E. Economic significance

A community tourism infrastructure, such as a Chamber of Commerce or Tourism Development Council, exists in the adjacent community(ies).

F. Maintenance support

Site has full support of all partners involved, especially partners providing maintenance.

G. Safety

The site is free of significant safety hazards to the viewing public, e.g. dangerous wildlife, automobile traffic, or other risks. (See Appendix C.)

Great Washington State Birding Trail Site Criteria Appendices

A. Ecological Significance

This means that at least one of Washington's natural communities is represented on the site. These are: aspen stands, cave, cliffs, basalt rims, waterfall, talus, freshwater wetlands, Garry oak woodlands, banks and instream islands, late successional forest, high elevation forest, prairie, mountain meadow, shrub-steppe, riparian, marine/estuarine foraging sites, rocky coastline, coastal islands, and western juniper savannah.

Due to 150 years of development in Washington state, very little pristine habitat remains. Therefore native vegetation and/or naturalized habitat are required on only a portion of site. Naturalized habitat is defined as at least 15 years of re-growth.

Acceptable sites:

- Historically altered habitats such as old-growth forest that is growing back as second- or third-growth stands
- Wetlands that have been cleared and farmed historically, and are now being restored
- Agricultural lands that are in a conservation program or grow crops or crop gleanings that feed birds, especially migratory species
- Voluntary restoration sites such as Spencer Island in Everett
- Mitigation sites on a large landscape level or that are part of a watershed or refuge management plan, and, are self-sustaining (minimum 15 years re-growth) and that have permanent, on-going budgets, maintenance and personnel, e.g. the Steigerwald National Wildlife Refuge.

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Not acceptable:

- Mitigation that results in a net loss of habitat. Various county and state agencies have monitored mitigation efficacy in Washington state, and found that mitigation success rates are only 3-30+% (Results of Monitoring King County Wetland and Stream Mitigations, 1998; Wetland Mitigation Evaluation Study, Phase 1, Compliance and Phase 2, Evaluating Success, Washington Department of Ecology, 2000 and 2002)
- Wetland mitigation banks. County and state guidelines do not provide guarantees for higher performance than individual mitigation at this time.
- Highly altered or artificial sites such as sewage lagoons. There may be birds but sewage lagoons are not tourist attractions.
- Parks with all introduced and/or ornamental species.
- Sites that will have rapid habitat value changes.

B. Bird-watching characteristics

The site should:

- Be good for beginning birders as well as experts. The goal is for visitors to experience immediate, positive rewards.
- Offer a variety of bird species or large number of a single species within 15 minutes of arriving at site.

C. Safety

The site should:

- Have a minimum of four parking places in a dedicated, legal, public road pull-off. Parking on shoulders of narrow roads is dangerous, and cars can get stuck on shoulders.
- Be within one hour's drive of services, e.g. food and shelter.
- Be located on a standard highway or road. Four-wheel drive roads are not acceptable. Tourists from other parts of the country do not know about local conditions and we don't want to risk people getting stranded in areas where help isn't available. Rental cars often prohibit travel on four-wheel drive roads.