

Birdwatcher Advisory

February through April 2010

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife / Fern Ridge Wildlife Area

Four units at Fern Ridge Wildlife Area are designated as wildlife sanctuary following the end of duck season on January 31 and continuing through April 30. The East Coyote, West Coyote, Fisher Butte, and Royal Amazon units are open every Saturday during this period for hiking and birdwatching and are posted closed Sunday through Friday to provide wildlife sanctuary. Royal Avenue and the trail to the Fisher Butte unit viewing platform remains open daily, year-round specifically to accommodate birdwatchers. The trail to the south Fisher Butte unit viewing platform accessible from Hwy 126 is open daily year-round. The trail from the Nielson Road parking lot to the East Coyote unit viewing platform is open daily year-round and a short trail from the Cantrell Road parking lot to a viewing blind remains open daily year-round.

Signs are posted at each access point alerting visitors to entry regulations. On a regular and frequent basis, hikers (birdwatchers, dog walkers) disregard the "Closed" signs and enter the units. The result is disturbance and hazing of wintering concentrations of waterfowl and other wildlife during this important life cycle time period.

The seasonal access restrictions are in place to provide wildlife sanctuary. Of particular importance in the late winter and spring time period is providing rest areas for waterfowl and other wetland dependent species prior to migration and nesting season. Recent morning fly-off counts of Canada geese at Fern Ridge documented over 40,000 geese flying off the lake at sunrise. The birds congregate in various fields and when a walker approaches the large flocks, the birds leave the area. When this happens several times each day by people entering closed areas, the geese leave the area and do not have an opportunity to forage and rest. The functional value of the wildlife sanctuary is diminished when the birds are not allowed to use the area undisturbed.

The walkers do not have to "fire guns" to cause the disturbance. Walking towards a large flock of geese will cause the birds to depart the area. When this happens repetitively, the pattern of use is significantly interrupted or eliminated. In a related area of disturbance, dogs are required to be on leash outside of game bird hunting seasons, however we regularly encounter people with "special dogs" that the owners choose not to keep on leash. This adds a higher level of disturbance when dogs are allowed to run during wintering and nesting periods.

We (ODFW) are working towards providing a hiking destination at each public access point during the "closed" period by providing marked trails and viewing platforms. During February, March and April, we would welcome the opportunity to enlist all visitors to assist with keeping people out of the wildlife sanctuary areas. On most days, there are unattended vehicles parked at access points and people walking past the "closed" signs. We are asking the birdwatching community to assist with managing the wildlife sanctuary areas by educating people you encounter in the field who disregard the posted signs.

Violations can be reported to Oregon State Police at 541-726-2525 or call the wildlife area headquarters at 541-935-2591.
Have a safe and enjoyable visit!

Regulation Overview - Fern Ridge Wildlife Area

The majority of Fern Ridge lake and wildlife area remain open daily year-round. This provides unrestricted access to over 75% of the Fern Ridge project daily year-round.

(Continued)

Four units, less than 25% of the area, have seasonal access restrictions to provide wildlife sanctuary from early October through April 30. The East Coyote, West Coyote, Fisher Butte, and Royal Amazon units have various limited entry and closure dates to provide wildlife sanctuary, even during hunting seasons. For example, during duck season, the Fisher Butte and Royal Amazon units close to hunting each day at 1 PM and are closed to public access at 2 PM. This provides regular and predictable wildlife sanctuary for wintering birds each day. Every afternoon the birds have a safe and undisturbed area for sanctuary, unless people disregard the signs and walk through the closed areas disturbing the birds.

East and West Coyote Units (Tentative 2010-11 Date Framework) Note: Dates change slightly each year dependent upon calendar/weekend date framework. Carefully read posted regulation signs and consult current Game Bird Regulation Booklet to verify dates)

February 1 to April 30: Open to public use on Saturdays for bird watching. Closed Sunday through Friday to all public access to protect wintering waterfowl. Dogs must be kept on leash at all times and discharge of firearms is prohibited. Exception: Designated trail to East Coyote unit viewing platform accessible from Nielson Road parking lot remains open daily year-round.

May 1 to October 10: Open daily for public use. All dogs must be kept on leash except during authorized game bird hunting seasons. Discharge of firearms prohibited except during authorized game bird or game mammal seasons.

October 11 to November 19: Closed to all entry for wildlife sanctuary.

November 20 to January 31: Open only for reservation waterfowl hunt on Mon-Wed-Sat mornings until 1 PM. Closed to all other public access to protect wintering waterfowl.

Fisher Butte and Royal Amazon Units

February 1 to April 30: Open to public use on Saturdays for bird watching. Closed Sunday through Friday to all public access to protect wintering waterfowl. Dogs must be kept on leash at all times and discharge of firearms is prohibited. Exception: Royal Avenue and trail to Fisher Butte unit viewing platform remain open daily, year-round. Effective this year, the designated trail to the south Fisher Butte unit viewing platform accessible from Hwy 126 also remains open daily.

May 1 to October 10: Open daily for public use. All dogs must be kept on leash except during authorized game bird hunting seasons. Discharge of firearms prohibited except during authorized game bird or game mammal seasons.

October 11 to October 15: Closed to all entry for wildlife sanctuary.

October 16 to January 31: Open to public use daily until 2 PM. (Open for both bird watching and hunting). Hunting allowed daily until 1 PM. Closed to all public access at 2 PM to provide afternoon wildlife sanctuary.

Kirk Park Unit

The developed "park" portion of the Kirk Park unit remains open daily, year-round for public access. Hunting regulations apply to the eastern 2/3 of the unit per the restrictions outlined below.

February 1 to October 15: Open to public use daily and open to hunting during authorized game bird and game mammal seasons.

October 16 to January 31: (concurrent with duck season dates): Open to public use daily and open to hunting only on Saturdays, Sundays, Wednesdays, and holidays.