Upland Game and Mammals

Upland game birds found on SVWMA include mourning doves, blue-winged quail, and sage grouse. The White-tailed and White-winged dove are relatively common, while the domestic pigeon is also frequently seen. The greater 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 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 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.

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 NDOW’s Habitat and Conservation Education Divisions.

Fishing and Boating

Although the quality of the trout and bass fishery has been negatively impacted by the presence of the illegal 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. Night water skiing 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.

Wildlife Viewing

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.

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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.

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.