

WILDLIFE

The fauna of SVWMA is extremely diverse due to the mosaic of habitat types present and NDOW's habitat developments. The exceptional diversity in such a relatively small area emphasizes the biological importance of SVWMA.

WATERFOWL

The Steptoe Valley is an important Great Basin stopover and resting area for waterfowl. Over 20 species of ducks have been recorded on SVWMA. The most common species include northern pintail, mallards, gadwall, canvasbacks and ruddy ducks. Ducks nesting on the area include northern pintail, gadwall, northern shovelers, cinnamon teal, ruddy ducks and others. Canada geese are commonly found on SVWMA; white-fronted and snow geese are infrequent visitors. Tundra swans visit SVWMA, but are relatively uncommon.

BIG GAME

The largest elk herd in Nevada inhabits SVWMA and the nearby mountain ranges. SVWMA provides spring, summer and early-fall habitat, while the adjacent Schell Creek and Egan mountain ranges provide important wintering grounds for elk. Mule deer use the area throughout most of the year. Antelope have increased dramatically in southern Steptoe Valley over the last several years and can be seen on the area from spring through fall.



UPLAND GAME AND MAMMALS

Upland game birds found on SVWMA include mourning doves, dusky (blue) grouse and Greater Sage-Grouse. There are several active sage-grouse lek sites on the benches surrounding SVWMA. Sage-grouse hens and broods are frequently seen in the meadows of SVWMA during the summer. A variety of mammals use SVWMA including pygmy rabbit, mountain cottontail, bobcat, kit fox, coyote, badger and ringtail.

NON-GAME WILDLIFE

Great blue herons, snowy egrets, American bitterns, white-faced ibis and great egrets are some of the wading birds found on SVWMA. Important feeding areas for wading birds include the shoreline of Comins Lake, edges of ponds and wet meadows.

A total of 30 species of shorebirds have been recorded on SVWMA, including black-necked stilts, American avocets, Wilson's phalaropes, spotted sandpipers and killdeer. Breeding shorebird species include killdeer, spotted sandpipers, willet, American avocet, long-billed curlew and Wilson's phalarope.

Fifteen species of diurnal birds of prey, or raptors, have been recorded on SVWMA including ferruginous hawks, Swainson's hawks and sharp-shinned hawks. Rough-legged hawks overwinter in the area and ospreys are spring and fall migrants. Bald eagles use Steptoe Valley as wintering habitat. They feed on fish until the ice freezes over then use other food sources including birds, small mammals and carrion for the remainder of the winter. Golden eagles are found here year-round. Adult and young peregrine falcons annually use SVWMA as a foraging site, primarily during migration. Seven species of owls have been recorded on SVWMA including short-eared and burrowing owls.

Over 140 species of songbirds have been recorded on the area including bobolink, yellow warbler and savannah sparrow. Riparian and associated upland habitats on SVWMA provide foraging and nesting habitat for black-chinned hummingbirds, calliope hummingbirds, willow flycatchers and MacGillivray's warbler.

The Lower Colorado River population of sandhill cranes migrate through the valleys of eastern Nevada and are regular visitors to SVWMA. The cranes nest in Elko and White Pine counties and migrate south to spend the winter in Arizona and California.

Twelve of Nevada's 24 known species of bats occur on SVWMA. While all of these species rely on the shrubland or wetland habitats for preying on both airborne and ground-dwelling insects, species such as silver-haired bats, western red bats and hoary bats also use the cottonwood trees for roosting during the day time.

FISH RESOURCES

Angler reports led to the discovery of an illegal reintroduction of northern pike in 2000. The northern pike population exploded and by 2006, the trout and bass fisheries at Comins Lake collapsed. Stocking was suspended in 2007 until northern pike could be removed from the lake. In 2015, Comins Lake was chemically treated to remove northern pike and restore the popular trout and bass fisheries. In April of 2016, Comins Lake was stocked for the first time in 9 years with 10,000 rainbow trout. Small numbers of largemouth bass and brown trout were released into the lake in the late spring and early summer of 2016. In the past, trout and bass have shown excellent growth in Comins Lake and it is expected that similar growth rates will persist into the future. Comins Lake is set to receive 10,000 rainbow trout in the spring and fall months. Brown trout and largemouth bass will continue to be augmented to Comins Lake as needed.

Steptoe Creek is stocked annually with 1,000 rainbow trout that is distributed over four miles of the creek. The brown trout population in Steptoe Creek is naturally reproducing and will be found in relatively low densities.

Relict dace, a native fish classified as a sensitive species by NDOW, exists in a number of springs and channels located in Steptoe Valley including portions of the north valley area of SVWMA. Relict dace have existed in Steptoe Valley since the Pleistocene Epoch and their persistence on the landscape speaks to their species hardiness, and ability to change to different climactic conditions. Utah chub also exist on SVWMA and were likely brought into the valley by Native Americans as a source of food.



WATER RESOURCES

Steptoe Creek, Cave Creek and Comins Lake are the primary water resources on SVWMA. Comins Lake, at the lower end of Steptoe and Cave Creek drainage basins, has a surface area of about 410 acres. The high productivity of Comins Lake can be attributed to the abundance and variety of invertebrate species found there. Comins Lake can be ice covered for three to four months during the winter. NDOW owns a large portion of the water rights of Steptoe Creek, Cave Creek and Willow Creek.

PUBLIC USES

WILDLIFE-ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

Wildlife viewing is becoming very popular across the country and in Nevada. Roads through the area provide excellent wildlife viewing during the majority of the year but can be limited by snow during the winter months. SVWMA receives considerable use by outdoor enthusiasts participating in sightseeing, wildlife observation, photography, hiking and educational/scientific activities. A nearby BLM elk-viewing site is found just south of SVWMA on US 93/50.

FISHING

Since NDOW purchased the property, Comins Lake has become a top fishery destination, not only in Nevada, but in the western United States as well. Current regulations allow water skiing between 11 a.m. and sunset. Flat wake restrictions are in effect for boats during other hours. Anglers are encouraged to review current regulation brochures prior to fishing at SVWMA.

HUNTING

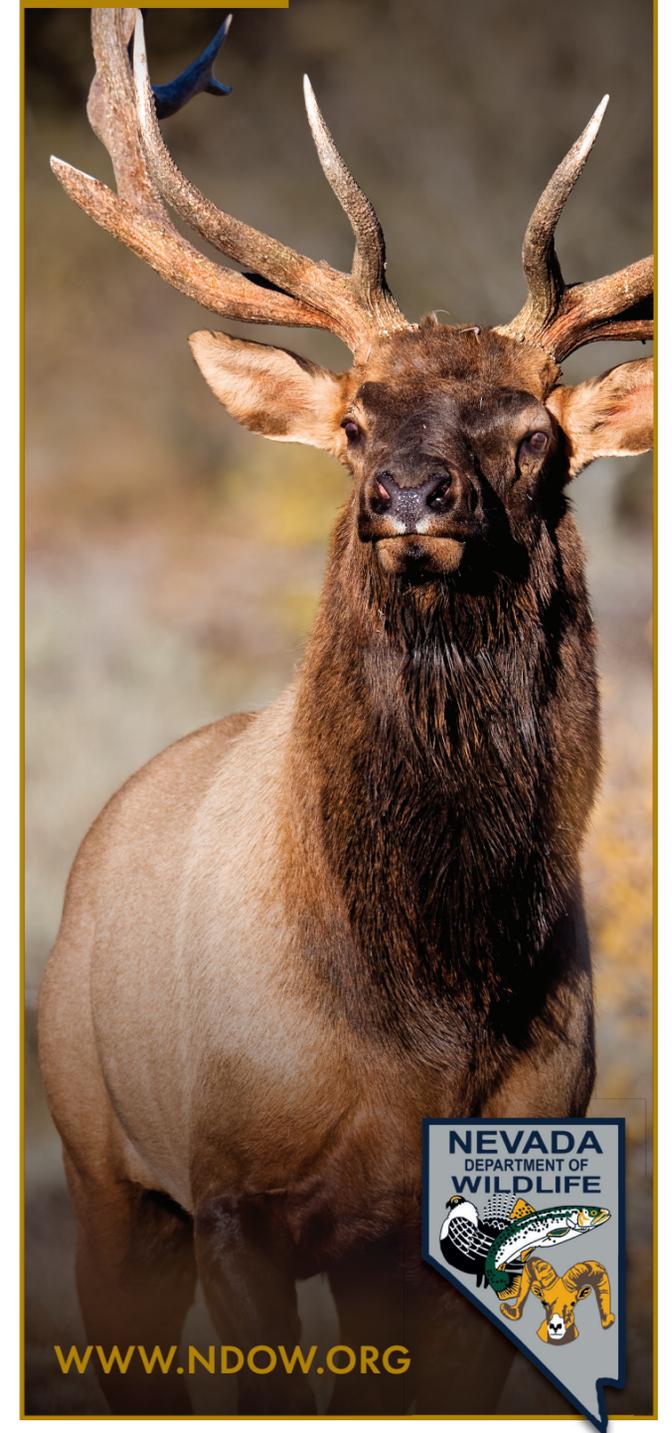
SVWMA is located within NDOW's Unit 111 of Management Area 11 and Unit 222 of management area 22. Elk tags in the area of SVWMA are intensely sought after by hunters, indicating the value of the herd to the sporting public. Hunters are encouraged to review current regulation brochures prior to hunting at SVWMA.

GETTING THERE

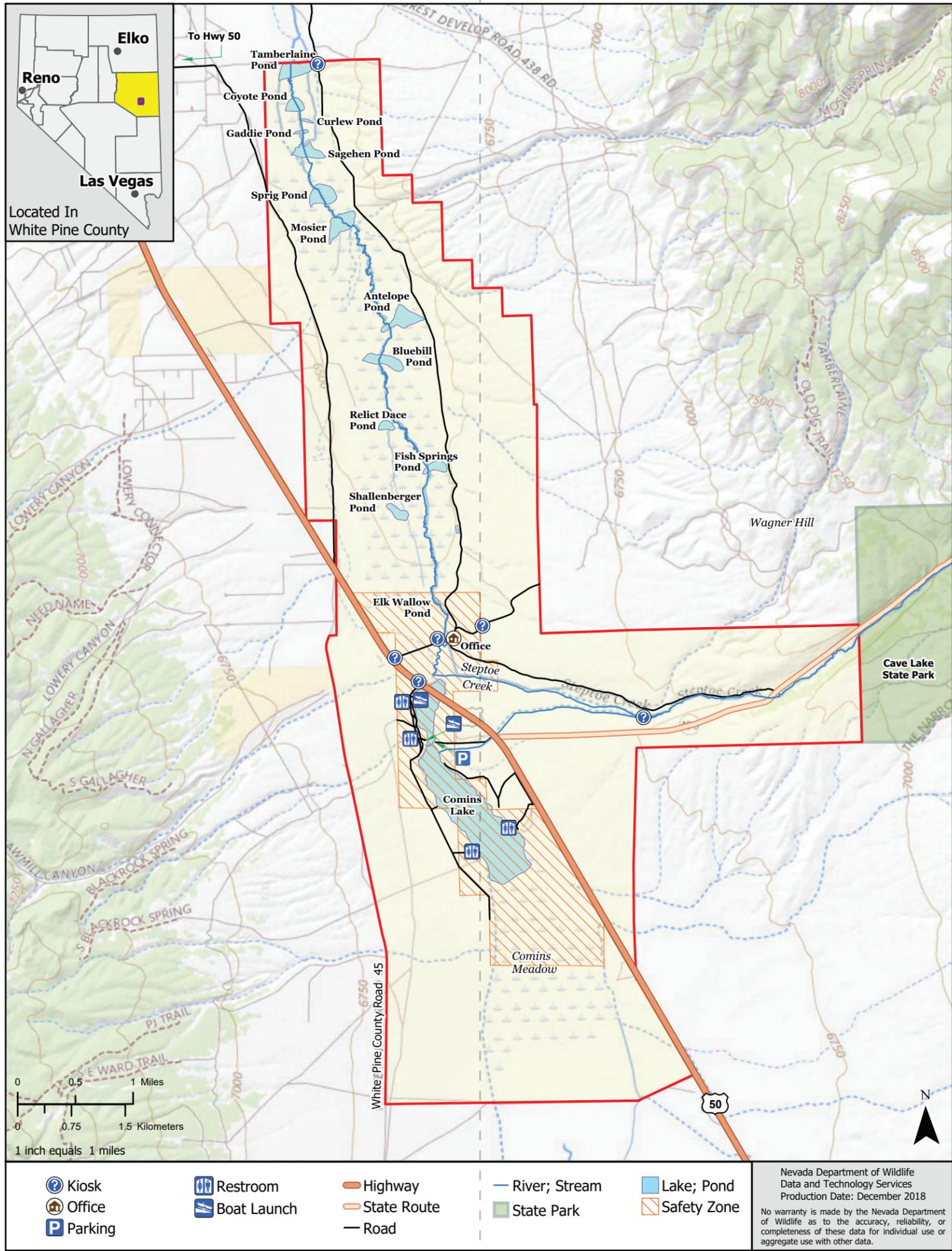
- From Ely, take US 93/50 south approximately 6 miles to the main entrance. Comins Lake is located just south of the main entrance on the west side of US 93/50.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

STEPTOE VALLEY



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INTRODUCTION

The Steptoe Valley Wildlife Management Area (SVWMA) is located immediately south of Ely, along U.S. Highway 93/50 in White Pine County. The property consists of 12,806 acres and includes Comins Lake, which is located about six miles south of Ely near the area headquarters.

Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW) has had a long-term interest in the acquisition of this valuable property, dating back to the 1980s. Ely community leaders, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) and numerous other partners worked together to make the purchase happen with NDOW's acquisition of the property in 1999. The property was established as the Steptoe Valley Wildlife Management Area in 2000.

The area surrounding SVWMA has a rich history of use by Native Americans and early explorers. For over 130 years, mining has played an important role in the economy of Ely. Ore was discovered on Ward Mountain leading to the formation of the Ward Mining District in 1872. The nearby Ward Charcoal Ovens were built to supply the company's smelters with fuel.

The Nevada Division of State Parks administers Cave Lake State Park and Ward Charcoal Ovens State Historic Park within close proximity to SVWMA. Great Basin National Park, administered by the National Park Service, is located about 65 miles southeast of SVWMA. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service administer federal lands surrounding SVWMA.

HABITAT TYPES

From wet meadows and riparian corridors to sagebrush and pinyon-juniper uplands, the habitats of SVWMA support an abundance of fish and wildlife that contribute significantly to the biological diversity of eastern Nevada. Sagebrush is important habitat for mule deer, pronghorn, sage grouse and a multitude of nongame species. Pinyon-juniper is found on the uplands surrounding the Steptoe Creek drainage. Both pinyon nuts and juniper berries are important food sources for many species of wildlife. The riparian habitats of SVWMA including cottonwood, willow and aspen have exceptionally high value for many species of wildlife. Ponds and wet meadows dot the landscape of SVWMA, providing food, cover and water for numerous species of waterfowl, wading birds and mammals. The deeper water of Comins Lake provides habitat for fish and diving ducks.

AREA MANAGEMENT

WETLANDS RESTORATION

NDOW partnered with Ducks Unlimited, RMEF and numerous other organizations to fund the restoration of wetlands in the north valley area of SVWMA through the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA). This restoration project was the first NAWCA grant in the state of Nevada. The goal of the project was to restore and enhance wetland and upland habitats to re-establish a more natural hydrological regime and mimic the valley's historic habitat conditions. To date NAWCA funds have been used to restore nearly 2,000 acres of wet meadow, seasonal wetlands and riparian (streamside) habitat and to enhance approximately 500 acres of associated uplands.

HERBICIDE SPRAYING

Chemical application is an effective method to control undesirable vegetation. Herbicides used on SVWMA are wildlife friendly and used only to target specific plants. Spraying is conducted to open up dense stands of cattail and hardstem bulrush to make wetlands more desirable for waterfowl and other wetland species.

INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT

The invasion of non-native plants could become a major threat to the native habitats on SVWMA. Controlling these invaders is difficult and time consuming. The competitive nature of these plants and their ability to spread impacts the natural plant diversity and ultimately the diversity of wildlife on SVWMA. Invasive species on SVWMA include hoary cress, various knapweeds and several types of thistle.

GRAZING

Grazing is used periodically on SVWMA to stimulate green-up, provide succulent feed and open overgrown areas for resting and feeding by waterfowl and other wildlife.

