

The Conservation Column

Every fall, the Oregon Audubon Council holds its Conservation Conference with representatives from Audubon chapters from around the state. This year the meeting was held in Yachats with eleven chapters in attendance. RVAS was ably represented by Linda Kreisman. Here is her report.

Status of progress on OAC 2017 Conservation Priorities

On November 11th I attended the annual Conservation Conference of the Oregon Audubon Council in Yachats. In the morning each Chapter gave a summary of their conservation efforts in 2017, and Bob Sallinger of the Portland Audubon Chapter gave a recap of overall progress on the goals that had been adopted for 2017. In the afternoon priorities were set for 2018.

Some interesting highlights from the local chapter reports were:

Lincoln City: The need to develop wildlife-friendly curriculum for the new Outdoor Schools to keep it from being totally dominated by information from timber interests

Klamath Basin: October aerial survey found the largest number of ducks and geese since 1939!

Portland: Wants to share their work with other Oregon chapters and be more helpful to us. May come to RVAS in January.

Salem: This spring ODF&W will start work on a Nature Center at Ankeny Hill

Umpqua: Ford Pond development as a natural area and the success of their Vaux's

Swifts watch.

National: May re-organize so we can start to lobby.

Priorities for 2017 were:

Habitat/ Important Bird Areas: Public Lands Defense, Terminal Lakes (Klamath, Lake Abert, and Malheur National Wildlife Refuge), Oceans, Forests, and Grasslands

Species: Cormorants (Columbia R. and Coast), Greater Sage Grouse, Marbled Murrelet, and Condors

Hazards: Lead and Vineyards

Other: Climate Change, ODFW Funding Initiative, and State Bird

Of these priorities, the best progress was made on:

Malheur: The occupation has brought the collaborative work to national attention, and it is being effective. Portland Audubon has full-time, year-round staff on the Refuge for the next three years. RVAS should take advantage of their work.

Oceans: Paul Engelmeyer and his crew had a good year at Cape Perpetua and the 10-Mile Creek Preserve.

Forests: OAC had good success with Elliott Forest and securing forest land in the Marbled Murrelet IBA, but the Forest Practices Reform has stalled (probably a good thing with the Trump Administration).

Marbled Murrelet: State of Oregon appears to support up-listing from Threatened to Endangered – will finalize in winter 2018.

Vineyards: The task group from Umpqua, Salem and Corvallis have issued a report with suggestions for next steps, one of which is to work with the LIVE Certification Program to get bird habitat included. I can email a copy to anyone interested.

The State Bird issue was resolved with a compromise. Oregon now has a State Raptor (Osprey) as well as a State Songbird (Western Meadowlark).

The worst “progress” was with the following:

Cormorants: The East Sand Island colony in the Columbia River collapsed in 2017, with thousands of birds abandoning their nests in one day and only 140 returning. Portland Audubon won its lawsuit, but the judge has permitted the cormorant killing by the Army Corps of Engineers to continue. There are now no legal pathways to stop the killing.

Greater Sage Grouse: The Federal (BLM) plans are under attack from the Trump

Administration and Oregon failed to allocate adequate funding.

ODF&W funding is still \$70 million short of funding for non-game wildlife. The funding bill made no progress in the legislature. May try for a State Referendum next.

All the other 2017 objectives were worked on without notable successes or failures.

OAC 2018 CONSERVATION PRIORITIES

Many of the 2017 priorities were carried over, with some additional areas of focus, especially related to defense of federal environmental laws and policies.

Federal Government:

Endangered Species Act

Migratory Bird Treaty Act (for more information, see the final section of this Conservation Column)

Public Lands – Forest Practices Act

FEMA Floodplain definition

Wildfires – fuels management and management of post-wildfire areas

Hazards:

Lights out Campaign (state-wide) (<http://audubonportland.org/issues/hazards/buildings/lo>)

Window strikes (<http://audubonportland.org/issues/hazards/buildings/tip>)

Pesticides

Species:

Marbled Murrelets

Lead and Condors

Sage Grouse

Grasslands – Vesper Sparrows and Streaked Horned Larks

Climate Change

Terminal Lakes: Klamath, Malheur, and Abert

Outdoor Schools: Curriculum development for 5th and 6th graders

Marine Reserves

ODF&W Funding

Bird Friendly Vineyards – Investigate LIVE certifications (<https://livecertified.org/>)

Statement on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act from the National Audubon Society:

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) is America’s cornerstone bird conservation law. Audubon led the charge to help pass the law in 1918, and it has since saved millions of birds and numerous species from the brink of extinction. Now signs are pointing to growing threats to this law, placing America’s birdlife in danger.

The MBTA protects most of the nation’s native birds by making it unlawful to kill, hunt, sell, or possess more than 1,000 species, along with their nests, eggs, and feathers, without a permit. It is credited with helping turn the tide against the plume trade and market hunting, which devastated bird populations in the early 20th century. Today, threats to birds continue, and the protections afforded by the MBTA are as vital as ever.

In recent years, the law has come under attack. Audubon rallied to oppose the “bird killer amendment” in 2015, which would have prevented any enforcement of the law. Legislation introduced last Congress would have given a free pass to deaths from industrial activities that incidentally kill birds, such as oil waste pits, power lines, and gas flares. Neither effort moved forward in the last Congress.

Audubon also supported a proactive approach to strengthening the MBTA by addressing these industrial activities more directly through a permit process. The process has since been suspended by the Trump administration.

In this current political environment, core laws like the Endangered Species Act and others are under increasing attack. Chatter about undermining the MBTA is growing, from the halls of Washington to the pages of the Wall Street Journal, and the threat to the law is expanding. These efforts could limit or end the protections for about 1,000 species of birds, from backyard birds like American Robins, to Red-tailed Hawks, and Common Loons, and declining species across the country like American Kestrels,

Cerulean Warblers, and more.

We will be working hard to defend the MBTA. As we approach the law's one hundredth anniversary, we will be on guard to continue Audubon's proud legacy and keep the MBTA just as vital and effective in its next century. Please stay tuned for opportunities to take action.