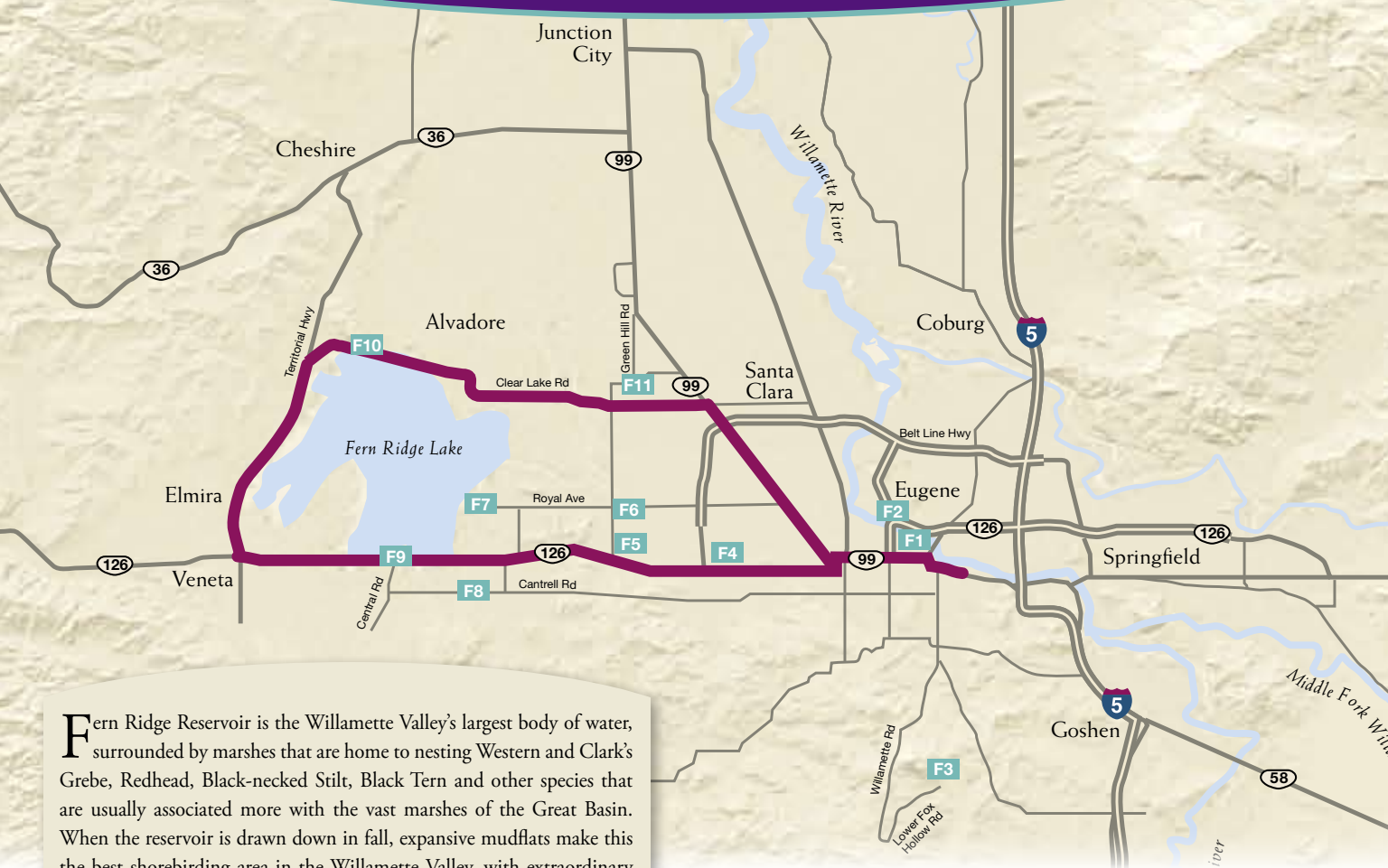


# FERN RIDGE LOOP



**F**ern Ridge Reservoir is the Willamette Valley's largest body of water, surrounded by marshes that are home to nesting Western and Clark's Grebe, Redhead, Black-necked Stilt, Black Tern and other species that are usually associated more with the vast marshes of the Great Basin. When the reservoir is drawn down in fall, expansive mudflats make this the best shorebirding area in the Willamette Valley, with extraordinary finds including Wood Sandpiper in recent years, along with nearly every western shorebird species. On your way to the reservoir from downtown Eugene, the home of the University of Oregon, be sure to visit Skinner Butte, one of the valley's prime migration spots, and several spots in the West Eugene Wetlands, one of the nation's best examples of a cooperative wetland restoration project.

**Loop Sponsor: Eugene, Coast & Cascades – Travel Lane County**

## F1. Skinner Butte

From 5th Ave near the Public Market in downtown Eugene, turn N onto Pearl St. Cross the railroad tracks and continue 0.1 mi to 3rd Ave, and turn W (L) to enter the park. After 0.2 mi turn sharply R at the gate and continue with caution up to the parking lot on top; use care as the road is narrow and is shared by cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

Skinner Butte is the Willamette Valley's best spring migration sites for songbirds. A loop trail and improved foot paths provide excellent birding opportunities through coniferous forests on the N slope and mixed deciduous forest and woodland on the S slope. During the migration season, practically any species of songbird that occurs in the Willamette Valley can

be found here. On some days during migration, "fallouts" occur with dozens of flycatchers, warblers, vireos, and tanagers showing up for the day. Bald Eagle, Cooper's Hawk, and Osprey nest on the butte. The park has facilities to accommodate large numbers of visitors and provides excellent views of Eugene.



**Sponsor:** Lane County Audubon Society

## F2. Delta Ponds

From downtown Eugene, go W on W 6th Ave and turn N onto I-105 over the Washington-Jefferson Bridge. Get in the R lane and take the exit to Valley River. Follow the loop under I-105 and head N on Delta Hwy. Get in the R-hand lane and take the Valley River

Center exit. Loop over a bridge over Delta Hwy and go W on Valley River Dr. In 0.4 mi you will reach a stoplight at Goodpasture Island Rd. From here, **for access to the East Bank Multiuse Path** turn L into the VRC parking lot. **To reach parking areas adjacent to Delta Ponds** turn N on Goodpasture Island Rd and look for a small, gravel pull-out in 0.5 mi, or continue N 0.4 mi to a new parking lot, overlook, and trailhead.

*Black Phoebe*  
PHOTO BY:  
STEVE DOWLAN





Anna's Hummingbird

PHOTO BY: STEVE DOWLAN

Over 120 bird species have been recorded at Delta Ponds. Look for Gadwall, Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Lesser and Greater Scaup, and Common Merganser along with Great Blue Heron, Great Egret (winter) and Green Heron (nesting). Also watch for Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Peregrine Falcon overhead, gulls and Spotted Sandpiper along gravel bars, and Willow Flycatcher, migrating warblers and vireos in riparian growth. A short walking route to view the ponds is to start at the Greenway bike bridge, go to bike path MP 0.75, and return by the same route. For a longer 5 mi loop along the river, at bike path MP 0.5, follow a paved path that leads to Goodpasture Island Rd with overlooks at 0.1 and 0.6 mi. Future trails are planned to surround the ponds between Delta Hwy and Goodpasture Island Rd.



**Sponsor:** City of Eugene

### F3. Ridgeline Trail and Cascade Raptor Center

From downtown Eugene go S on Jefferson St to 18th Ave. Turn L and go 0.4 mi, then turn R (S) on Willamette St. After 1.3 mi bear L onto Donald St and continue 2.0 mi. Turn R on Fox Hollow Rd and go 0.8 mi to Raptor Center parking area at 32275 Fox Hollow Rd. **Transit:** Lane Transit District Bus 24 or 73 stop at Donald/Fox Hollow Rd; from there walk 0.8 mi SW to Raptor Center.

The Raptor Center is a rehabilitation center specializing in hawks, falcons, owls and other raptors. This is a good starting point for a hike along the Ridgeline Trail, which circles through the south hills of Eugene. After you visit the 33 species of captive raptors and watch wild feeder birds, woodpeckers and warblers in the forested setting, you can hike the trail SW through mixed forest (with some old growth) to Spencer Butte for magnificent views of the Willamette Valley and the snow-capped Three Sisters volcanoes in the Cascades. For a longer hike, continue through mixed forest and oak savanna all the way to the West Eugene Wetlands. The Raptor Center (entrance fee) is open Tuesdays through Sundays, plus Mondays on holidays. The Ridgeline Trail (no fee) is open from dawn to dusk all year.



**Sponsorship available**



PHOTO BY: BRUCE CRAIG

Sora

### F4. Stewart Pond

From West 11th Ave (Hwy 126) in W Eugene, turn N on Bertelsen Rd. Drive 0.1 mi and turn E (R) on Stewart Rd. Go 0.5 mi, turn N (L) into the Stewart Pond parking lot. **Bicycle access** is via the Fern Ridge Path, which crosses Bertelsen Rd at Stewart Rd.

Stewart Pond includes a large emergent wetland and several smaller ponds, and is adjacent to oak savanna and forested wetland habitats. Look here for shorebirds, waterfowl, and wading birds in winter and during spring and fall migrations. Peregrine Falcon has been seen here. An observation and photography blind is located along the west edge of the pond. A 0.5 mi soft-surface trail leads to the forested wetlands. Other informal paths allow access to an extensive area with varied habitats.



**Sponsor:** Bureau of Land Management, Eugene District

### F5. Meadowlark Prairie – Greenhill Overlook

From downtown Eugene go 5.5 mi W on Hwy 126. Turn N on and go 0.5 mi to overlook. **Bicycle access:** Follow Fern Ridge Multiuse Path W along Amazon Creek to Greenhill Rd.

The 380-ac Meadowlark Prairie wetland is jointly managed by the City of Eugene and Bureau of Land Management, as part of the West Eugene Wetlands. Amazon Creek and several tributaries flow through the wetland, wet and upland prairie, and riparian habitats. This site is especially good for viewing raptors, with White-tailed Kite, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel and Northern Harrier common in season. Look for Short-eared Owl at dusk in winter and spring.

Western Meadowlark nests here, and flocks of 20 or more can be found in winter. As of 2009, a total of 206 species have been recorded in the West Eugene Wetlands.



**Sponsor:** City of Eugene

### F6. Meadowlark Prairie – Checkermallow Access

From the Greenhill Overlook (Site F4), continue N on Greenhill Rd 0.5 mi to a four-way stop at Royal Ave. Go 0.4 mi E on Royal Ave and watch for sign for Checkermallow Access parking lot to the S. **Bicycle access** is via the Fern Ridge Multiuse Path.

This site on Meadowlark Prairie provides direct access to Amazon Creek and adjacent wetlands. Along with Western Meadowlark and the raptors mentioned for Site F4, check Amazon Creek above the dam for wading birds and waterfowl. A spotting scope donated by Lane County Audubon is permanently installed at this access. The Fern Ridge Path extends approximately 0.5 mi to the W and 8 mi to the E and provides great birding with interpretive signage along the way.



**Sponsor:** City of Eugene

### F7. Fern Ridge Reservoir - Royal Avenue Access

From Greenhill Rd W of Eugene, continue W on Hwy 126 for 1.8 mi to Fisher Butte Rd and turn N (R). Follow Fisher Butte Rd to Royal Ave and turn W. Stop at the grove of oaks to view the Acorn Woodpecker colony. Continue W to the gate, which blocks Royal Ave and park in the gravel lot.

Fern Ridge Reservoir is an exceptional birding site and a very popular birding destination. It is the largest area of open

Cassin's Vireo

PHOTO BY:  
KEVIN SMITH





PHOTO BY: STEVE DOWLAN

Black-necked Stilt

water and wetlands in the Willamette Valley, and relatively close by air to the marshes of the Klamath Basin. Many wetland species that are typical of inland marshes, including Redhead, Western and Clark's Grebes, Black Tern, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Wilson's Phalarope, and Black-necked Stilt, also breed at Fern Ridge. To bird this area on foot, walk past the gate and continue along the old Royal Ave roadbed until you reach the water's edge (distance varies with seasonal water levels). Observation decks and side trails are to the south of the roadbed. Habitats include marsh, mudflat, Willamette Valley wet prairie, oak woodland, and reservoir water (through August). Shorebirding is fantastic during southbound migration (July-Oct); along with all of the regularly occurring species, watch for rarities such as golden-plovers and Stilt, Buff-breasted and Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. The oak woodland features Acorn Woodpecker and White-breasted Nuthatch. In spring, watch for a huge variety of waterfowl, waterbirds, hawks, and songbirds. The site is closed in the winter except for hunting access. Another good birding walk nearby starts from a gravel parking lot about 0.25 mi W of Fisher Road along Highway 126. Walk N along the gravel road toward Fisher Butte for views of prairie to the E and marsh on the W. A road around the base of the Butte continues on to Royal Avenue.



**Sponsor:** Oregon Field Ornithologists

## F8. Fern Ridge Reservoir - Coyote Creek Access

From Greenhill Rd W of Eugene continue 2 mi W on Hwy 126 to KR Nielsen Rd. Turn L (a sign indicates for wildlife viewing area) and follow KR

Nielsen Rd S, then W (where it merges with Cantrell Rd) for 2 mi until the road crosses a bridge. Park along the road shoulder near the bridge to access trails on either side of creek.

The birding in this area is well worth the effort to find it. On your way there, in late spring watch for Ash-throated Flycatcher along KR Nielsen Rd as this is one of the few likely places to see them in the Willamette Valley. The riparian woodland trails along Coyote Creek offer easy walking, with Black Phoebe, Pacific-slope Flycatcher, Cassin's and Hutton's Vireo, and Swainson's Thrush among the nesting species. Also watch for Belted Kingfisher, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and Great Blue Heron. Coyote Creek is a great place to put in a canoe or kayak for better views of waterfowl on the reservoir 2 mi to the N (though not navigable mid-October through March due to high flows and dangerous currents). The area is closed Oct 6 - Jan 25, and open only on Saturdays Jan 26 - April 30.



**Sponsorship available**

## F9. Perkins Peninsula State Park

From downtown Eugene go W 11 mi on Hwy 126 and turn R into park entrance. Seasonally, there is a \$3 entrance fee. In winter, park outside the closed gate and walk in.

The riparian woodland, oak woodland, and open park on this small peninsula act as a "migrant trap" in springtime, with neotropical songbirds stopping on its northern tip. Along with nesting Yellow Warbler, in April and May look high up in the oaks and maples for practically all regular migrant warblers. Also check along the W shore where a wooden deck provides good vantage for nesting Clark's Grebe along with

Purple Martin pair

PHOTO BY: JUDY SCHNEIDER



Red-shouldered Hawk

PHOTO BY: KEVIN SMITH

more common Western Grebe; with luck you might see a pair in courtship. In winter, check blackberry brambles for large sparrow flocks; this is a good spot for Swamp Sparrow. Also scan for Bald Eagle, Osprey, Lesser Scaup, Canvasback and Bufflehead. Canoe rentals are available in July and August. The reservoir is drained by December and is very muddy through February. Restrooms are closed in winter.



**Sponsor:** Eugene, Cascades & Coast

## F10. Kirk Park

From Hwy 126 at Veneta go N 5 mi and turn R onto Clear Lake. Go 1 mi E and turn L into park entrance. From Hwy 99 and Beltline in NW Eugene, take Hwy 99 N for 0.5 mi. Turn W (L) onto Clear Lake Rd. Go 6.7 mi and turn N (R) into park entrance.

This park is along the Long Tom River, which flows from the spillway of Fern Ridge Dam, just across Clear Lake Rd. Oak and Oregon ash dominate the habitat, with willows along the margins of several ponds. Kirk Pond, the large shallow pond along the N side of Clear Lake Rd, hosts large flocks of American Wigeon in winter, usually with a few Eurasian Wigeon, Canvasback, and sometimes more rare ducks. In winter, the spillway attracts numerous gulls, and Great Egrets line the river. Cliff Swallows nest here in spring. The pre-dawn fly-out of Tundra Swan flocks from winter roosts on the reservoir is a spectacle worth seeing and hearing. From the top of the earthen dam, scope the lake for gulls, terns, and (rarely)

jaegers. In spring, watch for Bald Eagle and for Osprey carrying fish to their nest. Listen for rails in the marshy areas, and Wrentit along riparian edges in the park. Camping is available at nearby Richardson Park.



**Sponsor:** U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

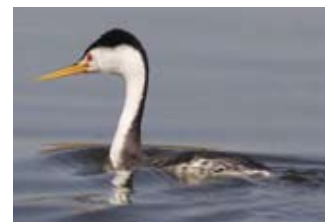
## F11. Eugene Airport area

From Site F10 continue W 5 mi on Clear Lake Rd. From Eugene go NW 4 mi on Hwy 99 and turn L on Clear Lake Rd. Best birding in this area is on side roads off of Clear Lake Rd and Green Hill Rd to N. Use caution and stop and park safely while viewing birds, as traffic moves fast on some of these roads.

The general area around the Eugene Airport is good for wintering raptors and waterfowl, including Tundra Swan. Check hedgerows for sparrows and Northern Shrike. Other birds that favor open country can sometimes be found in winter, including Prairie Falcon, Horned Lark, Burrowing Owl, and (rarely) Snowy Owl.



**Sponsorship available**



Clark's Grebe

PHOTO BY: BRUCE CRAIG