

# Helen M. Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary

## Mission Statement

The mission of the Helen M. Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary is to provide important year-round habitat for riparian and upland wildlife species along a unique stretch of the Deschutes River in Central Oregon, and to provide educational opportunities associated with wildlife habitat not available in other locations. The Sanctuary addresses the shortage of protected riparian habitat set aside uniquely for wildlife in Central Oregon.

## Sanctuary Physical Description

The Helen M. Thompson Wildlife Sanctuary (TWS) is located along both sides of the Deschutes River in the southwest corner of the city of Bend, Deschutes Co., Oregon. The TWS was created in 1972, by Helen M. Thompson, and subsequently managed by her son, Stephen Thompson. The Sanctuary was augmented with their combined purchases of seven parcels of land, which at the time, were located more than two miles upstream from the city of Bend. Since then, the Sanctuary has been refined through many steps involving land purchases, partitions, lot line adjustments, sales and other land use processes. Today, the property consists of a core area of 45 acres spanning both sides of the river. It is surrounded on three sides by low-density residential housing and on the fourth by public Forest Service land. It includes the Oregon State Scenic Waterway, Deschutes County riparian Area of Special Interest, and the multi-agency Waterway Overlay Zone (WOZ). The property management plan is designed to meet State of Oregon Goal 5 wildlife objectives.

## Sanctuary Attributes

The TWS provides riparian, wetland, riverine, upland-shrub, Ponderosa pine-forest and rim-rock habitats free of development and traffic by people and dogs. The TWS provides key breeding, feeding, resting, and wintering areas for a number of target species. It is the only stretch of the Deschutes River for miles without direct public access and the resulting potential, if unintended, disturbance of wildlife. The area experiences very light boating traffic because of access issues and dangerous falls downstream. There are ten islands in this wide, shallow area of the river.

## Target Species

Target species in the TWS include river otter, mink, beaver, elk, deer, geese, ducks, herons, quail, birds of prey with an emphasis on eagles and osprey; owls, kingfishers, doves, woodpeckers, and a wide variety of passerines with an emphasis on marsh birds and cavity nesters, and the Oregon spotted frog.

Other species include coyotes, bobcats, badgers, raccoons, rodents including a variety of squirrels, muskrats; rabbits, bats, various amphibians and reptiles, several fish species, invertebrates such as crayfish; and aquatic insects critical to the food web. The TWS provides both important summer breeding habitat and critical winter habitat for various target species. This stretch of river provides key spawning ground for native rainbow trout as well as holding areas for fish and crayfish that are the primary prey of river otters, mink, herons and osprey.

### Unique Features

The half-mile stretch of river that comprises the TWS contains a number of features that make it unique in the Middle Deschutes region.

- 1) The Sanctuary includes **both sides of the river**. This allows an overall coordinated effort for wildlife and habitat management. Some species like winter hunting bald eagles are particularly sensitive and will not remain perched across from human and dog presence on the other side of the river. Over one mile of river frontage is protected.
- 2) This is the **main river crossing point for deer** between the eastern slope of the Cascades and the high desert south of Bend. It provides vital **connectivity** for deer home ranges through their main E-W migration route, a feature that is increasingly recognized as vital to their survival.
- 3) This portion of the river is **wide and shallow** with a low to moderate flow rate. These features provides habitat for a large number of species, allows deer to cross and provide a traditional feeding destination for wintering elk.
- 4) The Sanctuary contains **wetlands and soft banks on both sides** of the river. These provide habitat for river otters and beavers, as well as marsh birds, amphibians including **endangered spotted frogs** and shallow water food organisms such as crayfish and sticklebacks. **Spotted frogs** have been documented on the east side of the river by qualified researchers.
- 5) The consistent depth keeps the **entire width of the river covered with water** during the yearly fluctuations in water level out of Wickiup Reservoir. This feature, rare in Deschutes County, provides high survival of aquatic insects reproducing in the shallows and contributes to the **high productivity** of fish and crayfish.
- 6) The bottom is covered in rocks and **spawning gravel**. This produces both fish and crayfish in abundance and supplies their predators with food. Downed trees along the edge provide additional habitat and holding areas.

- 7) This stretch contains ten **midstream islands**. These features create standing water, eddies, riffles and feeding, resting and nesting areas. The eddies and riffles provide ideal feeding areas for fish, crayfish and their predators. They receive heavy use by osprey, otters, beavers, herons, geese and ducks.
- 8) The Sanctuary is defined by **distinct rims on both sides** of the river along its boundary. This simplifies management and provides outcrop habitat for birds of prey, reptiles and mammals such as marmots and bobcats.
- 9) The Sanctuary contains no public trail along the river that would put a large number of people and their pets, especially dogs, in the corridor. In addition, **dogs are not allowed** anywhere on the property. This allows wildlife to pursue normal activities around the clock without disturbance or harassment. The result is a **high diversity of species** exhibiting natural behavior not commonly seen elsewhere on the river. Reproduction here results in **out-migration up and down river** into other parts of the system, providing fish and wildlife elsewhere.

#### Sanctuary Activities

The TWS provides a testing ground for various habitat manipulations and enhancements to increase the number and diversity of target species, such as bird boxes, nesting platforms, feeding stations, quail and small mammal refuges, rock, log and plant placement, wetland enhancement, pond and slough maintenance and native wildlife food plantings. It can also provide learning experiences and teaching opportunities for a variety of audiences. Interpretive trails are being contemplated on both sides of the river for carefully managed school tours. The TWS will also be available to agencies and universities for advanced field studies.

#### Administration

The TWS is currently owned and operated by Stephen E. Thompson, one of the original founders. Dr. Thompson has a PhD in zoology with an emphasis in animal behavior and ecology, as well as wildlife management. The TWS honors the memory of Helen M. Thompson, one of Oregon's most devoted and active conservationists, for her tireless efforts to protect wildlife habitat throughout the country. Mrs. Thompson has received numerous awards and testaments for her efforts to conserve wildlife habitat, from the Nature Conservancy, the Audubon Society, Friends of Opal Creek, Friends of the (Columbia) Gorge, the American Garden Club and its Portland affiliate, and the National Tropical Botanical Garden.