

Hemlock Butte & Wetland

Location & USGS Map

T23S.R5E.S14,15; Diamond Peak

Difficulty, Distance and Elevation gain

Wetlands and meadow: easy, roadside; ~4700–5300'

Butte: moderate; .8 mile RT, 450 feet, 5350–5804'

Bloom period

late June to late August peak in July

Highlights

wet meadows, rare plants

Directions

Take Highway 58 2 miles past Oakridge to Kitson Springs County Road (Rd. 23). Stay left and note the sign for "Vivian Lake 20 miles". Follow Rd. 23 for 16.3 miles of pavement and 3.1 miles of gravel. The Hemlock Butte trailhead is to the right. Park at the Vivian Lake trailhead .1 mile farther down the road to explore the wet meadow area here on both sides of the road. Continue .8 mile farther down the road to get to another wet meadow area to the right. 1.2 miles farther is a lovely dry meadow area on both sides of the road.



Green false hellebore (Veratrum viride) grows in the wetland at the base of Hemlock Butte. Snow still remains on nearby Diamond Peak in late July.



There are 2 species of spiraea in our area, hardhack (S. douglasii) and subalpine spiraea (S. splendens). Where the two grow together, as they do in the lower wet meadow here, their hybrid (S. x hitchcockiana) is often found. Its conical flower heads, as well as its leaves, are intermediate between its parent species.

A number of different habitats are easy to access in this area along the eastern edge of the Western Cascades. A short trail leads to the open top of Hemlock Butte, the small, rocky pinnacle that marks the area. The delicious huckleberries in the forest on the way up make this a worthwhile destination in late summer. When you reach the rocky area, the trail pretty much disappears, but it is possible to scramble to the top to enjoy a better view of Diamond Peak and the surrounding area. Rock-loving plants such as cliff penstemon, spreading phlox, thread-leaved sandwort, Cascade fleabane, spotted saxifrage, and the uncommon curved-beak lousewort can be seen here. There are many different conifers in the area, and a lone whitebark pine on the Butte attests to the proximity of the High Cascades. The first wetland is along the road right by the Vivian Lake trailhead. Here you can enjoy lovely flowers with much less effort. Three species of bog orchids, marsh marigold and elephant's head grow here. Tall mountain shooting star colors the meadow bright pink at the end of June and early July. The rare swamp onion continues the pink color scheme in late July. At least 4 species of willows can be studied by the roadside. If you carefully make your way to the lowest end of this wetland in August, you may find the small populations of tiny one-flowered gentians and leopard lilies, both species near the northern end of their ranges. Beargrass grows in abundance in the drier slopes surrounding the wetland. Farther down the road, the lower wetland has more swamp onion, as well as some different species including the newly discovered starry ladies'-tresses, leathery grape fern, western bog blueberry and hairy arnica. Englemann spruce along the road are a good indicator of the high moisture level in the area. Just before Rd. 23 intersects with Rd. 2120, there is a pretty drier meadow. Columbia lilies, pink owl-clover, scarlet paintbrush, Alice's fleabane and goldenrod add color to this area at the southern base of Hemlock Butte. If you continue up Rd. 2120 along Juniper Ridge, you can see more roadside wildflowers and eventually get to Groundhog Mountain.