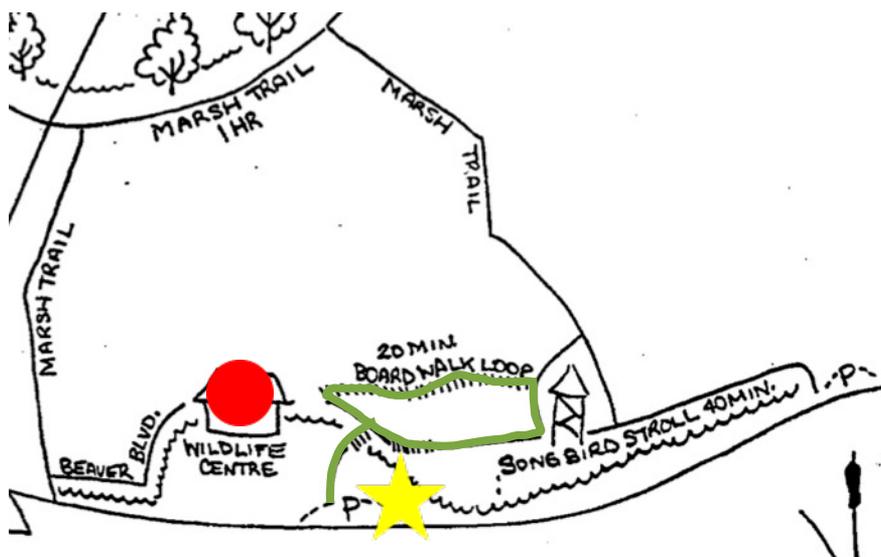




# Self Guided Tour BoardWalk Loop



 Boardwalk Loop Trail

 Discovery Centre in Parking Lot

 Old Wildlife Centre - demolished in 2020

# Welcome to the Boardwalk Loop

## Overview of the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area

As you start the Boardwalk Loop you will have a good view of the wetlands of the Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (CVWMA). The CVWMA is a 17,000 acre wetland that is internationally recognized as a **Ramsar site** and nationally as an **Important Bird Area of Canada**. The area supports an amazing amount of biodiversity. There are over 300 bird, close to 60 mammal, 17 fish, 6 reptile, and 6 amphibian species that have been recorded in the area. Plus, there are thousands of invertebrate and plant species.



### Did you know?

Since 1800, 20 million hectares (about 15%) of Canada's wetlands have been filled in and lost to development. Near major cities and towns, 70% of wetlands have been lost.

When one hectare of wetlands is converted to agricultural land, between 1 and 19 tonnes of carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) are emitted to the atmosphere per year.

Most wildlife in the province use wetland habitat at some point in their life cycle.

Wetlands cover about 6% of the land in BC.

One hectare of wetland can store between 9 and 14 million liters of water.

# Marshes and the Importance of Cattails

Marshes are wetlands that are flooded permanently (to varying levels) or seasonally and are characterized by aquatic vegetation such as cattails, floating-leaved pond-weed, yellow pond lily, white water-buttercup, and native milfoil.

Cattails are an incredibly important plant to wetland ecosystems:

- They are natural filters, capable of absorbing excess minerals and toxins in the water as they grow in the spring and release them when they die in the fall.
- They absorb excess water during rainfall events and periods of high water. This water is then slowly redistributed during the dry season. This prevents and minimizes floods.
- They provide great habitat for wildlife. Birds such as Red-winged Blackbirds will build their nests propped up in the stocks of the cattails. Ducks and other waterfowl use floating platforms created by the cattail's root mass as nesting sites. Turtles will also make use of these "cattail islands," using them as sunbathing spots on warm days. These floating cattail islands are much safer for many animals than resting on solid land, as they are largely inaccessible by larger predators and provide easy access to the water when smaller terrestrial predators come close.



**Red-winged blackbird and western painted turtle using the cattails**

# Tree Swallow Nesting Boxes



As you exit the boardwalk and head towards the Marsh Trail, you will see a series of boxes placed along the edges of the trail. These boxes are home to Tree Swallows. Volunteers and staff monitor over 70 boxes along the Marsh Trail Loop each year to collect data on success rates and other variables.

Tree Swallows are streamlined small songbirds with long, pointed wings and a short, squared or slightly notched tail. Their bills are very short and flat.

Adult males are blue-green above and white below with blackish flight feathers and a thin black eye mask; females are duller with more brown in their upper parts, and juveniles are completely brown above. Juveniles and some females can show a weak, blurry gray-brown breast band.

Tree Swallows breed in open habitats such as fields and wetlands, usually adjacent to water. They nest in artificial nest boxes as well as tree cavities. Foraging flocks are frequently seen over wetlands, water, and agricultural fields.

Tree Swallows feed on small, aerial insects that they catch in their mouths during acrobatic flight. After breeding, Tree Swallows gather in large flocks to molt and migrate.

# A Bird's Eye View from the Tower

The viewing tower, a destination on the Boardwalk Loop, offers a spectacular view of the wetland & surrounding mountain ranges.

The Creston Valley is a unique geological region between the Purcell (to the east) and Selkirk (to the west) mountain ranges. The wide valley is a flood plain of the Purcell Trench that is divided by the Kootenay River. The Kootenay River originates in the Rocky Mountains to the east and meanders its way south into northern Idaho. It then turns north and flows down into the Creston Valley and empties into the Kootenay Lake before forming its west arm at Nelson and descending rapidly into the Columbia River at Castlegar. Wow what a journey!!

The rich, fertile soil of the Creston Valley, created 12,000 years ago by the melting of glaciers, makes it a productive agricultural area. The area was populated by aboriginal peoples, the original residents being the Kutenai—one of three groups who formed the Ktunaxa First Nation. Traditionally, they lived mainly by hunting, trapping and fishing, and at tribal ceremonies worshiped the sun and the Great Spirit.



# Things that Slither and Croak

As you walk along the grassy sections of the trail you may see some of our local snakes. At the CVWMA, we have three different types of snakes:

- Western Terrestrial Garter snake (common)
- Common Garter snake (common)
- Rubber Boa (rare)

The common Garter snake is the snake in the picture shown below and is characterized by its bright yellow stripes and darker base colour. The Western Terrestrial Garter is slightly different with its identifying features being black checkering on the side and its overall grey/brown body colour.



There are 3 species of frogs found here:

- Pacific Chorus Frog (common)
- Columbia Spotted Frog (shown below, common)
- Northern Leopard Frog (rare)

*The invasive American Bullfrog is a threat to native frog populations...and they have been recently found in the Creston area ...Check out the interpretive signage near the Marsh Trail junction to learn more...*



# Western Painted Turtles

The Western Painted Turtle can be seen in the ponds along the Boardwalk Loop. They can be seen swimming or loafing on a cat-tail mound or floating log in the water. They are named after the bright yellow stripes on its head, neck, tail and legs, and the glowing red on its **plastron** (shell covering the belly) and under-edge of its **carapace** (shell covering the back). The red and yellow patterns contrast with the olive-green of the skin, and the dark colouring of the upper carapace.

Painted turtles can grow to over a foot in length, with the carapace measuring up to 25 cm long - roughly the size of a dinner plate!

Painted Turtles prefer the margins and shallows of lakes and ponds, ditches and sluggish streams with muddy bottoms and lots of aquatic plants. These areas provide important habitat for feeding, basking, shelter from predators, and hibernation.

Painted Turtles require nearby upland nesting areas without vegetation. At the CVWMA, the turtles cross West Creston Rd from May-July in search of gravel south-facing slopes to lay their eggs.

The Western Painted Turtle is the most northerly occurring turtle in North America. They can survive under water in ponds that are 2 C and covered with half a metre of ice! It is the only native pond turtle left in B.C.

In B.C., Painted Turtles are found in pockets throughout the southern interior, as far north as Golden. This includes the Okanagan Valley, Kamloops Lake, Shuswap Lake, and the Creston and Nelson Area. They are less common on the coast.



# HOW TO CONNECT & LEARN MORE

## Online

[www.discovery-centre.ca](http://www.discovery-centre.ca)

## Phone & Email

(250) 402 8661 (Nature Centre)

(250) 402 6905 (Year Round)

Email: [education@discovery-centre.ca](mailto:education@discovery-centre.ca)

## Onsite Seasonally (May-Oct)

1760 West Creston Rd

Creston, BC V0B 1G7 Canada

## Mailing Address

PO Box 763, Creston, BC

V0B 1G0 Canada

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