

Appendix H. Oregon's Mid-Coast Estuaries

Salmon River Estuary. This is classified as a Natural Estuary and has little residential, commercial, and industrial development. The entire estuary and its associated wetlands are part of the Cascade Head Experimental Forest and Scenic Research Area, which is owned and managed by the US Forest Service. The entire Cascade Head area is 11,890 acres; the estuary comprises 205 acres.

Areas of Ecological Importance and Critical Habitat Designations: Habitat areas include wetlands, mudflats, emergent herbaceous wetlands, and intertidal marsh. The estuary provides transitional habitat between freshwater and saltwater for upstream spawning migrations for anadromous fish and rearing areas for juveniles and smolts. The Salmon River Estuary is part of the [Salmon River Estuary-Cascade Head Conservation Opportunity Area](#).

Species of Interest: In addition to providing habitat for salmon, the Salmon River Estuary was nominated as an Important Bird Area for brown pelican, bald eagle, and peregrine falcon, and for its abundance of shorebirds, including western sandpipers.

Siletz Bay Estuary. Siletz Bay is classified as a Conservation Estuary by the Oregon Land Conservation and Development Department. It lacks jetties or channels, but is near Lincoln City, which has altered some of the shoreline near the estuary. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) manages a 568-acre portion of the bay as a national wildlife refuge, which includes coastal conifer and hardwood forest, estuarine tidelands, and freshwater riparian habitats. The estuary was formerly diked to drain land for raising dairy cows. The USFWS is managing the refuge to allow the salt marsh to return to its natural state, where tides inundate the refuge twice daily. The [Siletz Bay is a Conservation Opportunity Area](#).

Species of Interest: The Siletz Bay Wildlife Refuge provides nursery habitat for coho and Chinook Salmon, Steelhead and Cutthroat Trout, and other anadromous species. Spring Chinook usually arrive to the refuge in May, and American shad arrive between late April to the end of May. The refuge is also home to red-tailed hawks, bald eagles, barn owls, red-shouldered hawks, ospreys, turkey vultures, merlins, and peregrine falcons as well as estuary-dependent birds, including great blue herons, great egrets, Virginia rails, eared grebes, brown pelicans, buffleheads, common mergansers, wood ducks, northern shovelers, American wigeon, green-winged teals, and double-crested cormorants. Mammals at the refuge include Roosevelt elk, black-tailed deer, harbor seals, mink, river otter, muskrat, and beaver. Siletz Bay has native, common eelgrass as well as exotic *Zostera japonica*, which was introduced with non-native oysters.

Depoe Bay Estuary. Depoe Bay estuary is about 25 acres and is classified as a Shallow-Draft Development Estuary. The estuary is landlocked, with the exception of the harbor entrance, which was developed to support fishing, tourism, lumber, and agriculture. The bay supports bald eagle nesting sites and black oystercatchers, among other species. [Depoe Bay is a Conservation Opportunity Area](#).

Yaquina Bay Estuary. Yaquina Bay is a 4,300-acre estuary located in the City of Newport. It is classified as a Development Estuary. Current human uses of Yaquina Bay include fishing and fish processing, logging, shipping, tourism, aquaculture, and agriculture. The estuary has been dredged and filled at several locations to support these uses and to allow for development. Oregon State Parks owns the Yaquina Bay State Recreation Site, a 32-acre parcel of land overlooking the mouth of Yaquina Bay. There are large, cultivated shellfish operations in the Yaquina estuary.

Areas of Ecological Importance and Critical Habitat Designations: Yaquina Bay is listed as critical habitat for Green Sturgeon. Yaquina Bay State Recreation site is a spruce and pine forested bluff. Lower Yaquina Bay has little freshwater influence and is popular for shellfish harvesting. The Wetlands Conservancy has identified high salt marsh, tidal Sitka spruce swamp, and non-tidal Sitka spruce swamp as the highest priorities for habitat restoration. The estuary also has eelgrass beds, and nesting eagles and osprey. Spruce swamps are located in the upper estuary along Elk Creek and Little Elk Creek and areas for potential restoration of high salt marsh are located in Boone Slough and Nute Slough. Currently, there is an eelgrass mitigation project in the eastern portion of Marina Bed. [Yaquina Bay is a Conservation Opportunity Area.](#)

Alsea Bay Estuary. Alsea Bay is designated as a Conservation Estuary, is one of only six estuaries in Oregon that is managed for conservation under the [Coastal Zone Management Act](#), and does not have jetties at the ocean entrance. Recreational fishing and clamming are allowed in Alsea Bay and species present include cockles and purple varnish clams, softshell clams, and Dungeness crabs. There are two public boat launches at Alsea Bay, including the Port of Alsea boat launch and McKinley's Marina.

Species of Interest: Alsea Bay supports Green Sturgeon as well as a diversity of other species.

Areas of Ecological Importance and Critical Habitat Designations: The east side of Alsea Bay has more than 400 acres of undisturbed marsh habitat and additional marsh habitat in the lower reaches of Drift Creek, a Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team (FEMAT)-designated key watershed. Additional tidal high marsh habitat that is recovering from previous grazing disturbance is found west of Barclay Meadows and east of Eckman Lake. The Bayview Oxbow has about 150 acres of diked former tidal marsh. Barclay meadows contains small areas of diked former tidal marsh. Bain Slough is a forested wetland located at River Mile 9 that has well-developed remnant tidal channels. A tidegate, ditching, and residential development all reduce tidal influences at Bain Slough, which was likely a spruce tidal swamp at one time. [Alsea Bay has been identified as a Conservation Opportunity Area.](#)

Yachats River Estuary. Yachats River Estuary is about 40 acres, is a minor estuary, and is classified as a Conservation Estuary. The Yachats River Estuary is part of the [Yachats River Area Conservation Opportunity Area](#). It is a designated Important Bird Area of Oregon and includes marbled murrelet and spotted owl nesting sites.