

## 51-18. GRAYS LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (IBA)

### Boundaries and ownership:

*Boundaries:* Boundaries are clearly marked; South – ID 34, East/North – Grays Lake Road, West – West Side Rd.

*Ownership:* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Hall Irrigation District, Private

### Focal species using the site and timing of use:

Largest breeding concentration of Sandhill Cranes (250 pairs) in the world. Numerous waterfowl species nest here, including Trumpeter Swans, as well as shorebirds (Killdeer, Long-billed Curlew, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson’s phalarope, Wilson’s Snipe), waterbirds (American Coot, Virginia Rail, Sora, American Bittern; plus colonial species listed below), Peregrine Falcons, and Northern Harriers. During migration, shorebirds (Greater Yellowlegs, American Avocet, Sandpipers) are abundant.

*Colonies:* Eared Grebe (15-20 nests), Western Grebe, White-faced Ibis (up to 2,000 birds), Franklin’s Gull (up to 10,000 birds), Black Tern, Forster’s Tern

### Location of type 1 and 2 habitat within the site:

Functional Group	Type 1 Habitat	Type 2 Habitat
waterbirds	breeding colonies, emergent vegetation	wet meadows
large waders	breeding colonies, emergent vegetation	wet meadows
secretive marshbirds	emergent vegetation	none
waterfowl	open water, emergent vegetation	none
shorebirds	exposed mudflats during spring/fall migration	wet meadows
gulls and terns	breeding colonies, all areas	none

**Access to the type 1 and 2 habitat and visibility of the birds:** Canoe will probably be necessary to access many areas, or by foot. This is a very large area with very little access other than canals. Aerial surveys may be necessary to determine locations and sizes of colonies on the refuge. Grasslands largely accessible.

### Conservation issues:

- Introduced noxious weeds are a problem, which could become more serious.
- The dissected ownership pattern is a major problem; many [land]owners could sell to developers. There are too many small landowners to easily develop cooperative management plans with.
- The Fort Hall Irrigation District could drain more water from the marsh or drain it earlier in the year.
- Renewed gold mining on Caribou Mountain could lead to increased sedimentation on the refuge.
- The main portion of the marsh is managed through agreement with the Irrigation District; the agreement could be withdrawn.

### Conservation measures taken, in progress, or proposed:

- Chemical, mechanical, and biological control of noxious weeds.
- Altered grazing regime and research project to manage livestock in a way to improve wildlife habitat.
- Buy land when available.
- Grow crops and hay for cranes and geese.
- Working with Irrigation District to improve water regime for wildlife.

**Past and current surveys:**

- Colonial waterbird surveys have been conducted in the past. Currently appears to be very little activity because of drought.
- Surveys for Trumpeter Swans and Sandhill Cranes
- Have done aerial surveys for ducks and geese in the past. Funding not available currently to continue this.

**Potential survey methods***Description:*

- a. Nest searches for grebes and other waterbirds nesting in the emergent vegetation in small colonies. Canoe will be necessary for access.
- b. Colony counts for nesting ibis, gulls, and terns. Aerial surveys will likely be necessary to at least determine location and size of any colonies in the area.
- c. Census for waterfowl on the open water using aerial surveys.
- d. Area searches for migrating shorebirds from observation points near Type 1 habitat.
- e. Systematic sampling, probably including the use of playback calls, for secretive marshbirds from the road and from a canoe along channels.
- f. Census for gulls and terns during waterfowl counts

*Selection bias:* N/A

*Measurement error and bias:* N/A

**Needed pilot studies:** Design aerial surveys for colony counts and waterfowl counts. Determine protocol for establishing playback stations for marshbird surveys. Very extensive area with limited accessibility.

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