



Running Y Ranch Resort: A Natural Landscape

Birds, Butterflies and Wildflowers

Gary Vequist



RUNNING Y RANCH
RESORT



Skillet Handle - a natural wildlife habitat



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Western Pond Turtle on Fairway

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank local residents of Running Y Ranch Resort, Klamath Native Plant Society, Klamath Trails Alliance and Klamath Basin Audubon Society for their input and review of this handbook. This handbook will assist resort visitors in identifying common birds and wildflowers in their natural habitats.

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Running Y Ranch Resort – A Natural History

Running Y Ranch Resort is a destination resort offering a variety of recreational opportunities, including an Arnold Palmer Signature Golf Course, Running Y Sports and Fitness Center, Sandhill Spa, and Bill Collier Ice Arena. This historic ranch was sold in 1974 to Roy Disney, as a summer residence, and twenty years later it was purchased by JELD-WEN Corporation of Klamath Falls. The 3,600-acre ranch was subsequently developed as Running Y Ranch Resort. The lodge, vacation rentals and recreation facilities were built amongst evergreen forests, oak woodlands and aspen groves. It is a great place for outdoor nature activities like hiking, biking and birding.

Homeowners have preserved native trees and shrubs in their landscaping, protecting pockets of wildlife habitat in their backyards. Flower gardens were designed to attract migratory birds, pollinating bees and beautiful butterflies. Over six miles of paved bike paths extend through the resort, including a three-mile loop trail encircling the “Back 9”. The Skillet Handle peninsula on Upper Klamath Lake is a natural sanctuary that attracts hikers, birders and nature enthusiasts. The Skillet Handle Birding Trail wanders past a fascinating assortment of wildflowers as it traverses through ponderosa pine forests and Oregon white oak woodlands.

The elevation at the Running Y Ranch Resort ranges between 4,140 feet on the lakeshore to 4,493 feet on higher ridgetops. The resort’s location on the east side of the Cascade Mountains ensures summer temperatures are not too hot and winter temperatures are not too cold. Annual rainfall is around 13 inches, above the hallmark of a true desert -10 inches per year. It is a semi-arid landscape with cool summer nights and mild temperatures lingering into mid-morning – an ideal place for outdoor activities.



The Cascade Mountains contain a wide assortment of conifers (cone bearing) trees adapted to specific site conditions. This “biodiversity” is what scientists refer to as “species richness”. The structural complexity of old-growth conifer forests creates places for wildlife seeking shelter. Specialized woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees travel up and down the trunks of trees in search of food (insects and/or seeds). Running Y Ranch Resort is located on the western shores of Upper Klamath Lake, a setting dominated by Ponderosa pine but a place also consisting of Douglas-fir, incense cedar and western juniper.

Klamath Basin - Where Ecosystems Intersect

The Klamath Basin is a place where four distinct ecoregions intersect – an ecological crossroads. Native plants associated with Great Basin sagebrush steppe and Cascade conifer forests grow side-by-side on the Skillet Handle peninsula.

The *Cascade Mountains* extend from Mount Lassen to Mount Baker creating not just a geographical divide, but a climatic wall dividing the Pacific Northwest into a wet side and a dry side. Moist-warm air rises up western-slopes of the Cascades and, as it cools, water begins to precipitate out as rain or snow. Running Y Ranch Resort is located on the drier east side of the Cascade Mountains at an elevation of 4,200 feet. Ponderosa pines do well on the east side of the Cascade Crest because environmental parameters (such as elevation, climate and soil conditions) are ideal for their survival. (Visit: *Crater Lake National Park*)

Northern Great Basin terrain consists of broad-sunken valleys called “basins” separated by north to south directional fault-block mountains called “ranges”. This is a rough shrubby landscape called “sagebrush steppe” where “deer and antelope still play”. The western boundary for “basin and range country” is Modoc Rim on the eastside of Upper Klamath Lake.



Wildflowers and drought-resistant grasses emerge in open spaces between sagebrush and rabbitbrush on the Skillet Handle. (Visit: *Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge*)

Oregon's High Desert emerged from a chaotic past when pumice and ash smothered this semi-arid landscape of cinder cones and lava buttes. Summer days can be scorching with little shade offered by “pole-like” lodgepole pines but nights quickly cool losing heat to a clear sky. In the northern extremes of Klamath County slender lodgepoles crowd together on dry, ashy soil deposited by many past volcanic eruptions. (Visit: *Newberry National Volcanic Monument*)

Medicine Lake Plateau is California's version of the high desert. Layers of lava built a rocky landscape that includes underground lava tubes. After each volcanic eruption, life is reborn ecologically on this new land. Lichen (part fungus and part algae) grows as patches on rocky surfaces, while rocky cracks collect windblown dust and ash forming a rudimentary soil. Hardy grasses and desert shrubs colonize this new land. Bonsai-like juniper trees struggle to beat the odds to survive after years of stunted growth. (Visit: *Lava Beds National Monument*)

Upper Klamath Lake Up Close

Upper Klamath Lake, the largest natural lake in the Pacific Northwest, collects water from springs and creeks originating in the surrounding mountains. Upper Klamath Lake outlets into Link River before flowing into Lake Ewauna (Klamath Falls). The Klamath River outlets from the lake and journeys 263 miles through deep canyons to the Pacific Ocean at Redwoods National Park.

Upper Klamath Lake's surface water stays around 4,140 feet above sea level, creating freshwater habitat for a diversity of fish-eating birds. A low ridge (a watershed divide) separates the Klamath River from the Lost River – a stream with nowhere



to go. The Lost River flows into “landlocked” Tule Lake, attracting hundreds-of-thousands of migrating birds. Wetland habitats provide essential early summer nesting for many magnificent birds, such as American White Pelican, Great Egret and Bald Eagle. However, the springtime courtship dances of Western and Clark’s Grebes get most of the attention from birdwatchers during early summer.



Upper Klamath Lake

Upper Klamath Lake is 25 miles long and 3 to 12 miles wide with an average depth is 8.5 feet. At the end of the last Ice Age, Modoc Lake was 100 feet deeper and nearly ten-times larger than present day Upper Klamath Lake. This ancient lake submerged all but the highest ridges at Running Y Ranch Resort. Over ten thousand years the average annual temperature increased by 5 degrees creating the present semi-arid regime. It is noteworthy to mention that during the past 100 years the average annual temperature has increased over one degree – a much greater rate of warming than ever before.