



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service - Pacific Region

Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge

California Nevada Idaho Oregon Washington Hawaii Pacific Islands



We honor
Rich Guadagno
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Background

Humboldt Bay NWR is located on Humboldt Bay on the northwest California coast near Arcata. The refuge protects wetlands and bay habitats for migratory birds, especially black brant. The refuge includes the Lanphere Dunes, one of the most pristine remaining dune ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest. The refuge also administers Castle Rock NWR, a 14-acre island located less than a mile off the California coast, which contains the largest breeding population of common murres in California and provides a roost for Aleutian Canada geese during migration.

The refuge exists primarily to protect and enhance wetland habitats for migratory waterbirds using the Bay, especially black brant. Concentrations of migratory waterbirds--especially shorebirds--occur in the fall, winter, and spring; in winter, it is not unusual for over 100,000 birds to use the Bay as a feeding or resting site. The Lanphere Dunes Unit protects endangered and rare plants within rare dune plant communities.

Birds that heavily depend upon the Bay for food include willets, marbled godwits, dunlin, least and western sandpipers, cormorants, black brant, wigeon, greater scaup, bufflehead, surf and white-winged scoters, green-winged teal, pintail, great and snowy egrets, and great blue heron.

The main reason for these waterbird concentrations are the eelgrass beds and extensive mudflats; the Bay contains the largest remaining eelgrass beds south of the Willapa Bay in Washington. These also make the Bay an important spawning, nursery, and feeding area for fish and other marine life. Endangered/threatened species present are the peregrine falcon, bald eagle, brown pelican, western snowy plover, Humboldt Bay wallflower, and beach layia.

This refuge has been described as one of the most important areas in the U.S. south of Alaska for the black brant. This is especially true during the spring when the Bay is a key staging area for brant prior to their return to arctic nesting grounds. Lanphere Dunes Unit contains two globally endangered plant communities; one of which is the best of two remaining in existence.

Recreation & Education

Wildlife observation and waterfowl hunting are the principal public uses of the Humboldt Bay Refuge. The total number of visitors averages 15,000 to 17,000 per year.

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**Refuge Manager
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and raptors is September through March. Black brant and migratory shorebird populations peak from mid-March to late April. Summer visitors will see many gulls, terns, cormorants, and pelicans; as well as resident egrets and herons. Waterfowl, raptors (including osprey), and harbor seals are visible throughout the year.

One trail is open seven days per week during daylight hours (Hookton Slough Trail), and one is open seasonally during refuge office hours (Shorebird Loop Trail). The Hookton Slough Trail follows a tidal slough 1.5 miles out along the south edge of Humboldt Bay. The 3-mile distance (round trip) passes along grasslands, freshwater marsh, mudflats, and open water. Look for herons and egrets, as well as shorebirds, waterfowl, and harbor seals. The 1.75-mile Shorebird Loop Trail passes near some of the refuge's best shorebird viewing areas. The trail affords a good overview of the diverse seasonal wetlands; an optional side trail takes you to the refuge's largest permanent freshwater pond. Interpretive panels along the way illustrate the refuge's wildlife resources and habitat management practices. Look for shorebirds, waterfowl, songbirds, tree frogs, and river otters.

Waterfowl, snipe, and coot hunting occurs on five of the seven units of the refuge. Only the hunting within the 330-acre hunt area of the Salmon Creek Unit is tightly controlled, with hunting allowed only two days per week until 1 p.m., with 12 hunting blinds/sites, a lottery draw, and a paid permit process. An estimated 1,000 hunters utilize the refuge annually. Wildlife viewing from a boat can be excellent. However, boaters should be aware that tides, wind, and weather change rapidly on Humboldt Bay. There are currently four public boat launches on the Bay; the refuge is currently in the process of building a dock for launching small, non-motorized boats at the Hookton Slough Trail parking area.

Humboldt Bay and tidal sloughs are open to fishing year-round. Areas separated from the Bay by land, such as creeks and flooded areas behind levees, are closed to fishing. The Hookton Slough Trail is open to shore fishing; access to other areas is by boat.

Guided walks are provided on the Lanphere Dunes Unit on the first and third Saturdays of each month.

Directions

Humboldt Bay Refuge is adjacent to Highway 101, near the cities of Arcata and Eureka, California. Wildlife-oriented recreational opportunities are available in the South Humboldt Bay portion of the refuge. Take the Hookton Road exit from Highway 101 at the south end of the Bay. To the Hookton Slough trailhead, drive 1.2 miles west on Hookton Road; the parking area is on the north side of Hookton Road. To the refuge office and Salmon Creek Unit: southbound traffic, turn right at the end of the off ramp, then immediately left onto Ranch Road; northbound traffic, take the overpass, turn right onto Ranch Road.

Contact

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