

# Great Blue Herons and Forestry

Wildlife in Managed Forests:  
Reference Series

Great blue herons (*Ardea herodias*) and their nesting habitat are protected in Oregon by the Oregon Forest Practices Act (FPA). These birds are also protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Great blue herons (GBHEs) have a wingspan of 5.5 - 6.5 feet and weigh about 5 or 6 pounds.

These large birds will eat nearly any small animal within striking distance, including fish, amphibians, reptiles, small mammals insects and even other birds. GBHEs mostly feed in wetlands, ponds, streams, and pastures.

GBHEs are colonial nesters, which means they nest in groups of nests, called a rookery. Rookeries are often near water. They typically nest in live trees, but have also been found to nest on the ground, in bushes and on man-made structures. During nesting season, males arrive first at the nest colony and court passing females. Rookeries can be as small as a single nest or upwards of 500 individual nests. Nests are constructed mainly by the female with materials brought by the male, and are used year after year.

## WHAT IS MOST LIKELY TO DISTURB A NESTING GBHE?

- Timber harvest
- Log hauling
- Road construction
- Low-flying aircraft

## WHAT THREATENS THE GBHE?

- GBHEs compete with increasing bald eagle populations for nesting space and food.
- GBHEs are especially sensitive to disturbance at rookeries



Photo by Larry Pecenka.

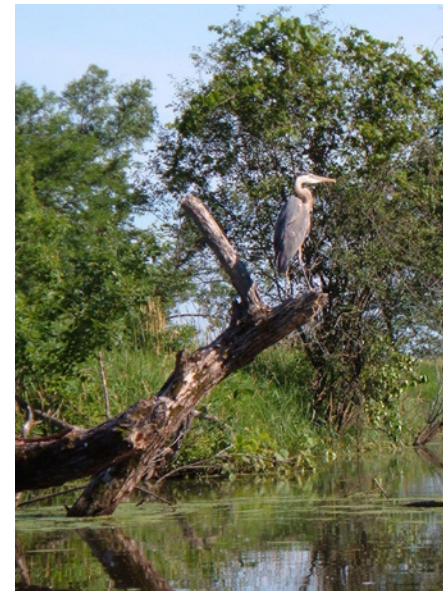
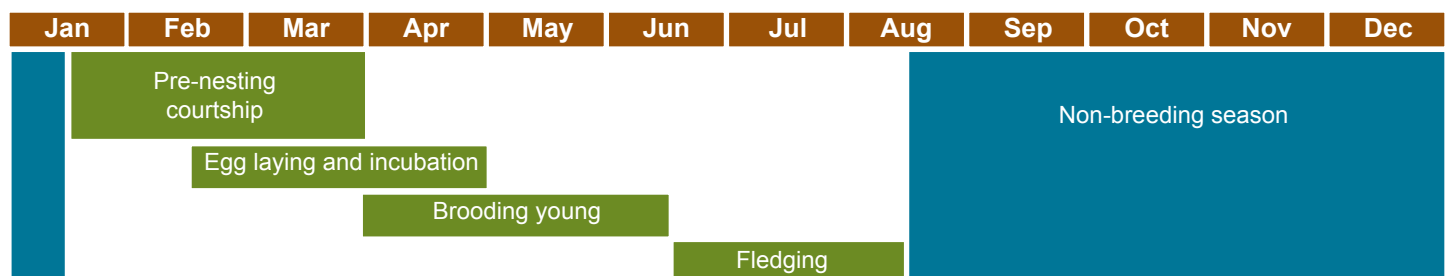


Photo by Cathy Dewitz.

## WHEN DO GREAT BLUE HERONS NEST?

Critical nesting period:  
**Feb 15 - Jul 31**



## WHAT DOES THE FPA REQUIRE?

Protect the resource site (active nest tree and any identified key components). An active nest tree is one that has been used by GBHEs within the last three nesting season. Key components include forested areas around the nest trees that have perching, fledging and replacement trees.

## HOW DO I PROTECT THE RESOURCE SITE?

- Maintain site integrity and avoid disturbance during the critical nesting season (February 15 to July 31).
- Forest operations are not allowed within 1/4 mile of the active nest trees from February 15 to July 31.
- Maintain a 300-foot buffer of trees around the active nest tree. The buffer should include a forested area that provides a visual screen for the nest site.

## SOURCES & MORE INFORMATION

Oregon Forest Practices Act: <http://www.oregon.gov/odf/Pages/lawsrules.aspx>

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01371/wdfw01371.pdf>

[www.KnowYourForest.org](http://www.KnowYourForest.org)

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

[EPA.gov](http://EPA.gov)



Photo by Larry Pecenka.



## ABOUT OFRI

The Oregon Forest Resources Institute was created by the Oregon Legislature in 1991 to advance public understanding of forests, forest products and forest management and to encourage sound forestry through landowner education.

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