Field Guide

SMITH & BYBEE WETLANDS

STORY BY *James Davis* / PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Metro staff*

Smith and Bybee Wetlands is a big surprise to many first-time visitors. Passing warehouses and railroad tracks in North Portland, you don't expect to find two lakes bursting with trees, plants and animals. But this 2,000-acre natural area offers some of the Portland region's best wildlife viewing.

Your first big choice: whether to explore by foot or boat. The Interlakes Trail passes through huge cottonwoods, other wetland trees and grasslands, to several spots with great views of the natural area's two namesake lakes. This mixture of habitats provides homes for many kinds of wildlife, especially birds.

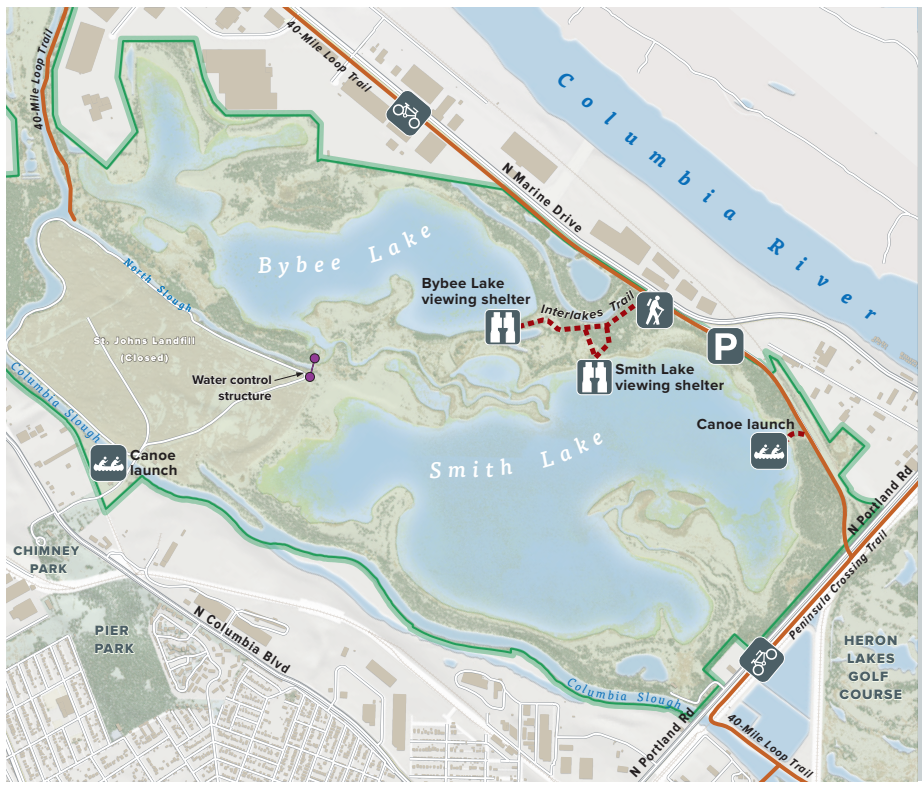
From mid-April through late June, see the lakes up-close by paddling a kayak or canoe, or venture out in winter if you're willing to brave the cold. Start from the boat launch on Smith Lake, the larger lake along the southern shore of the Columbia River. To the west, the remains of "the north Slough" give you a front-row view of many mammals as you cross to Bybee Lake.

No matter what time of year you visit, you'll find something exciting at Smith and Bybee. Discover basking turtles in the spring, creepy-crawly insects in the summer, migrating birds in the fall and soaring raptors in the winter. You can nearly always spot muskrats, beavers, black-tailed deer, raccoons, cottontail rabbits, river otters, minks, long-tailed weasels or coyotes.

This abundance of wildlife takes Smith and Bybee back to its roots. Like all land along the Columbia, this area changed dramatically as the region's population began to grow in the 1880s. From 1940 to 1990, part of the site served as the St. Johns Landfill, which accepted most of the region's trash. Metro took over management, closed the landfill and started the transition back to nature.

Today, Smith and Bybee Wetlands is one of the most outstanding places to see native wildlife in a Pacific Northwest city.

For more information, visit: oregonmetro.gov/smithandbybee



SMITH AND BYBEE WETLANDS NATURAL AREA

5300 N MARINE DR.
PORTLAND, OR 97217

DRIVING
Take Interstate 5 north to exit 307, Delta Park/Marine Drive. Head west 2.2 miles on Marine Drive and look for Smith and Bybee on your left.

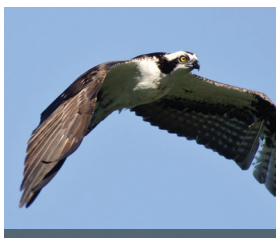
KNOW WHEN YOU GO
Smith and Bybee is open sunrise to sunset.
No bikes or dogs, please.

AMENITIES
A picnic shelter, bathrooms, bike rack, drinking fountain and site map can all be found in the parking area. The Interlakes Trail is paved, flat and wheelchair-accessible.

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

You're a short drive from St. Johns, where you can fuel up with coffee, grab a bite to eat or browse local shops for books, toys, cameras and more. For ideas, visit stjohnsmainstreet.org

BE ON THE LOOKOUT!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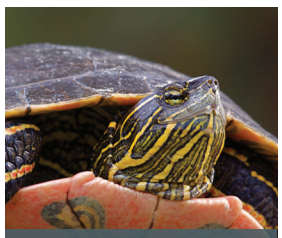
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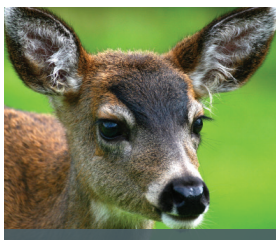
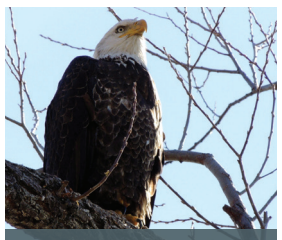

BLACK-TAILED DEER


BALD EAGLE

SEASON BY SEASON

SPRING: Explore by kayak or canoe for an up-close look at lush, green scenery and abundant wildlife. Many migrating birds pass through, and 35 species of songbirds nest here. They sing like crazy during breeding season, especially early in the day. Watch for Western painted turtles basking in the sun on floating logs. Smith and Bybee has one of the biggest populations in Oregon, and one of the easiest to see. On the right side of the Interlakes Trail, a wooden railing overlooking Bybee Lake provides such reliable views, it's dubbed "Turtle Turnout." Meanwhile, hibernating animals get active and focus on breeding. Look for Pacific chorus frog tadpoles in the water, and garter snakes sunbathing on logs or along the trail.

SUMMER: July and August are quiet as birds eat, hide, molt and grow to survive the coming seasons. Mammals cruise around near sunset looking for food, but they're the hardest animals to spot; they can sense people, especially if we're talking! One group of animals that's pretty obvious: insects and spiders. Spider webs laced with cottonwood seeds nearly cover the trees, creating a "haunted forest." In the water, phenomenal plant growth can make paddling almost impossible.

FALL: Autumn is a time of change. Migrating birds leave with their young, while thousands of ducks that nested in the Arctic arrive for the winter and feast on water plants loaded with seeds. Shorebirds, like killdeer and sandpipers, fill up on food while they head south. Look for famous black and orange caterpillars called "wooly bears," which drop to the ground and dig a place to hibernate until spring.

WINTER: Without evergreens, this wetland forest looks naked. From the Interlakes Trail, you can look right through the trees and see the lakes – an opportunity to spot mammals and big, perched birds. This is the best time to see bald eagles, red-tailed hawks and other raptors. By February, male Pacific chorus frogs call for mates in big gatherings at the edge of water. If snow sticks, you might be lucky enough to see rabbit, deer or coyote tracks.