

# Birding with awareness: creating connections between user groups and waterfowl habitats

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## Birding with Awareness

- Getting out to go bird watching and take photographs during the winter waterfowl season is very popular.
- The large flocks of snow geese (*Anser caerulescens*), Trumpeter (*Cygnus buccinator*) and Tundra Swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) arrive on agricultural lands and wetlands and attract tens of thousands of people to see them.
- This drives a huge ecotourism industry, especially in northwest Washington.
- Birding With Awareness was created to educate the public about the relationship between the presence of waterfowl and waterfowl friendly agricultural lands, including dairy farms.
- "Birding with Awareness" means how to be more aware of what you are looking at, seeing in context, not just the birds but the landscape/habitat they are using.
- Public lands were our focus to start. We picked Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Snoqualmie Wildlife Area, a heavily used public area near large urban communities.
- Shared Spaces – a program to create awareness about our public lands being used by a variety of different users and user groups.



Swans wintering on a dairy farm – pasture grass grown for silage

## Public Wildlife Areas: Shared Spaces

- Birders, hikers, sportsmen/women all share two things in common:
- They all rely on healthy natural lands and they all must be good stewards of these shared spaces
- We reached out to a wide variety of user groups: Watchers, hunters, dog trainers, walkers, and anyone else we encountered on these areas.
- Articles and programs creating awareness about the issues and other users were done.
- Getting people to be aware of the complexity of issues, diversity of users and wildlife was key.



Waterfowl watching - snow geese on dairy grass



Waterfowl hunting



Wildlife photography



Hunting dog training



Dog walking - on leash



Trumpeter Swans landing in a harvested corn field on a dairy farm

## Private Lands And Public Roads

- We took the Shared Spaces concept and expanded it for private farmlands and public roads.
- Farms, especially those that grow waterfowl friendly crops are key to supporting Washington's vast numbers of waterfowl.
- Getting the message out to birders and photographers about the role of farms that grow waterfowl friendly crops is vital.
- Dairy farms: Important for swans - 85% of our wintering Trumpeter Swans in western Washington use dairy farms for all or part of the winter.
- Provide information for people on where to go and birding/photography etiquette, especially along public roads.
- Respect for private lands and other user groups on private land, i.e., hunters, farming activities and more while out enjoying the flocks of swans and snow geese, and raptors, etc.



Swans in muddy post-harvest potatoes



Trumpeter and Tundra Swans in potato field

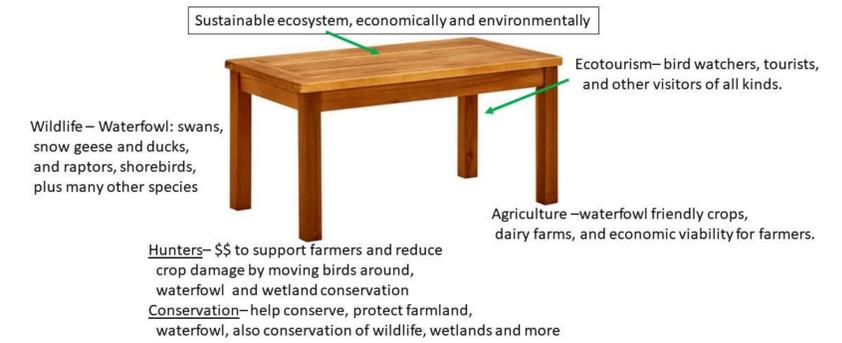
## Taking Action

- Be safe. For you and everyone else.
- We provide information on how to be aware of their surroundings, what to look for, and methods to determine where they are safe to park, walk, or set up their tripod.
- Note if there are other cars around. Be aware of other activities happening on a public area: hunting (waterfowl, big game, etc.) during certain dates, hunt dog training, or other activities.
- If you need a pass to be on public land, put it on your dashboard.
- Read what is posted on the reader boards/kiosks. Follow these rules and regulations.
- If you are out during hunting season, it is suggested you wear an orange or pink vest so you can be seen. Yes, non-hunters wear vests to stay safe.
- And... **If You See Something, Say Something** Suspicious activities: Take photos, never confront. We promote techniques from Washington's Eyes In The Woods program - teaching people how to look, listen, take notes and how to report suspicious or illegal activities regarding wildlife or on public lands.



## Waterfowl Enthusiasts Need to be Waterfowl Habitat Enthusiasts

What Supports this Waterfowl Spectacle?  
All four legs are needed for balance and support



Share cropping – Organic carrot harvest by farm workers and swans – expensive sharing

- Farming practices are changing, and crops are shifting to non-waterfowl friendly such as berry and landscaping trees and shrubs.
- Dairy farms are leaving western Washington – market forces, regulations, environmental rules
- More efficient harvesting machine and methods so less "waste" left in a field for waterfowl food



Trumpeter Swan in dairy pasture grass



Trumpeter Swan and sandhill crane in corn field

## Acknowledgements

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