

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Ridgefield

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*





*The banks of the lower Columbia River in southwest Washington have been alive with activity for thousands of years. Ancient human civilizations thrived here and shared the land with an abundance of animal and plant life.*

*Although the ancient people have long since departed their prehistoric dwellings, wildlife persists in an area with generations of oak trees and remnant river channels. This place is Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge.*

## A River's Generosity Creates a Paradise for Waterfowl...



*Dusky Canada geese*  
©Montana Waterfowl Foundation

The Columbia River has long been generous with its bountiful resources. It has sustained the lives of people, wildlife, and plants for millennia. Today, the river continues its tradition of giving by producing hydroelectric power and providing places for industry and recreation. Unfortunately, some of the demands on the river come at a high cost to fish, wildlife, and their habitats. Dikes, dams, development, disturbance, and pollution have taken their toll. Only a few natural areas maintained for wildlife remain along the river today.

Along the lower reaches of the Columbia River lies Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge(NWR). The 5,218 acres of Refuge contain a lush mixture of seasonal, semi-permanent, and permanent wetlands, grasslands, riparian corridors, and forests of Douglas-fir and Oregon white oak. These habitats, combined with a mild, rainy winter climate, provide an ideal environment for migrating birds and wintering waterfowl.

Each fall, the Refuge comes alive with thousands of ducks, geese, and swans. These birds depart their northern nesting areas and migrate down the Pacific Coast or over the Cascades to escape the harsh Alaskan and Canadian winters. On Ridgefield NWR, they find precious resting and feeding areas where they spend the winter months preparing to meet the demands of spring migration and the nesting season.



## ...and also a Paradise for People



*The "Blue Goose," designed by conservationist J.N. "Ding" Darling in 1934, is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

Visitors to Ridgefield NWR may enjoy viewing a variety of wildlife within a few minutes of the Portland-Vancouver metropolitan area. The Refuge landscape provides sanctuary throughout the seasons for waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, river otter, black-tailed deer, coyotes, and other species of wildlife. The Refuge also offers a place for people to keep in touch with their "wild" neighbors. For many, this is a place to learn about and appreciate the splendor of the natural areas that once occurred in abundance along the lower Columbia River.

Ridgefield NWR is one of over 540 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The 94 million acre Refuge System is the only nationwide network of Federal lands managed specifically for the conservation of fish and wildlife. Refuges serve to protect our nation's natural and cultural resources for people of all ages and for generations to come.



*American bittern*  
©Vaughn Ruppert

*Opposite: River otters*  
©Jim Cruce

*Below: Virginia rail*  
©Wilson Cady





**Dusky Canada Geese: A Refuge to Call Their Own**

Ridgefield NWR was established in 1965 to provide wintering habitat for the dusky subspecies of Canada goose. This large dark-breasted goose had recently undergone a crisis created by nature. A violent earthquake rocked southern Alaska in 1964 elevating the Copper River Delta by six feet. In a matter of minutes, the primary nesting area for dusky Canada geese was permanently changed.



*Western painted turtle hatchling*  
©Joe Engler/USFWS

*Background: Western Canada geese*  
©Jim Cruce

Over time, the marshy, coastal wetlands that had been nesting habitat for dusky Canada geese were invaded by willows and alders. The resulting shrub thickets provided perfect cover for hungry brown bears and coyotes allowing them to approach nesting geese without being noticed. The altered habitat and increased predation greatly reduced the geese's success in hatching and raising their young. This resulted in a dramatic decline in the dusky Canada goose population.

Although the effects of the earthquake on the Copper River Delta could not be reversed, measures were taken by the Service to ensure dusky Canada geese would have secure wintering habitat. The

*Coyote*  
©Jim Cruce



dusky Canada goose winters along the lower Columbia River and in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Establishment of Ridgefield NWR secured vital wintering habitat for geese.

Service biologists work cooperatively with state wildlife agencies

in the effort to monitor wintering goose populations. Other important species monitored on the Refuge include painted turtles, bald eagles, great blue herons, purple martins, sandhill cranes, and the threatened aquatic plant water howellia. Monitoring of these native species and other resources help guide Refuge habitat management practices and conservation efforts.



*Refuge volunteer*  
©USFWS

## Ancient Village of Cathlapotle - Ridgefield's Rich Cultural and Natural History

Long before Euro-americans arrived on the lower Columbia River, its rich natural resources sustained large populations of native peoples. The remains of a large Native American village on the refuge bear testimony to their existence and their enduring relationship with the natural environment. On November 5, 1805,

Lewis and Clark first observed the village of Cathlapotle on their way to the Pacific. The expedition noted 14 cedar plankhouses at the "Quathlapotle nation." From the Village, seven canoes paddled out to inspect the strangers and trade with them.

Returning in March, 1806, Lewis and Clark stopped at Cathlapotle for several hours and then camped for the night at a "butifull grassy place" about a mile upstream. This campsite is also located on Ridgefield NWR. It is known today as Wapato Portage because it was here that Clark described how the village women collected wapato in a lake and portaged it to the river. But the site's significance does not revolve solely around its use as a campsite by the famed explorers. Radiocarbon dating has determined that human habitation here dates back at least 2300 years, making it one of the oldest sites in the active floodplain of the Columbia.



*Cedar basket*  
Courtesy of the  
Clark County  
Historical Museum



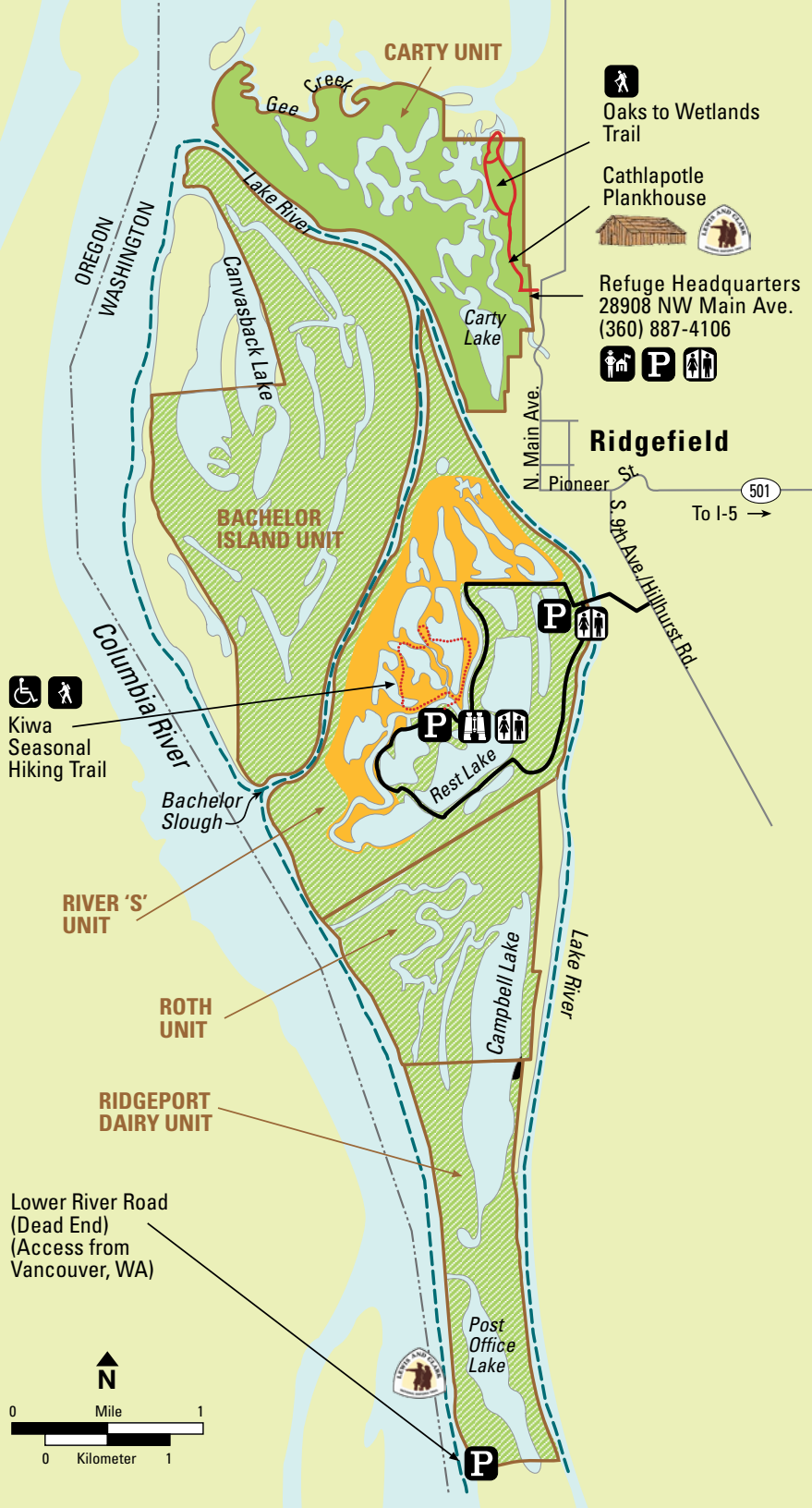
*Cedar ladle*  
Courtesy of the  
Clark County  
Historical Museum

*Historical  
painting courtesy  
of Gene Ellis*

Cathlapotle and Wapato Portage are two of the few significant archaeological sites on the Columbia River that have withstood the destructive forces of flooding, looting, and development. Over the last decade, archaeological research on the Refuge has revealed fascinating information about the ancient environment and how the people found sustenance in the plant and animal resources around them. Today, that rich natural and cultural legacy is permanently protected on Ridgefield NWR and illustrated through the Cathlapotle Plankhouse Project.

The concept of the Cathlapotle Plankhouse Project was to build a full-scale cedar plankhouse similar to those visited by Lewis and Clark at Cathlapotle over 200 years ago. Compelled by immense interest from the public to learn about the Refuge's cultural resources and the approaching Bicentennial of Lewis and Clark's historic journey (2003-2006), the Refuge and numerous partners embarked on this special project. In March 2005, the Cathlapotle Plankhouse became a reality. The 37 by 78 foot western red cedar structure stands as a testimony of the innumerable hours contributed by partners and volunteers dedicated to constructing, maintaining, and operating the plankhouse. Today, the Cathlapotle Plankhouse is a setting for Refuge environmental education, resource interpretation, and special cultural and historic events.





## Carty Unit - Cathlapotle Plankhouse - A Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Site

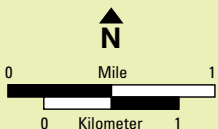
Located approximately 500 yards from the Carty Unit parking lot stands a modern day representation of a traditional dwelling of the Native Americans who once inhabited the Refuge. The Cathlapotle Plankhouse was constructed to resemble the houses described by Lewis and Clark when they visited the village known as Cathlapotle over 200 years ago. Special programs and events are scheduled throughout the year. For an updated list of events and activities, check the plankhouse website at: [www.plankhouse.org](http://www.plankhouse.org) or contact the Refuge office.

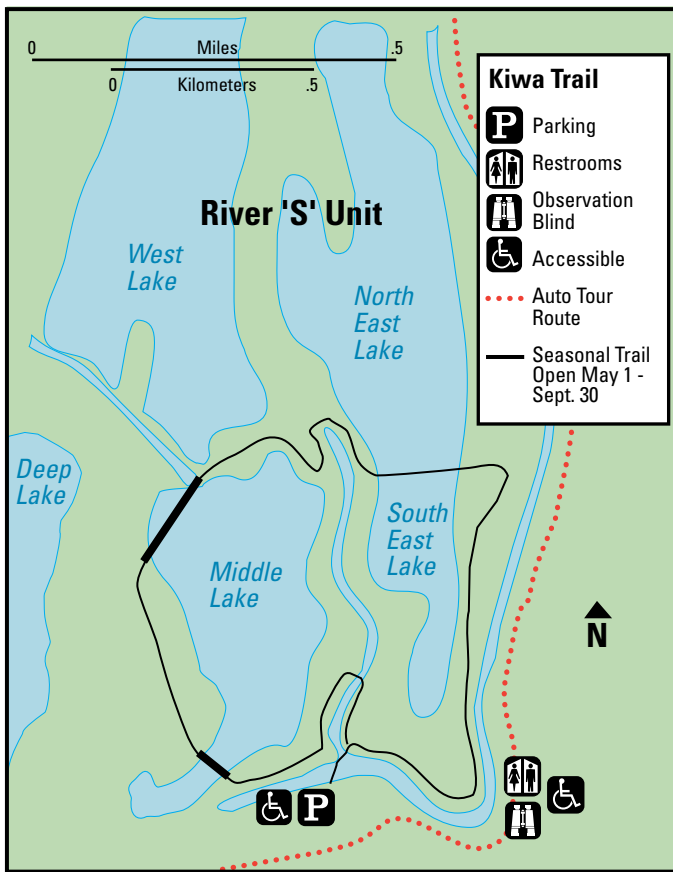
### Ridgefield NWR Map Legend

- Refuge Units Open to the Public (See Regulations about Closed Areas within these Units)
- Refuge Units Closed to the Public
- Refuge Waterfowl Hunt Area (Consult Refuge Office for Regulations)
- Refuge Headquarters
- Parking
- Restrooms at Carty Unit, River "S" Unit and Observation Blind Parking Lots
- Observation Blind
- Oaks to Wetlands Hiking Trail (2-miles) Open Year-round
- 4.2-mile Auto Tour Route
- Kiwa Seasonal Hiking Trail (~1.5 miles) Open May 1 - Sept. 30
- Kayak/Canoe/Boat Route (No launching facilities or routes located on the Refuge.)
- Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail Site

### Prohibited Activities

- No Horseback Riding
- No Bicycling
- No Pets Allowed
- No Jogging is allowed on the Refuge





### Visiting Year-round

At the River 'S' Unit (above), the Kiwa Trail is open for use from May 1–September 30. The auto tour route and observation blind are open year-round during daylight hours.

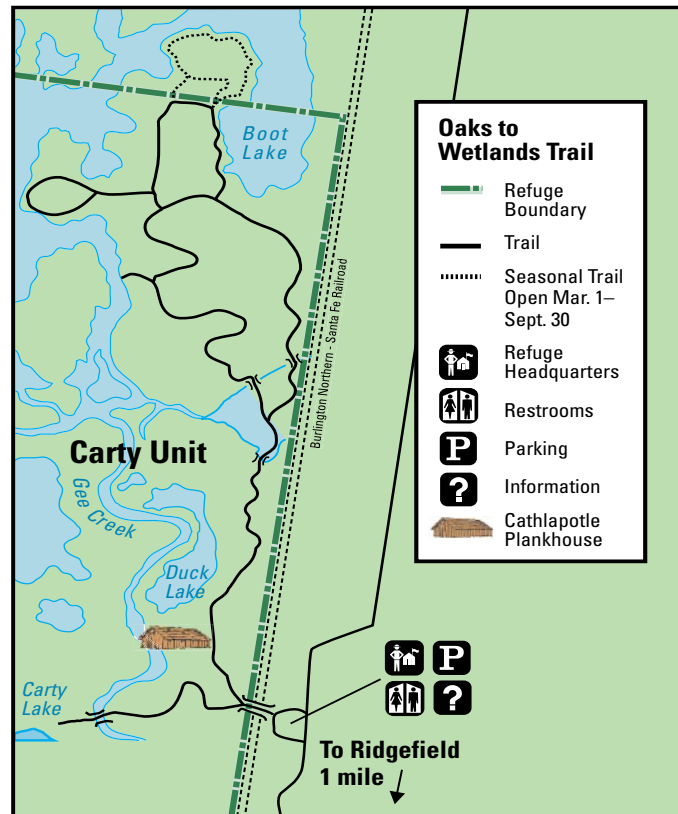
*Mayweed*  
is found in the  
Refuge.  
©USFWS

In order to ensure the safety of all visitors, and to preserve trail vegetation and conditions, only foot traffic is allowed on Refuge trails. Bicycles or other forms of transportation are not allowed.

*Moth mullein*  
(right), and *self-heal*  
(below) grace  
the Refuge in the  
springtime.  
©USFWS



At the Carty Unit (below), the 2-mile loop Oaks to Wetlands Trail is open every day during daylight hours. This trail crosses uneven terrain through wetland and forested habitats, offering a slightly more challenging hike. Numerous basalt outcroppings and springtime wildflowers create a beautiful backdrop for one of the Refuge's most scenic areas.



## Enjoying the Refuge . . .



Raccoon  
©Jim Cruce

Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is an exciting place for all to explore and enjoy wildlife. Although numerous species of wildlife are always present on the Refuge, the best time to view large numbers of ducks, geese, swans, and other migratory birds is during the winter months. More than 180 species have been seen

on the Refuge. For a complete list of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish, consult the Refuge's wildlife checklist. Two units of the Refuge are open to the public - the River 'S' Unit and the Carty Unit.

## . . . Along the River 'S' Unit Auto Tour Route . . .



Wildlife identification at the viewing blind  
©B. Harrison

Enjoy viewing wildlife while driving the 4.2 mile Auto Tour Route and use your vehicle as your personal observation blind on wheels. Wildlife viewing and photography from the road is excellent, allowing visitors to encounter wildlife with minimal disturbance. The River 'S' Unit is open daily from sunrise to

sunset. Please note gate closure times posted at the entrance to the Unit.



Above: Mink / ©Jim Cruce

Opposite: Swans / ©Jim Cruce

## . . .During the Fall & Winter

Between October 1 and April 30, all visitors must remain in their vehicles while traveling the Auto Tour Route. The large flocks of ducks and geese using the Refuge during this period become accustomed to seeing cars and will allow vehicles to pass by, or even stop, within a few feet without taking flight. Your car becomes your personal observation blind on wheels. When everyone follows this rule, the result is a high quality birding opportunity for all. During this time of year, you may exit your vehicle only at the Refuge entrance parking lot and to use the observation blind located along the tour route.



Cormorant  
©Jim Cruce

Please be a courteous driver and obey the posted speed limit. Also, use turnouts to stop and observe wildlife while allowing other vehicles to pass.

*"I slept but very little last night for the noise kept up during the whole of the night by the swans, geese...brant (and) ducks on a small sand island...they were immensley numerous and their noise horrid."*

*Capt. William Clark,  
Lewis and Clark Journal,  
Lower Columbia River,  
November 5, 1805*





## ...During the Spring & Summer

From May 1 to September 30, you may walk or drive the Auto Tour Route, access the observation blind, and walk around the loop of the Kiwa Trail. The Kiwa Trail (*kee-wah* meaning “crooked” in the Chinookan language) offers great bird watching opportunities during the early spring songbird migration. Later in the summer, you may observe many local breeding



*Coot with chick*  
©Jim Cruce

birds, including broods of ducks and geese, and young swallows eagerly eating insects out over the wetlands. The trail is a compacted gravel path, suitable for wheelchairs and strollers, but is otherwise limited to pedestrian traffic.



*Marsh wren*  
©Jim Cruce

*Below:  
Swans taking flight*  
©Jim Cruce



## Hunting and Fishing

A portion of the River “S” Unit is open to waterfowl hunting during the regular waterfowl hunting season in accordance with State and Federal regulations. A Refuge-issued hunting permit is required for each hunt day and hunters must check in and out. The use of well-trained retrievers is encouraged to ensure that all birds



*Refuge staff examines waterfowl/USFWS*

are retrieved. Consult the hunter hotline at (360) 571-2015, the Refuge website, or the hunt brochure for current regulations and hunting information.

Fishing is permitted during daylight hours on the Carty Unit and a portion of the River 'S' Unit. At the Carty Unit, fishing is allowed year-round according to State regulations in the waters adjacent to the Oaks to Wetlands Trail. Carp, catfish, crappie, and bluegill are commonly caught. Fishing is also permitted in the area along the north side of the bridge crossing Lake River at the entrance of the River 'S' Unit. Visitors fishing here must park at the entrance parking lot at the visitor contact station and walk to the fishing area.



*Belted kingfisher*  
USFWS

## Managing Refuges for Wildlife



Refuge staff takes a closer look  
©USFWS

As the fingers of urban sprawl and development begin to reach new areas, there is an ever-increasing need to maximize the availability of quality habitat for wildlife. This is the case at Ridgefield NWR. As less land is available for wildlife habitat, refuge managers use their resources to produce the best quality habitat possible to support larger and more diverse populations of native plants and animals.

Like farmers who tend their crops, refuge managers may intensively manage wildlife habitat where possible to maximize the production of food resources needed by wildlife. Wetland flooding and draining, farming, grazing, mowing, invasive species removal, tree planting, and regulating visitor uses are usually common practices on refuge lands. These management “tools” are used to improve habitat specifically for wildlife.



Refuge education programs and public participation in wildlife-dependent recreational activities provide valuable experiences and help develop an appreciation and awareness of our special places. Refuge managers must find the

balance between the needs of refuge visitors and the needs of wildlife. Since “wildlife first” is the guiding management principle on National Wildlife Refuges, recreational activities are regulated so that negative impacts to wildlife and habitat are minimal.



Great horned owl and owllet / ©Jim Cruce

## Keeping the “Wild” in Wildlife Refuge

All other areas of the refuge within the River 'S' Unit and the Carty Unit, and the Bachelor Island, Roth, and Ridgeport Dairy Units are posted as closed sanctuary areas. This is because of their importance to both migratory and resident species of wildlife. Pets, bicycling, horseback riding, canoeing, boating, kayaking, running, and all other activities not specifically mentioned are not allowed on the Refuge.

Howellia pond  
©Joe Engler/USFWS



## Refuges Create Continuity for Wildlife

Ridgefield NWR serves as the administrative headquarters for four national wildlife refuges in southwest Washington. The others include three refuges located in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area—Steigerwald Lake NWR, Franz Lake NWR, and Pierce NWR.

The three refuges in the Gorge are small in acreage and are limited in both visitor facilities and public access areas. Information about these refuges can be obtained by contacting the Refuge Manager at 360/835 8767.

### *Steigerwald Lake NWR*

**Steigerwald Lake NWR** was created in 1984 and contains 1,049 acres of historic lakebed and river bottomland habitat. This refuge supports anadromous fish, breeding neotropical birds, and migrating and wintering ducks, geese, and other migratory birds. Steigerwald Lake NWR is located just inside the boundary of the scenic area, east of the city of Washougal, and may be viewed from the Columbia River Dike Trail beginning at Steamboat Landing in the city of Washougal.

### *Franz Lake NWR*

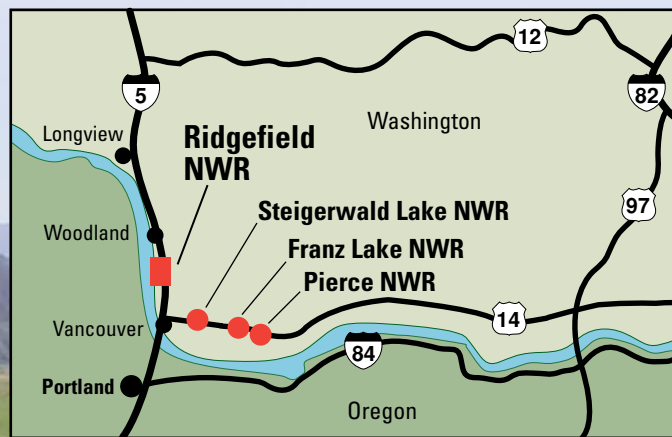
**Franz Lake NWR** was established in 1990 and contains a total of 552 acres. Franz Lake's system of streams, backwaters, and wetlands provide habitat for breeding, migrating, and wintering waterfowl and other wetland birds and raptors such as bald eagles. The Refuge is a popular place for wintering tundra swans, which may be viewed from a turnout on State Route 14.

### *Pierce NWR*



*Camas*  
©Joe Engler/USFWS

The Service acquired **Pierce NWR** through a land donation of 319 acres made by the previous landowner, Mrs. Lena Pierce. Today, the Refuge has a total of 329 acres of habitat that provide sanctuary for wintering waterfowl such as Canada geese, ducks, and other aquatic birds. One of the last remaining chum salmon runs in the Columbia River exists in Hardy Creek, which flows through the Refuge and empties into the Columbia River. Hikers at the top of neighboring Beacon Rock can get a bird's eye view of the Refuge.



## A Community's Contribution . . .

National wildlife refuges do not stand alone in the effort to preserve our nation's natural and cultural resources. In many ways, they are just one small part of a larger conservation community. Many organizations and individuals contribute thousands of hours to our wildlife refuges and local communities by planting trees, battling invasive species, and providing visitor outreach and education programs. Friends groups serve as advocates for our refuges and natural areas at the local, regional, and national level. Without these extra voices and hands at work, conservation successes could not reach the heights they reach today. If you'd like to help, contact the refuge office about becoming a refuge volunteer or a member of the Friends group.

*Visitors enjoying a day at the refuge*  
USFWS



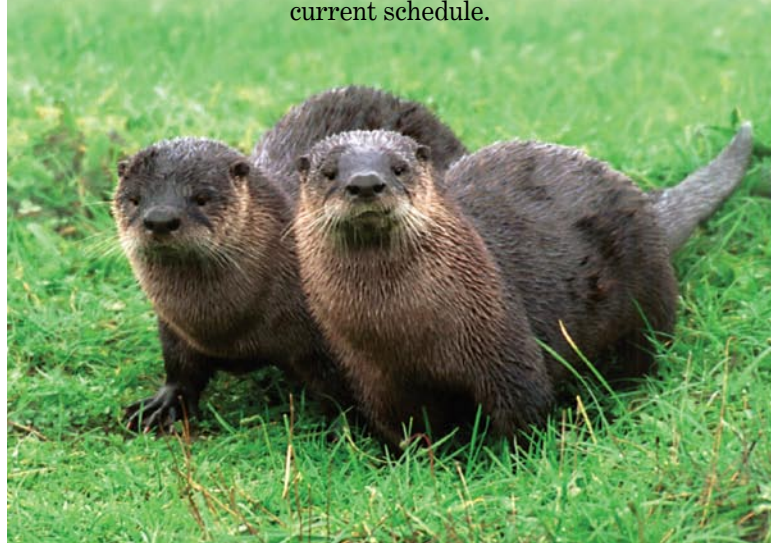
*Students discover micro-habitats with hands-on activities / USFWS, Susan Saul*

## . . . for Environmental Education and Interpretation

An environmental education guide, resource materials, and space for teachers and educational groups are available for outdoor classroom activities. Groups planning to visit or to conduct educational activities on the refuge are required to make reservations in advance to avoid conflicts with other groups or scheduled refuge management activities.

Throughout the year, special events are held on the Refuge including guided tours and interpretive programs about the Refuge, its wildlife, and management. Contact the Refuge office or website for a current schedule.

*River otters*  
©Jim Cruce



Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge  
PO Box 457  
28908 NW Main Avenue  
Ridgefield, WA 98642  
360/887-4106

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
<http://www.fws.gov>

For Refuge information  
1 800/344 WILD  
<http://ridgefieldrefuges.fws.gov>

Washington Relay Service  
TTY 1 800/833-6388  
Voice 1 800/833-6384  
Telebraille 1 800 833/6385

Federal Relay Service  
TTY and Voice 1 800/877-8339  
(available 8:00 am to 8:00 pm EST)

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## *National Wildlife Refuge*

