



Your patience will be rewarded- new access to refuge soon to be unveiled

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A variety of new signs have popped up along Hwy. 101 at the Siletz Bay National Wildlife Refuge this month, but the most important ones right now say “Road Closed.”

Contractor timing caused a bit of a cart before the horse situation for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (USF&WS) according to Wildlife Biologist Dawn Harris.

“We are doing some great things to improve visitor access to the refuge that wasn’t available before, including a new road into a small part of the refuge that connects to a new loop trail,” she said. “Unfortunately, it won’t be open to the public until at least January. But the contractors that were hired for the very eye-catching new refuge sign had a small window of time when they could construct it, so it went up way before the work we are doing will be finished.”



Gretchen Ammerman

A crew from the Northwest Youth Corps is helping to restore native plants to the a part of the Siletz Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Since the sign went up, staff at the refuge headquarters in Newport have been fielding a spike in calls about the construction, which, in addition to the new trail and parking areas, also will include a small boat put-in for canoes and kayaks.

The 568-acre refuge is one of six national wildlife refuges that make up the Oregon Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The construction area is affecting just a small part of the refuge, located just east of the highway. Dubbed “Alder Island” by USF&WS staff, it is bordered by the Siletz River and its tributaries, and Millport Slough. The construction is a restoration to bring natural tidal activity to a part of the refuge that was significantly altered by construction of the Siletz Keys across the highway.

“They used the marshes here to dump the dredge spoil,” Harris said. “That blocked the tidal flow and significantly changed the plant and animal life; we are restoring that.”

Large machinery was used to breach two dykes, and two culverts were installed, allowing the tidal flow to return to the marshes.

“Over the next few years you will see the vegetation change,” Harris said. “Especially with a growth in marsh plants. We’ve already had fish in here, which is wonderful.”

A loop trail about three quarters of a mile long will soon allow visitors to explore the marshes and enjoy passive recreation activities like bird watching and photography. “Since this is a wildlife refuge, no dogs will ever be allowed,” Harris said. “There are plenty of other places where people can walk dogs around here. We aren’t anti dog--I have one myself-- but we want the birds to feel safe.” The fish, though, aren’t as protected. “We are going to have a few walk-in fishing landings along the Siletz River,” Harris said.

Although a lot of the marsh plants will restore naturally, help is being given with planting of natives by a crew from the Northwest Youth Corps, a group funded through the AmeriCorps program. “We are based in Eugene but we travel all sorts of places,” said project leader Emily Van Cleve. “We were just in California on a fuels reduction (fire prevention) project, and we were also recently in Eastern Oregon.”

Comprised of post-high school graduates, the corps is an opportunity for youth who are looking for a way to explore natural resource work. “We get 2 hours of education on a variety of topics related to conservation and restoration work,” Van Cleve said. “It’s a great way to explore Oregon, learn new things and find out about job prospects.”

When the trail is ready for the public, the USF&WS will be having an opening ceremony. “We are planning to have a grand opening sometime in January,” Harris said. “There are also going to be some planned water based excursions planned throughout the year. We have a great loop for kayaking and canoeing that we are looking forward to showing people.”



Gretchen Ammerman
Great Blue Herons are one of the species that frequent the refuge.



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This large new sign along with construction visible from the road has been causing staff at the USF&WS is causing a spike in calls from a curious public.

Stewardship is another way to get connected with the improved Alder Island. “We will be looking for volunteers to help maintain the trail,” Harris said. “We want people to feel a sense of ownership here. It’s your land, after all.”

For more information about Alder Island and the Siletz Bay National Wildlife Refuge, visit

fws.gov/refuge/siletz_bay