

**Upland Game and Mammals**

Upland game birds found on SVWMA include mourning doves, blue grouse, and sage grouse. There are several historical 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 small mammals use the area including pygmy rabbit, mountain cottontail, bobcat, kit fox, coyote, badger, ringtail and twelve species of bats.

**NON-GAME WILDLIFE**

Great blue herons, snowy egrets, American bitterns, white-faced ibis and great egrets are 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 has 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 hawks have been recorded on SVWMA including ferruginous, Swainson's and sharp-shinned hawks. Rough-legged hawks overwinter in the area and ospreys are spring and fall migrants. Bald eagles use Steptoe Valley for wintering habitat where they feed on fish until the ice freezes over after which they use other food sources including birds, small mammals, and carrion for the remainder of the winter. Golden eagles are found 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 owls and burrowing owls.

Over 140 species of songbirds have visited 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 migrates 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.

**FISH RESOURCES**

Steptoe Creek contains rainbow and brown trout. Rainbow trout are planted annually in Steptoe Creek while brown trout represent wild populations of fish that are able to successfully spawn in the stream. 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 the north portion of SVWMA.

Comins Lake had been regularly stocked with rainbow trout and largemouth bass until 2007 when NDOW ceased stocking the water due to heavy predation by illegally introduced northern pike. The pike population has profoundly affected the reservoir's trout and bass fishery. Highly successful spawning by bass has been documented each year since their introduction, however, recruitment is nearly non-existent because of pike predation upon each year's cohort of young bass.

Since the pike were discovered, an aggressive public awareness campaign has been in effect to educate anglers of the management implications the pike poses to the Comins Lake trout and bass fishery. To combat this illegal species, the Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners reclassified northern pike as a prohibited species in 2005 and pike can now be taken by numerous methods other than hook and line. In addition, harvest of the species is unlimited and anglers cannot be cited for waste of the species. This reclassification will only help in the effort to completely eradicate this prohibited species from reservoirs in White Pine County.



**Fishing and Boating**

Although the quality of the trout and bass fishery has been negatively impacted by the presence of the illegally introduced northern pike, fishermen occasionally catch nice sized bass in those portions of the lake that support suitable bass habitat. Although the pike are considered a nuisance, some fishermen target the species and fish in excess of 40 inches in length have been taken from the lake. Anglers frequently use small boats while fishing on Comins Lake. Current regulations allow water skiing between 11 a.m. and sunset. Flat wake restrictions are in effect for boats during other hours. Anglers and boaters are encouraged to review NDOW's current regulation brochures prior to fishing at SVWMA.

**Hunting**

SVWMA is located within NDOW's Unit 111 of Management Area 11. Elk tags for the surrounding area are highly sought after indicating the value of the herd to the sporting public. With additional upland and wetland restoration work planned, antelope,

deer and elk use will very likely increase which will provide additional hunting and viewing opportunities. Waterfowl and upland game bird hunting opportunities will increase following the wetland and upland restoration projects. Hunters are encouraged to review NDOW's current regulation brochures prior to hunting at SVWMA.

NDOW, with assistance from the public, is currently evaluating the prospect of doing additional public improvement projects at Comins Lake including improved roads, parking areas around the lake, improved boat ramps with docks, fishing platforms, and a fish cleaning station. The development of an interpretive facility at the ranch headquarters, including a trail and wetland site, is also being considered.



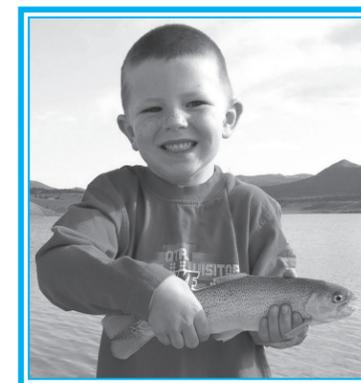
**WATER RESOURCES**

Steptoe Creek, Cave Creek and Comins Lake are the primary water resources on SVWMA. Comins Lake, at the lower end of SVWMA, and the Cave Creek drainage basins have 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 most of the appropriated water rights of Steptoe, Cave, and Willow creeks under the Steptoe Creek Decree.

**PUBLIC USES**

**Wildlife-Associated Activities**

Wildlife viewing is becoming a very popular recreational activity in Nevada as well as other parts of the United States. Roads through the area provide excellent viewing of wetland dependent and upland-associated wildlife. 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.



**GETTING THERE**

From Ely, take US 93/50 approximately 7 miles south to the main entrance. Comins Lake is located just south of the main entrance on the west side of US 93/50. From Las Vegas, take I-15 to US 93 approximately 280 miles north to the main entrance.



The Steptoe Valley Wildlife Management Area is open year-round, without hourly restrictions. There is no charge for use of the area. For more information, contact the Steptoe Valley Wildlife Management Area at HCR 10 Box 10808, Ely, NV 89301, or call (775) 289-1690, or call NDOW's Habitat Division at (775) 463-7816. This brochure was developed by NDOW's Habitat and Conservation Education Divisions.

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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 6,426 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, currently administered by the Nevada Division of State Parks, were built to supply the company's smelters with fuel. State Parks also administers Cave Lake State Park which is adjacent 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 antelope, 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 nurture cottonwood, willow, and aspen trees that 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.

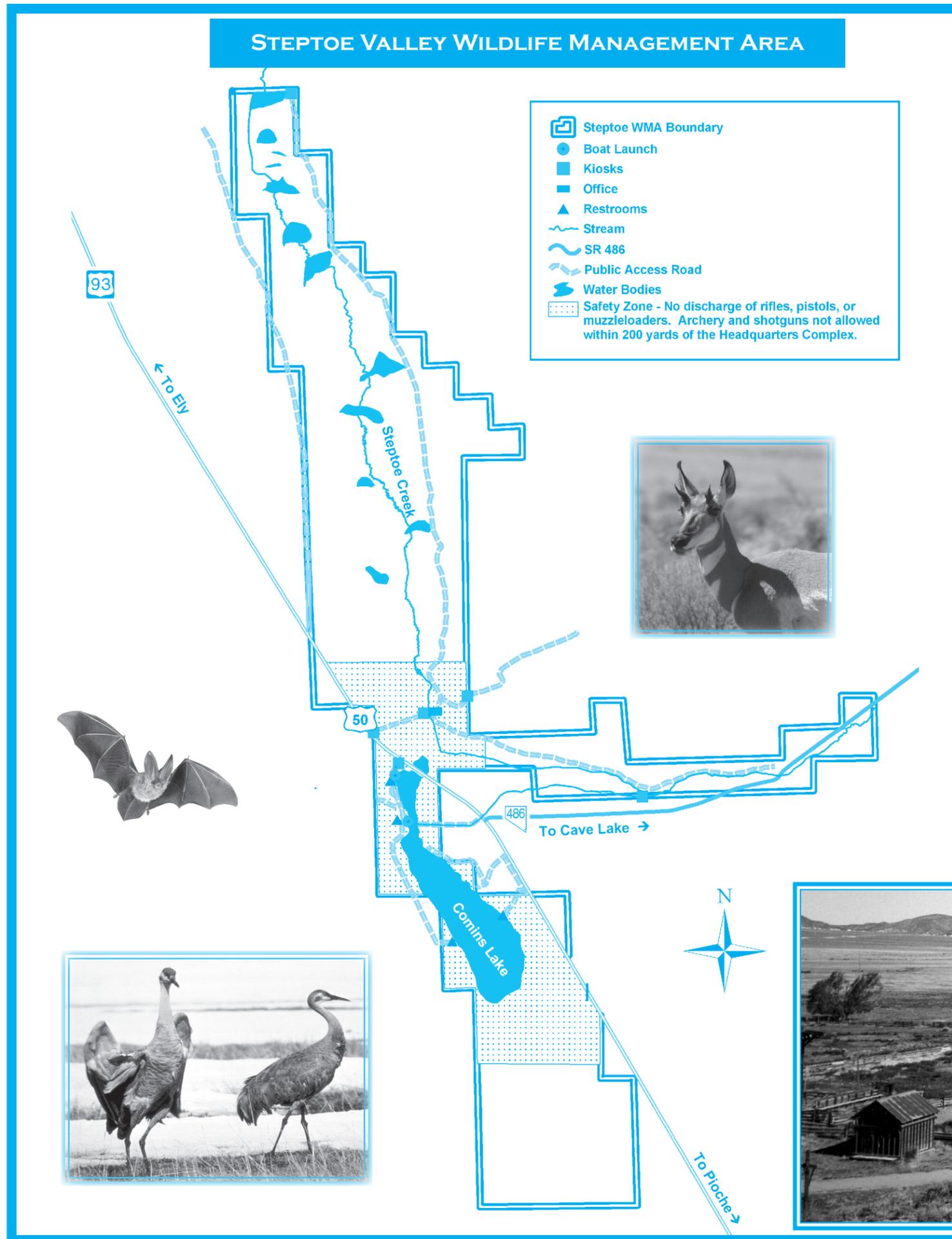
## AREA MANAGEMENT

### 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 a North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant. The goals of the project were to restore and enhance wetland and upland habitats, to re-establish a more natural hydrological regime and to mimic the valley's historic habitat conditions. Completed in the fall of 2008, this project created 13 seasonal ponds on the area.

### Grazing

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



## Invasive Plant Management

The invasion by non-native plants is posing a threat to the native habitats on SVWMA. Controlling the 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 Russian knapweed, hoary cress and thistle.

## Herbicide Spraying

Application of herbicides is an effective method to control undesirable vegetation. Spraying is conducted to open up dense stands of cattail and hardstem bulrush thereby making wetlands more desirable for waterfowl and other wetland associated species.

## WILDLIFE AND FISH

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

### Waterfowl

The Steptoe Valley is an important stopover and resting area for waterfowl traveling through this part of the Great Basin. 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 while white-fronted and snow geese are infrequent visitors. Tundra swans are occasional visitors to the SVWMA.

### Big Game

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

