

ODFW Oak Island Nature Trail

Trail Open: April 16 through September 30

Welcome to Oak Island. As you walk the trail, you will see wood posts that correspond to the following information:

Native Americans

Two hundred years ago, Native Americans walked on this very spot. Each year, just before winter, tribes from up and down the Columbia and Willamette rivers gathered on Oak Island for a trading fair which included dancing and festivities. Lewis and Clark reported that when they passed Sauvie Island on November 5, 1805, all the natives they saw had flattened heads, a custom dating back to Mayan nobility 1,500 years ago.

Native Americans used deer parts to make weapons, tools, food and clothing. They used tall grasses to make baskets for carrying trade goods. They used the snowberry bush's white berries, seen along this trail, to make soap. Rose hips, the red berries that grow on wild roses, were a source of Vitamin C. The Himalayan blackberries, an invasive species, were not brought here until the mid-1800s by the Hudson Bay Company.

Although about 2,000 Native Americans lived on Sauvie Island when Lewis and Clark passed by, nearly all had died from disease within thirty years.

Oregon White Oak

You are looking at Oregon white oak trees, *Quercus garryana*. These trees may live to be 200 to 500 years old if they get enough sunlight. Native Americans burned the area around oak trees to make it easier to hunt, but this also helped the oak grove by clearing out other trees and providing more sunlight. Look down and see if you can find acorns. Acorns are the seeds of oak trees. They are eaten by squirrels, mice and black-tailed deer. The Native Americans ground acorns into meal.

Oak Galls

The little round speckled balls that you see on the ground and on the oak leaves are called "oak galls." Inside of the oak galls are insects called gall wasps. In the spring before the oak leaves are fully grown, a wasp will lay an egg on a leaf. The egg causes a chemical reaction that makes the tree grow a case around it. This case protects the egg and larvae from being eaten by birds. Then the larvae eat out the inside of the gall as they grow. If the oak galls have tiny holes in them, that means the wasps inside have already emerged.

Oak galls can sometimes grow to be the size of a ping pong ball but their average size is three to four centimeters in diameter.

Birds

While you are standing here, look and listen for birds. You might hear a black-capped chickadee calling "Chic a dee dee dee." These small, black-capped birds pick insects out of the trees. Song sparrows are also common. They are gray and brown and eat seeds, berries and insects. There are many variations of their song.

A northern flicker is a woodpecker that feeds on the ground. They eat ants, worms and sometimes berries. Flickers nest in tree cavities.

American kestrels, red-tailed hawks and Cooper's hawks can be seen perched in trees or circling their prey. Barn owls and great horned owls come out at night. They all eat small mammals. Listen for the kestrel's "Klee, klee, klee" or the great horned owl's deep night hooting.

Birds

You are facing Sturgeon Lake. In the fall and spring, you can see flocks of Canada geese and sandhill cranes. They return from their northern nesting grounds in Alaska in early September. The cranes feed on waste grain from the recently harvested fields nearby and then fly to Sturgeon Lake each night to roost. As many as 3,500 sandhill cranes stop on Sauvie Island each fall and thousands of geese. You might also see large flocks of northern pintails and American wigeons on the lake in the fall, as well as tundra swans. When Lewis and Clark traveled through this area, they wrote that the noise from these numerous birds was "horrid" and kept them awake all night. Throughout the year, great blue herons can be seen fishing on Sturgeon Lake.

Flooding

Sauvie Island has a long history of flooding. The island is surrounded by the Columbia River and the Multnomah Channel. In 1844, the floodwaters reached as high as 33 feet, putting all but the highest points of land under water.

About 60 years ago, levees were built to protect the island from the Columbia River's flooding. The areas outside the levees flood annually.

You are looking at Sturgeon Lake. Sturgeon used to live in this water before the island was diked in the 1940s. After that, the lake began to fill in with mud, making it difficult for sturgeon to survive. Today, the mud is up to five feet deep and the sturgeon are no longer here.

In the winter, the floodwater often comes up as far as this post. In the flood of 1996, the water was 20 feet above the bottom of this post!

Mammals

In this area there are many types of mammals. The mounds of dirt that you see are made from the huge front claws of the Townsend's mole. As the moles make underground tunnels, they push the dirt to the surface. Moles eat worms and insects and store this food in their tunnels.

Look at the tall grass behind you. If you are quiet enough you might see black-tailed deer, which feed on the grass and small plants. When the deer lay down to sleep it flattens the grass.

Brush rabbits and raccoons live on Oak Island, too. Bats are night animals, coming out right before dark to feed on insects. From this point you might see river otters because they like areas around water.

How to get to the ODFW Oak Island Nature Trail: From the Sauvie Island Bridge, go left (past the store) to Reeder Road. Turn right on Reeder Road to Oak Island Road. Turn left.

Once you enter the gate, proceed straight to the parking lot. Parking permit required.

Trail Map



	Parking
	Trail Head
	Restrooms
	Trail
	Sites



Steelman Lake

Mammals

Sturgeon Lake

Birds

Galls

Oak Grove

Native Americans

0.13 mi



Loop trail from parking lot is 2.4 miles

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