

### **A New Year Brings Some New, and some Continuing Conservation Priorities**

The Oregon Audubon Council (OAC) is the umbrella organization for all Audubon chapters in the state. The Council meets twice a year—in the Spring to share information on Chapter programs and practices, and in the Fall to establish Conservation priorities. The most recent OAC conservation meeting was held on November 6-7, 2010 at the Audubon Society of Portland. I represented Rogue Valley Audubon Society at the meeting. Our task was to sort through many Conservation issues of mutual concern and identify those which would be OAC Conservation Campaign Priorities for 2011. This was not a simple task. To identify the most urgent among a large number of concerns required extended discussion, and consideration of many points of view. I'm pleased with the outcome-- the six Draft Priorities that were identified:

- Wind Power
- Greater Sage Grouse Protection
- Raptor Protection
- Forest Protection
- Proposed Wild Bird Conservation Act
- Important Bird Areas

Identifying these six priorities brings immediate attention to their need, and demonstrates that Oregon Audubon stands behind each effort. Your RVAS Board will review and discuss these priorities, and determine how RVAS wishes to endorse and support the effort. Based on the OAC Draft Report, here's a condensed description of all six priorities. Each Priority is very important; they are not listed according to any order of significance.

**WIND POWER:** The National Audubon Society and the Oregon Audubon Council have always fully supported the development of wind facilities at appropriate locations. However, the current lack of regulatory oversight of wind development and lack of comprehensive planning for wind development in Oregon has led to a situation where development unnecessarily threatens wildlife populations and critical wildlife habitats. Improperly sited or overly large wind facilities pose a significant threat to wildlife. During the 2011 legislative session a bill may be introduced that would define a "single wind facility" to keep developers from subdividing projects to avoid regulatory oversight. The Oregon Audubon Council has agreed to support and endorse this proposed legislation during the 2011 legislative session which will help ensure that wind developments are appropriately sited. RVAS will be asked to sign on to letters of support. You may be asked to write a letter of support as well. We must of course support efforts to implement carbon alternatives, but these efforts must not come at the expense of the environment in other ways.

**GREATER SAGE GROUSE PROTECTION:** In 2010 the US Fish and Wildlife Service determined that listing of the Greater Sage Grouse under the Endangered Species Act is "warranted but precluded" due to lack of resources. Like the Northern Spotted Owl, the Greater

Sage Grouse represents not only a species but an entire imperiled ecosystem. All western states within the Greater Sage Grouse's range are developing science-based plans to protect this species. Oregon Greater Sage Grouse guidelines were supposed to go before the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission in December 2010 for approval but were removed from the agenda under heavy pressure from wind developers and counties. Wide support is necessary to ensure that ODFW quickly adopts science-based guidelines and ensures adequate regulatory authority to enforce protections for Greater Sage Grouse. Again, you may be asked to help, by sending letters of support, and participating in town hall meetings where Sage Grouse protection will be discussed.

**RAPTOR PROTECTION LEGISLATION:** Despite the fact that it has been illegal since 1918, birds of prey continue to be illegally taken in Oregon. In 2009 Oregon Audubon played a lead role in passing legislation to increase protections for birds of prey in Oregon. The legislation specifically increased the amount of damages that the state could recover for illegal take of raptors from the former level of \$50 to current levels of \$2000-\$5000 per bird. In 2011 Oregon Audubon Council would like to support legislation to increase penalties (fines and jail time) associated with these crimes. RVAS will be asked to endorse proposed legislation; individual members will be asked to sign-on to letters of support to write their own letters of support, and to take advantage of any opportunities they have to let legislators know how important we consider this legislation to be.

**FOREST PROTECTION:** As Rogue Valley Audubon members know, protection of old growth forests, especially as they relate to the recovery of the Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet, has been a longstanding priority for OAC. You may have thought the WOPR was put to rest, but the same issues continue to appear. During 2011 there will be critical opportunities to comment on revised versions of the Spotted Owl Recovery Plan, WOPR and critical Habitat Designations, as well as the proposed take of Barred Owls. Oregon Audubon Council will monitor this. Individual Audubon members may, and should comment on these revised plans and proposed policies. In addition, Audubon Oregon Council has decided to support legislation being introduced by Sierra Club et al during the 2011 session to increase protection for old growth habitat on State Forests: RVAS will be asked to endorse legislation, send chapter letters in support of legislation, and contact key decision-makers.

**WILD BIRD CONSERVATION ACT:** Hunters and Fishermen have paid a tax on hunting and fishing gear for the better part of a century--this provides the primary source of revenue for ODFW. As a result, 88% of the species in Oregon which are not hunted or fished receive less than 2% of the ODFW budget. To address this disparity, legislation will be introduced during the 2011 legislative session to implement a 5 cent per pound fee on bird seed ("A Nickel for the Birds!"). This Wild Bird Conservation Act would provide approximately \$2 million year which would be used to fund a single avian conservation coordinator at ODFW with the rest of the funding going into on-the-ground avian related restoration and education projects. Because the fee will be collected at the wholesale level, it will not appear on consumer purchase receipts. The fund would have an oversight committee and would have a sunset clause in 2017 to help ensure that it was appropriately administered. Having birders contribute financially to statewide avian conservation efforts will help ensure adequate and stable funding to protect the birds we so greatly enjoy. The OAC has agreed to support this effort, which was developed by Portland

Audubon, Backyard Bird Shops, and the Wildlife Society. There will be opportunity to provide input into the proposed legislation, to endorse legislation, and to send letters of support. It will also be essential to educate members and the public about the legislation, sign-on to letters of support, send out action alerts to members, and if necessary, participate in meetings with legislators and other key decision-makers

**IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS:** Oregon's 97 designated Important Bird Areas represent the most important locations in our state for bird nesting, resting and breeding. (IBA's in Jackson County include the Cascade –Siskiyou National Monument, Denman Wildlife Management Area, Siskiyou Crest, and Table Rock.) Many chapters conduct protection, restoration, monitoring and educational outreach activities at their local Important Bird Areas. For the 2011 Priorities, the OAC identified five IBA opportunities where collective resources and expertise can have a significant impact.

- **Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and Klamath National Wildlife Refuge:** Both Malheur and Klamath National Wildlife Refuges are in the process of developing Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP) which will guide Refuge activities for the next two decades. The CCP process represents a critical opportunity to ensure that two of the premier Refuges in the west are restored to health. The OAC agreed to engage in CCP Process through participation in public meetings, commenting on CCP drafts, and to develop strategies to strengthen OAC connections to and support for both the Malheur and the Klamath National Wildlife Refuge.
- **Lake Abert:** Competition for limited water resources has resulted in a situation in which Lake Abert's water has fallen to dangerously low levels, increasing salinity, reducing brine shrimp populations and jeopardizing avian populations. There is a need to focus attention on this IBA and develop strategies to address water concerns. The OAC will form a working group of Audubon Chapters and other interested parties to develop short and long term strategies and solutions to address Lake Abert water issues.
- **Steens Mountain:** Audubon played a central role in passing the Steens Act nearly a decade ago, protecting vast areas of Steens Mountain from development. However, federal funding to acquire development rights was never appropriated by Congress. This funding is critical to ensure that new development pressures on the mountain are not realized. The OAC, with leadership from the Audubon Society of Portland, will lobby Oregon's Congressional Delegation to support appropriation of federal funds. The OAC also agreed to oppose wind development within the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management Area. RVAS can support this lobbying effort through signing onto letters, writing individual letters, and meeting with legislators.
- **Marine Reserves:** In 2009 Audubon played a pivotal role in establishing the first marine reserves in Oregon. Audubon ensured that the needs of avian species were considered and incorporated into the Marine Reserve process. RVAS was very active in this campaign. In 2011 we need to ensure that marine reserves are adequately funded via the state budget process and build upon our 2009 success by expanding the marine reserve system. This includes supporting expansion of Marine Reserve System through the 2011 legislative process. We will again be asked to endorse legislation, sign on to letters of support, write our own letters of support, and participate in meetings with legislators and other key decision-makers. It is important for the Marine Reserve effort that legislators understand

that this is not something of concern just for coastal Oregon, and that citizens and Audubon chapters in the interior fully support an expanded Marine Reserve system.

All of this sounds like a lot of work, and in fact, it will be. Audubon was founded to address concerns about bird conservation, and conservation continues to be our focus. It's important that our Audubon priorities for the environment are made explicit, understood by all our members, and supported by Audubon chapters across Oregon. You will hear more about each of them throughout the year, and you will be asked to assist in implementation. Thanks for your efforts, and for your support.