

## 51-26. MINIDOKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE (IBA)

### Boundaries and ownership:

*Boundaries:* The refuge covers 19 miles on both side of Lake Walcott

*Ownership:* U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Idaho Department of Public Lands, and Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation operates a state park on the refuge.

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

Nesting species (not including colonial species listed below) include waterfowl (Mallard, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, Green-winged Teal, Cinnamon Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Common Goldeneye, Canada Geese, among others), waterbirds (Pied-billed Grebe, American Bittern, Sora, American Coot), and shorebirds (Long-billed Curlew, Willet, Spotted Sandpiper, Killdeer, American Avocet, Wilson's Snipe). Thousands of molting ducks (as high as 100,000) in late summer and fall. In the fall and spring, big loafing flocks of gulls are present, mainly Ring-billed Gulls and Franklin's Gulls (can have 10,000), some shorebirds, and several Trumpeter Swans and Common Loons. Also considered a migratory shorebird site by the Intermountain West Regional Shorebird Plan. Bald Eagles found here in the winter.

### *Colonies:*

*South Shore* - American White Pelican (500-600 pairs), Snowy Egret (10-20), Cattle Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron (20-30), California Gull (600-700), Great Blue Heron (<30 pairs), Double-crested Cormorant (600-700 pairs), Caspian Tern

*Tule Island* - Western and Clark's Grebes (about 2:1 ratio; 200-400 nests total). Similar number of nests a couple miles upriver (Bonanza bar colony)

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

Functional Group	Type 1 Habitat	Type 2 Habitat
waterbirds	breeding colonies, open water & emergent vegetation	none
large waders	breeding colonies, emergent vegetation	rest of shoreline
secretive marshbirds	water's edge	none
waterfowl	open water, edges during breeding season	none
shorebirds	exposed mudflats during spring/fall migration	rest of shoreline
gulls and terns	breeding colonies, all areas	none

**Access to the type 1 and 2 habitat and visibility of the birds:** All surveys must be done from the shoreline or from the air. Boat access is not permitted, as it is highly disruptive to the nesting birds. Colonial nesters can be seen and surveyed from the shore, although not all of the colony can be seen. Gull flocks in spring and fall come into the area after dark and leave early, and are far away, which makes species determination difficult.

### Conservation issues:

- Introduced annual and perennial plants. Especially grasses, which have lowered natural plant diversity and consequently affected (reduced) animal diversity.
- An increased fire frequency due to introduced cheatgrass.
- Past grazing has reduced the native riparian trees and shrubs.
- Potential disturbance to nesting/molting birds if boating area is expanded.

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

- Grazing discontinued in 1995 on most of refuge.

- Native grasses planted after wildfires, where possible.
- Lake is zoned to keep boats away from nesting colonies and waterfowl molting areas.
- Unfenced areas are being fenced to prevent grazing from trespassing livestock.
- Working with BLM to develop stock watering areas off the refuge.

#### **Past and current surveys:**

- Aerial surveys for waterfowl are conducted 2-3 times each summer and fall depending on funding. Many years no surveys are done. Currently waterbird surveys are conducted once a month for several sections of the refuge
- Colony counts for herons, egrets, gulls, terns, pelicans, and cormorants are conducted ever 2-3 weeks throughout breeding season by Mike Fisher.
- Point counts have been conducted in the past, but have not been run since 2001. Counts were run on foot, and vegetation transects are present at each point count site.
- Bald Eagle nest monitored by IDFG and refuge staff.

#### **Potential survey methods**

##### *Description:*

- Nest searches for grebes and other waterbirds nesting in the emergent vegetation in small colonies. Grebe colony east of the island can be counted from observation points on a hill adjacent to the highway.
- Colony counts for nesting herons, egrets, gulls, pelicans, terns, and Double Crested Cormorants from the shoreline. This is likely not a complete nest count, but is standardized. Overflights may be necessary to get colony sizes, but ground-based might work later in summer.
- Census for waterfowl on the open water from shoreline when possible; otherwise, aerial surveys are recommended (particularly during molting period when ducks are in the eastern end of the refuge).
- Area searches for migrating shorebirds from observation points near Type 1 habitat. However, there is very little mud flat habitat available on a regular basis, so shorebird surveys may not be warranted.
- Systematic sampling, probably including the use of playback calls, for secretive marshbirds.
- Census of spring and fall gull concentrations from the ground. Birds move on and off the refuge roost sites in deep, open water far from shore during early morning and late evening. May not be possible to get a good species breakdown

*Selection bias:* Although all colonial birds can be counted from shore, only part of the colony can be seen. Boat surveys are too disruptive and are therefore not permissible. Aerial photographs of the colonies may reduce this selection bias.

*Measurement error and bias:* Gull species during migration seasons may be hard to discern for reasons mentioned above under survey methods.

**Needed pilot studies:** Because surveys have been conducted in the past, no pilot studies may be necessary.

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