51-36. STERLING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA (WMA)

Boundaries and ownership:

Boundaries: Boundaries are clearly marked

Ownership: Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Bureau of Reclamation

Focal species using the site and timing of use:

Common species during the breeding season include waterbirds (Sora, Virginia Rail, Western Grebe, Herring Gull, California Gull, Franklin's Gull, Forster's Tern, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Snowy Egret, White-faced Ibis), waterfowl (Canada Goose and multiple duck species), shorebirds (American Avocet, Black-necked Stilt, Killdeer, Willet, Long-billed Curlew, Wilson's Snipe, Wilson's Phalarope), Northern Harriers, Marsh Wrens, and Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Area is used by multiple waterfowl species (Snow Goose, Tundra Swan, Canada Goose, and many duck species) during migration. Wintering area for Bald Eagles, Canada Geese, Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds, and several species of ducks.

Location of type 1 and 2 habitat within the site:

Extensive wetlands in the following sections of the WMA: Orth, Plunkett, Thompson, American Game, Vanderford, and Johnson

Functional Group	Type 1 Habitat	Type 2 Habitat
waterbirds	open water & emergent vegetation	none
large waders	emergent vegetation, particularly on the Orth segment in the North and South ponds, as well as Wells pond	rest of shoreline
secretive marshbirds	water's edge of all ponds, but more prevalent in the Johnson pond complex	none
waterfowl	open water, edges during breeding season; in late winter concentrate in Johnson pond, a portion of main Orth pond, and small Thompson pond (remain open during winter)	none
shorebirds	exposed mudflats during spring/fall migration, particularly in Orth ponds	rest of shoreline
gulls and terns	all areas	none

Access to the type 1 and 2 habitat and visibility of the birds:

All areas are easily accessible to the public and visible from shoreline. There is a viewing blind on the Johnson pond. All of the ponds, including Johnson, can be viewed from a variety of locations along the shore. In many cases, a vehicle could be driven up to the pond and observations made from there. The waterfowl and shorebirds are easily visible. The more secretive marsh birds that utilize emergent vegetation are much more difficult to spot. All ponds have some portion in emergent vegetation. Vehicle and boat access, as part of a sanctioned survey effort, could be arranged by contacting Dean Rose (contact info below).

Conservation issues:

- Drought is an issue impacting quantity of water.
- Russian olive invasion has been a problem.
- An unusually high magpie population was suggested as a reason for 2.9% waterfowl nesting success. The magpies were linked to the high density of Russian olive trees.
- Because of the "island" effect of the WMA within an intensively farmed and grazed landscape, the question of whether or not the WMA was a "predator sink" was raised.

Conservation measures taken, in progress, or proposed:

- Russian olive invasion has been addressed by an aggressive removal effort. Yearly spraying is done to control seedlings. As a result, once trees were removed, the magpie population declined and waterfowl nesting success rose to 36%.
- A low-intensity predator management program is in place on the WMA. Passive and active management techniques are used.

Past and current surveys:

- Nest searches for waterfowl and assessment of goose nesting success (chain drags, foot searches) – Spring through late Summer. Chain drag surveys are conducted every 5 years.
- Vehicle counts for breeding waterfowl pairs and broods – Spring through late Summer

Annual reports on waterfowl productivity are available at the Regional IDFG Office

Potential survey methods

Description:

a. Nest searches for grebes and other waterbirds nesting in the emergent vegetation in small colonies.

b. Census for waterfowl and other waterbirds on the open water from walking the shoreline or from vehicle at observation points.

c. 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. These can be done from the shoreline around various impoundments.

f. Census for gulls and terns during waterfowl counts

Selection bias: N/A

Measurement error and bias: Should be negligible. Drought may affect the amount of open water and mud flats available to the birds, but vegetation is fairly stable.

Needed pilot studies: None

Contact:

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