



*Oregon Pilots Association's*

# *Prop Wash*

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# Oregon's Hidden Horizons: Seaplane Destinations

By Herb Lingl

In my travels by seaplane, I have discovered that Oregon is one of the most seaplane-friendly states in the American West. With more than a thousand lakes, hundreds of miles of navigable rivers, an ocean coastline running from the Columbia River to the California border — the state offers a broad range of water-flying experiences. It also presents one of the most layered regulatory environments in the country. The Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service, and a half-dozen other federal and state agencies each govern their own waters with their own rules.

Several of the destinations described here also serve as natural waypoints for pilots flying south to California — and one of the best reasons to make that trip this June is the 2026 Clear Lake Splash In, held June 4–8 in Lakeport. More on the event, and a group flight south from the Pacific Northwest, at the end of this article.

Before planning a new Oregon seaplane journey, consult the Boat Oregon Waterway Map, available through the [Oregon State Marine Board website](#). The interactive map lets you zoom in and click on any water body to see which uses are permitted.

## Upper Klamath Lake

If there is a single destination in Oregon that every seaplane pilot should experience at least once, it is Upper Klamath Lake. Sprawling across nearly 140 square miles in south-central Oregon, it is Oregon's largest freshwater lake— and one of the most extraordinary water-flying destinations anywhere on the West Coast.

The lake and its surrounding marshes are woven into a network of national wildlife refuges, and the birdlife is genuinely staggering. White pelicans, great blue herons, bald eagles, ospreys, and vast flocks of migratory waterfowl share the water with arriving aircraft.

At roughly 4,140 feet elevation and within easy range of the Cascade peaks and the high desert, the lake sits at the convergence of some of Oregon's most dramatic landscapes. [Rocky Point Resort](#), located on the western shore has historically offered dock access and waterfront lodging for visiting pilots — call ahead to confirm current availability. Crater Lake lies nearby — the caldera is prohibited to seaplanes, but the rim is worth a look from the air.

## Cultus Lake

Moving north into the central Cascades, [Cultus Lake](#) is among the most practical floatplane destinations in the Deschutes National Forest. Unlike many of the alpine lakes in this area, Cultus carries no problematic speed restrictions, and its size makes it workable for float operations. The resort on the lake has not historically been seaplane-friendly, but the U.S. Forest Service maintains a sandy beach campground on the opposite shore.

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## Crescent Lake

[Crescent Lake](#), also in the Cascades, is among the more seaplane-friendly destinations in the region. A resort offering no-frills rental cabins has been welcoming to visiting pilots. U.S. Forest Service campgrounds also border the lake. For amphibious aircraft, 100LL can be sourced at [Bend \(BDN\)](#) or [Sunriver \(S21\)](#). [Odell Lake](#) is another option worth researching in this corridor. [Wickiup Reservoir](#) is also potentially usable but can be subject to significant seasonal drawdown.

## Woahink Lake Seaplane Base

On the Oregon coast, four miles south of Florence, [Woahink Lake Seaplane Base \(100\)](#) offers two charted landing lanes, and dock space. The setting is unlike anything else on the West Coast — one of the few lakes in Oregon whose bed reaches below sea level, its deepest point lying some 36 feet below sea level, held back from the Pacific by coastal sand dunes. [Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park](#) borders the shoreline, and the surrounding Oregon Dunes landscape has a distinctive character found nowhere else on the West Coast.

## Siltcoos Lake

A short distance to the south, Siltcoos Lake — Oregon's largest coastal lake, connected to the Pacific by the Siltcoos River — is well known for salmon, steelhead, bass, and trout. Darlings Marina offers dock moorage, cabin accommodations, and a lakefront BBQ pub open Wednesday through Sunday.

However, since the marine layer along the Oregon shoreline can persist for days, the Willamette Valley provides an inland option through Eugene and south, with Fern Ridge as a practical anchor.

## Fern Ridge

West of Eugene, the Fern Ridge Reservoir is a useful staging point in the Willamette Valley. It is broad, shallow, and easily identified. However, there is no fuel available. During my flight from Indiana to California, Dave Wellman, who keeps

seaplanes in both Oregon and Maine, met me there to deliver fuel. Dave and a panel of other pilots, will be leading a discussion about flying seaplanes in Oregon during the 2026 *Clear Lake Splash In* on June 6.

## The Columbia River

The Columbia River forms the entire northern border of Oregon and has served as a water aviation corridor since the earliest days of flight.

The geography that makes it spectacular also makes it demanding. The Columbia River Gorge acts as a natural wind tunnel, funneling air between the Cascade Range and the dry Columbia Plateau — sustained winds of 20 to 30 knots are routine in summer, with gusts considerably higher, and direction can reverse within hours. The river is wide enough near Hood River to build meaningful wave action in a strong wind. The winds make it a world class windsurfing destination.

While not technically in Oregon, the [Elochman Slough Marina](#) in Cathlamet, WA, just across the Columbia River, allows seaplanes to dock. There are restaurants within a couple of blocks, and the Wahkiakum Port District No. 1 offers guests cabins for rent at the marina. If you're looking for a place with a private bathroom, Hotel Cathlamet is a 7-minute walk from the marina.



## Group Flight to the Clear Lake Splash In via Oregon

A group flight from the Pacific Northwest to the 2026 Clear Lake Splash In is being organized. The event takes place June 4–8 in Lakeport, California. Clear Lake is California's largest natural freshwater lake, roughly 100 miles north of San Francisco. Its elevation fluctuates somewhat around 1,320 feet.

In addition to the panel discuss about flying seaplanes in featured presentations include:

- *Seaplanes: The Ultimate Adventure Vehicle*, by Seaplane Pilots Association Executive Director Steve McCaughey
- *How Seaplanes Saved My Life*, by Frankie Ridolfi
- *The Colorado Seaplane Initiative*, by Ray Hawkins
- *Flying Floatplanes in Alaska*, by Chris Brown
- *The AOPA STEM Aviation Curriculum*, by Stephen Bateman, President of the Oregon Pilots Association
- *How America's Seaplane City Was Created*, by Bob Tweedie, Economic Development Director, City of Tavares, Florida
- and other seminars

Numerous seminars provide FAA *WINGS* credit. Registration is required but the seminars are open to everyone.

To register, visit <https://clearlakesplashin.com>.

To join the group flight south, contact me at <https://clearlakesplashin.com>

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Herb Lingl is the coordinator of the 2026 Clear Lake Splash In and the author of the forthcoming book, *The Horizon's Calls: A Journey Across America by Seaplane*, which recounts his cross-country flight from Indiana to Clear Lake, California in a 1946 Taylorcraft on Edo 1320 straight floats. More information about the journey and the book is available at [HorizonsCalls.com](http://HorizonsCalls.com).



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