

## 2025-29 Oregon SCORP Wetlands Priority Component

### Introduction

The Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986 requires each statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plan (SCORP) to include a component that identifies wetlands as a priority concern within the state. This Appendix serves as the wetland priority component for Oregon's 2025-29 SCORP. The following sections are included in this element of SCORP: values and functions of wetlands, current wetland conservation in Oregon, wetland mapping in Oregon, and listing of priority wetland types and locations for restoration and acquisition.

### Values and functions of wetlands

Wetlands, rivers, lakes, coastline, ponds, and reservoirs are numerous in Oregon. According to the Department of State Lands, Oregon currently has approximately 1.4 million acres of wetlands, over 100,000 miles of rivers and streams, 1,400 named lakes, 360 miles of coastline, and an additional 3,800 ponds and reservoirs (Oregon Department of State Lands, 2023d). These waters of the state are valuable aquatic resources that vary across the state and provide many values to Oregon. The following list contains examples of wetland functions that are important to the quality of life for Oregonians (Oregon Department of State Lands, n.d.):

- **Flood storage and water supply:** Wetlands reduce flood depth, flood damage, and streambank erosion by capturing and storing stormwater flows; wetlands also slowly release the stored stormwaters to support summer stream flows when water is needed.
- **Water quality and improvement:** Wetlands remove pollutants (e.g., nitrogen and phosphorous, some chemicals, heavy metals) that would otherwise degrade water quality.
- **Food-web support:** Wetlands produce diverse flora and fauna that feed invertebrates, amphibians, fish, birds, and other wildlife.
- **Wildlife, plant, and fish habitat:** Wetlands provide habitats (spawning, rearing, feeding, nesting, and wintering) for many fish, wildlife, and plant species, including those that are endangered or imperiled.

Wetlands are also valuable for aesthetics, recreation, and education as they offer opportunities for boating, paddling, fishing, hunting, photography, wildlife observation, and outdoor education. The 2025-29 SCORP further demonstrates the importance of wetlands and all state waters for outdoor recreation through the Oregon Resident Outdoor Recreation Survey, a statewide survey of Oregon residents regarding their participation in outdoor recreation in Oregon in 2022 and their attitudes and priorities regarding outdoor recreation management. Full details on the resident survey can be found in the "2023 Oregon Resident Outdoor Recreation Survey Report" available at <https://bit.ly/scorp24a1>. The survey asked Oregon residents to report their annual participation in several activities that regularly occur on or near wetlands and waterways. Although this participation data cannot be directly attributed to wetlands, it nonetheless illustrates the general importance of these activities to Oregonians. Table 1 shows, for each activity, the percentage of Oregon residents participating and the number of total user occasions per year. Nature observation is the most common activity on the list with 37% of the population participating at least once per year and almost 55 million user occasions annually. Other popular activities (each with over 10 million user occasions) include beach activities (lakes, reservoirs,

ivers), outdoor photography/painting/drawing, and taking children or grandchildren to nature settings to explore and/or learn about nature. Fishing, paddling, boating, and hunting activities have smaller portions of the population participating but are still enjoyed by Oregon residents millions of times per year.

**Table 1**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>% Population Participating</b>	<b>User Occasions</b>
Nature observation (e.g., birds, other wildlife, forests, wildflowers)	37%	54,981,854
Beach activities – Lakes, reservoirs, rivers	31%	14,419,698
Outdoor photography, painting, or drawing	21%	21,705,217
Taking children or grandchildren to nature settings to explore and/or learn about nature	20%	14,905,603
Fishing – Freshwater	16%	7,596,365
Flat water canoeing, sea kayaking, rowing, stand-up paddling, tubing, floating	15%	4,495,845
Fishing – Ocean/saltwater	9%	3,171,700
Power-boating (cruising or water skiing)	7%	2,968,688
Hunting – Big game	7%	2,337,429
Hunting – Small game	5%	1,379,174

**Current wetland conservation in Oregon**

Wetland planning in Oregon is focused on, “the protection, conservation, and best use of wetland resources” (Oregon Department of State Lands and Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development, 2024). The primary state law for regulating activities within waters and wetlands is Oregon’s Removal-Fill Law (ORS 196.795-990), which was passed in 1967. The law covers activities such as removal, fill and other ground-altering activities within waters of the state and requires people who plan such activities to obtain a permit from the Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) (Oregon Department of State Lands, 2023d).

DSL’s wetlands program was established by statute in 1989 through a comprehensive wetland conservation bill (ORS 196.668 and 196.672). DSL is responsible for issuing removal-fill permits, developing and maintaining the Statewide Wetland Inventory, providing wetland planning assistance, developing standards and tools, and providing public information and training.

A key component to Oregon’s wetland conservation approach is mitigation. Compensatory mitigation is required when a proposed project will lead to unavoidable permanent wetland impacts. DSL uses a permit application process to document how a proposed project has taken efforts to avoid and/or minimize adverse effects to aquatic resources and how any unavoidable impacts have been offset by actions to replace the area, functions, and values of the loss (Oregon Department of State Lands, 2023a).

The following document is a resource for local planners in Oregon planning for the protection and management of wetlands:

- [Oregon Wetland Planning Guidebook](#)

In addition to DSL, the following agencies and sovereign nations play a role in the conserving and managing wetland resources in Oregon through various programs and strategies:

- Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
- Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development
- Oregon Water Resource Department
- Oregon’s Tribal Nations
- Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Oregon Department of Agriculture

### **Wetland mapping in Oregon**

A statewide inventory of wetlands is available through DSL and is regularly updated when new mapping becomes available (Oregon Department of State Lands, 2023c). Wetland inventories and other natural resource mapping that identify approximate locations of wetlands and waters in Oregon are included in the inventory. The inventory includes data from the US Fish and Wildlife Service National Wetlands Inventory, DSL-Approved Local Wetlands Inventories, US Geological Survey National Hydrography Dataset, and US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Soil Survey.

The SWI web map is updated as new mapping becomes available. Datasets not available in digital formats have not been added to the web map. DSL is working to make these additional datasets available for viewing. The web map and additional datasets can be accessed through the following link: [Oregon Statewide Wetlands Inventory](#).

### **Oregon’s priority wetlands**

For the 2025-29 Oregon SCORP, listings of priority wetland types and locations come from three sources. These listings will be examined and, if necessary, updated during the planning for the 2030-34 SCORP. The first source for identifying priority wetland types is DSL’s Removal-Fill Guide. This guide contains a listing of Aquatic Resources of Special Concern, which are described as waters in Oregon that, “provide functions, values and habitats that are limited in

quantity because they are naturally rare or have been disproportionately lost due to prior impacts” (Oregon Department of State Lands, 2023b, Appendix F). Table 2 lists Oregon’s Aquatic Resources of Special Concern including a brief description of each.

**Table 2**

<b>Aquatic Resources of Special Concern</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Core cold water habitat	Waters expected to maintain temperatures generally considered optimal for salmon and steelhead rearing, or that are suitable for bull trout migration, foraging and sub-adult rearing occurring during the summer. Waters with a seven-day Average Maximum temperature $\leq 16^{\circ}\text{C}$ ( $\sim 61^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).
Cold water refugia	Those portions of a water body where the water temperature is at least $2^{\circ}\text{C}$ ( $3.6^{\circ}\text{F}$ ) colder than the daily maximum temperature of the adjacent well mixed flow of the water body.
Alcoves	Water bodies that maintain a downstream connection to the main channel at summer low flow but have no upstream connection during low flow.
Side channels	Flowing water bodies with clearly identifiable upstream and downstream connections to the main channel.
Eelgrass beds	Beds of the submerged aquatic plant, <i>Zostera marina</i> , occurring in intertidal and shallow subtidal areas of estuaries and bays where substrate, turbulence, and salinity conditions fit its range of tolerance.
Kelp beds	Beds of a bull kelp ( <i>Nereocystis luetkeana</i> ), or other macroalgae that generally grow from the seafloor to the ocean surface.
Wooded tidal wetlands	A wetland in which trees and shrubs have an aerial cover of 30% or more, and that is inundated at least once annually by tides.
Alkali wetlands and beds	These wetlands or seasonal waters in Eastern Oregon include playas or “salt flats”, and alkaline lakes with saline or alkaline soils and fluctuating water levels.
Bogs	Wetlands characterized by constant saturation, accumulation of peat, low nutrient availability, acidic soil ( $\text{pH} < 5.5$ ), and vegetation that tolerates these conditions.
Fens	Peat soil wetlands with mineral-rich groundwater or surface water sources, and soil $\text{pH}$ generally higher than 5.5.
Hot Springs	A wetland where discharging groundwater in summer is $> 10^{\circ}\text{F}$ warmer than the expected water temperature.
Interdunal wetlands	Wetlands in the dunal system along the Oregon coast may occur in the deflation plains, depressions, swales or low areas.
Mature Forested wetlands	Wetlands in which trees have an aerial cover of 30% or more and either the average diameter at breast height of a minimum of 10 trees exceeds 18 inches, the average age of trees exceeds 80 years, or there are $> 5$ trees/acre with diameter $> 32$ inches.
Ultramafic soil wetlands	Low-elevation wetlands occurring mainly in southwestern Oregon, usually with a sponge-like organic soil layer, in an area with exposed serpentine or peridotite rock, and/or in soils with very low Ca:Mg ratios.
Vernal pools	Seasonally inundated depressions underlain by an impermeable claypan or hardpan layer.
Wet prairies	These wetlands occur on valley floors where clay-rich soils create a perched water table.

Source: Oregon Department of State Lands (2023b, Appendix F)

The Oregon Conservation Strategy also recognizes specific types of wetlands that are particularly important in Oregon. The strategy aims to maintain fish and wildlife populations in Oregon and identifies wetlands as a strategy habitat (Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, 2016). Strategy habitats are those that provide important benefits to Oregon's "Species of Greatest Need." The following list shows the priority wetland types identified by the strategy (note: there is considerable overlap with the list in Table 2):

- Alkaline wetlands
- Deciduous swamps and shrublands
- Marshes (including emergent marshes)
- Off-channel habitats
- Playas
- Seasonal ponds and vernal pools
- Wet meadows (including montane wet meadows)
- Wet prairies

Lastly, the Wetlands Conservancy, a land trust with the mission to conserve and steward Oregon's wetlands, has worked with wetland biologists to identify biologically significant wetlands in Oregon (The Wetlands Conservancy, 2023). Unlike the listings of priority wetland types shown above, this list contains specific locations of important wetlands across Oregon. The full list is shown in Table 3. It is important to note that there are many more important wetlands in Oregon that are not included in The Wetlands Conservancy's list of significant wetlands.

**Table 3**

<b>Significant Wetlands in Oregon</b>	
Abert Lake	McKay Creek National Wildlife Refuge
Agate Desert Vernal Pools	Mickey Hot Spring
Bandon Marsh National Wildlife Refuge	Nestucca Bay National Wildlife Refuge
Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge	North Alvord and Mann Lakes
Batch Lake Complex	Palomino Playa
Bayview Oxbow	Popcorn Swale
Beaver Creek State Park	Rowena Plateau Vernal Pools
Big Marsh	Sand Lake Estuary
Circle Creek Spruce Swamp	Scappoose Bay Bottomlands
Crooked River Wetlands Complex	Siltcoos and Tahkenitch Lakes
Darlingtonia State Natural Site	Silvies River
Fernhill Natural Treatment Wetlands	South Slough Estuary
Gearhart Fen	Sparks and Hosmer Lakes
Illinois Valley	Sullivan Gulch
Jackson-Frazier Wetland	Summer and Silver Lakes
Killin Wetlands	Sycan Marsh
Kingston Prairie	Tumtum Lake
Klamath Marsh National Wildlife Refuge	Umatilla National Wildlife Refuge
Ladd Marsh	Upper Klamath National Wildlife Refuge
Little Crater Lake	Warner Wetlands
Lower Columbia River Swamplands	West Eugene Wetlands
Malheur National Wildlife Refuge	Wickiup Reservoir
Many Lakes	

## References

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