

NARRATIVE REPORT

OURAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

July, 1974 - June, 1975

Personnel

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(Transferred 11/24/74)	
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I. GENERAL

A. Weather Conditions

Precipitation for the year totaled 6.64 inches, slightly above the long-time average of 6.31 inches. March 1975 accounted for 1.49 inches and May received 1.79. September 1974 was absolutely dry.

High temperature was 99° for July and low was a minus 20° in January.

Generally, 1974 was a drouth year, while 1975 had a good, wet spring and early summer. The high temperature was below average and the low temperature was above average.

B. Habitat Conditions

1. Water

As of July 1, water was impounded in the Sheppard, upper Wyasket, lower Wyasket, Johnson, Leota, and Woods units. The first named two by pumping from the Green River, and the last four by Green River flooding.

As reported in the FY 1974 Narrative Report, the 1974 Green River flood (May-June), occasioned by snow melt from the Yampa and Little Snake River drainages, and augmented by above normal releases from Flaming Gorge dam, was the highest in refuge history, cresting above and overflowing the Leota unit protective dike.

Water conditions remained excellent through 1974 with the exception of Sheppard unit, where beaver got into the act and attempted to control water level manipulation, draining one borrow area segment, flooding interior roads, and threatening dike stability.

Impoundments froze over in mid-December, the Green River by early January. Ice went out on the river February 21, and shortly thereafter on the impoundments.

Pumping was started on March 3 and was necessary throughout the remainder of the report period.

Green River flooding (May-July, 1975) was below normal, but of longer duration. None of the refuge facilities were adversely effected. Post flood river flows were normal to low.

Funds restrictions precluded pumping as required, so water conditions at end of June were good, but below optimum, with pumped water in Leota, Sheppard, and upper Wyasket units and (1974) flood waters in Woods and Johnson.

2. Food and Cover

The drouth conditions of 1974 left the refuge benchland dry and seared at year's end. However, the wet spring of 1975 did wonders to rejuvenate the annual grasses, which have shown a steady improvement since grazing was eliminated in 1968. Four-winged salt bush (*Atriplex canescens*), rubber rabbit brush (*Chrysanthemum nauseosus*), and shadscale (*Atriplex confertifolia*) all benefitted and produced far above normal.

The 1974 flood was a benefit to lowland grasses and shrubs, so the drouth effect was mitigated and production was normal. Moisture in 1975 started and maintained good growth.

The 1974 flood had a very beneficial effect on hardstemmed bulrush in the Leota unit, resulting in excellent growth, a more pronounced "clumping" effect, providing better nesting habitat and escape cover. The ratio of open water to vegetative cover in L4, 6, 8 and 9 is now close to fifty-fifty and hopefully can be maintained by increasing the managed water level in Leota unit generally by ten inches to fourteen inches. The gain by hardstem was made to the detriment of cattail, whose presence was notably reduced refuge-wide.

Smartweed (*Polygonum coccineum*) growth in Woods Bottom was again excellent with some 20-30 percent being utilized in September and October by feeding waterfowl. Greater use could be made of this crop, if we could re-flood in the fall.

Thirty-seven acres of refuge farmlands were tilled and planted to winter wheat in September. Production was good following irrigation, and was utilized by some 400 Canada geese and

30 to 35 head of mule deer into late winter when snowfall finally covered it over.

Two cuttings of hay were made by a permittee on seventeen acres of alfalfa, one in the fall (second of the year) and one in June, 1975.

II. Wildlife

A. Migratory Birds

1. Waterfowl

July 1974's population of waterfowl was a great improvement over 1973. Canada geese up twenty percent to 120, 1,200 mallards, 900 gadwall, 170 pintail, 530 teal and 300+ of other assorted species. Coot numbered 800, up from 350 the previous year.

A known 45 Canada goose goslings survived to flight stage in 1974, while 73 were observed in 1975. Some progress, but still very disappointing.

The observed duck production of 1,640 in 1974 was also an improvement, but represents an unknown percentage of actual nesting success. We must devise a better, more reliable census method!

Mrs. Mary Sangster, graduate student working on a Master's Thesis, re-ran three miles of nesting transects in April, May and June, 1975. Of twenty-two nests located, fifteen were destroyed by predators and one by flooding prior to hatch! Another problem that must be solved.

August populations remained static, except that an additional 80 Canada geese were present, probably representing local production.

No increase in total waterfowl numbers was noted in September, although species composition changed as migrating blue-winged teal and gadwall increases heralded fall migration.

No significant duck migration was noted for fall of 1974. Canada geese on the refuge increased to 421 the first week of November, and peaked at 1,100 on November 22, due primarily to the green browse available and the decoying effect of the captive goose flock in a nearby pen.

Most ducks departed as impoundments froze. One hundred Canada geese and sixty mallards overwintered, often feeding in the pen with the captive goose flock.

Two hundred fifty Canada geese were noted on March 8. On March 27 the refuge waterfowl population consisted of 200 coot, 150 geese, 1,400 mallards, 800 pintail, 460 assorted other ducks, and 200 American mergansers. In a week's time 8,400+ were present, and on April 3 15,000 were recorded. By May 29 the population was reduced to 2,300+, including 130 Canada geese. The June nesting population consisted of 1,000 coot, 80 Canada geese, 500 mallards, 500 gadwall, 50 pintail, 140 teal, 240 widgeon and 20 redheads.

Waterfowl use days for FY 1975 totaled approximately 1,038,300, up from 855,200 in FY 1974. The use days by species were:

Canada geese	53,800
Mallard	308,700
Gadwall	116,800
Pintail	176,100
Green-winged teal	46,500
Blue-winged teal	73,900
Widgeon	28,000
Shoveler	18,600
Redhead	12,400
Ring-necked	7,200
Canvasback	2,400
Lesser scaup	4,900
Bufflehead	5,600
Ruddy	5,600
Coot	166,500
American merganser	11,300

Seventy-six whistling swans were counted on November 22 and were still present on December 6. Swan use days were estimated to be 2,300. One swan was noted on March 21. Most swan use occurs on Woods Bottom, a large, open body of water.

One snow goose was noted on February 28.

2. Sandhill Cranes

Crane migration in the fall occurred during late September into October. Peak refuge population was 100, for 700 use days.

Spring migration occurred in March. Peak refuge population was 171 with 300 estimated use days. Two banded cranes were observed on the refuge on April 10. Two cranes were recorded in the fourth quarter for ten use days.

3. Mourning Doves

Refuge peak population of doves was down a full 80 percent; from 1,000 to 200. Use days dropped from 70,000 to 50,000. A longer season, extending into November, helped keep use days up.

4. Other Waterbirds

No new species of marsh or waterbirds observed. Use days increased.

B. Upland Game Birds

1. Ring-necked Pheasant

No discernible change. Population still low.

C. Big Game Animals

1. Mule Deer

No change.

2. Antelope

No change.

D. Fur Animals, Predators, Rodents and Other Mammals

1. Beaver

Permission was obtained to remove nuisance beaver from the Sheppard unit water distribution system. Mr. Lynn Nickell, Roosevelt, Utah, removed twelve in March, 1975. This slowed, but did not eliminate our beaver problem. Refuge population increasing.

2. Muskrat

Population registering a slight increase yearly. New "push ups" in Leota and Woods Bottoms are a welcome addition as waterfowl nest platforms. The Johnson unit "dry up" probably caused a population shift rather than a die-off.

3. Striped Skunk

Population definitely on the increase. Mary Sangster, running nesting transects, reported daily sightings. Refuge

personnel eliminated at least eight encountered on refuge dikes midst the waterfowl nests.

4. Bobcat

Bobcat are present on the refuge, but population is low. None sighted, none trapped.

5. Coyote

The coyote population has been lowered as the result of official control activities. Mr. Victor Keenan, District Supervisor, A.D.C., now resident on Ouray Refuge, located two dens adjacent to Sheppard-Leota units, one containing six pups, the other seven. All thirteen pups were eliminated.

6. Badger

Sightings have been few. One nuisance animal, digging in the fallow farm fields, was trapped and eliminated.

7. Raccoon

The raccoon population is still increasing and accounted for their share of waterfowl nests destroyed. A control program will have to be implemented, if we are ever going to raise waterfowl!

8. Prairie Dogs

There was a slight decline in observations on the refuge. The population is too low for comfort!

9. Other

There has been a definite increase in the rabbit population on the refuge and adjacent areas.

E. Hawks, Eagles, Owls, Crows, Ravens and Magpies

All present on the refuge, except crows and ravens. No discernible change in populations. No observations on nesting or production. Magpies definitely associated with observed waterfowl nest depredation.

F. Other Birds

Mr. and Mrs. "Butch" Wright, making their third annual visit, spent the first three weeks of May "birding" on Ouray Refuge. Following is a list of birds they observed not currently listed on the refuge bird list: Wood duck, ferruginous hawk, pidgeon hawk, semi-palmated plover, greater yellowlegs, short-eared owl, eastern bluebird, Audubon's warbler, yellow-breasted chat, green-tailed towhee, Savannah sparrow and vesper sparrow.

G. Fish

No change.

H. Reptiles

No change.

I. Disease

None noted.

II. REFUGE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

A. Physical Development

1. Contracts

None.

2. Rehabilitation

One-fourth mile of river front dike was raised in Leota Bottom in hopes of preventing another flood disaster like 1974. Refuge personnel and equipment was used. Approximately 2,000 yards of material was bulldozed into place.

Partial repair to the flood damaged dikes was effected to restore water level management integrity. Again, refuge personnel and equipment was used, with Mrs. Mary Sangster, aboard as Biological Aid, GS-4, (NTE 130 days), volunteered and served as a very capable truck driver for this project.

Three miles of transect lines were laid out, posted and signed, one and one-half miles each in Sheppard and Leota Bottoms. Mrs. Sangster was to have a two-year "Master's Study" on vegetative type waterfowl nesting preference,

hence these transects. Unfortunately, funding was unavailable. Mrs. Sangster worked "on her own" this period, but has chosen to abandon the project next year. We will attempt, with our limited manpower, to run the transects ourselves, as this information is badly needed for management purposes.

3. Habitat Development

None.

B. Plantings

Thirty-seven acres of the Sheppard farm fields were plowed, disced, and planted to winter wheat for green browse for the geese. One irrigation followed the planting. No fertilizer was used.

C. Collections and Receipts

None.

D. Control of Vegetation

1. Mechanical

Approximately ten acres of tamarisk were mowed in Johnson Bottom and forty acres in Sheppard Bottom. Cattails and hardstem bulrush were mowed in Leota units L7 and L10.

E. Planned Burning

None.

F. Fires

A lightning-struck cottonwood snag ignited. Burn was confined to a strip fifty feet wide and 120 feet long.

IV. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

A. Grazing

The refuge grazing is six months, October through March. The usual permits were in effect, but the fee was raised to \$1.00 per AUM, same as BLM. Refuge permittees were notified that

grazing would terminate at the end of the 1978-79 season, for at least two years, to allow range recovery, and, if resumed, would be under a new policy.

B. Haying

Twenty-five tons of hay were taken as a second cutting from seventeen acres of alfalfa in August, 1974, by a permittee. Refuge receipts were \$11.00 per ton. Twenty-five tons were harvested in 1975.

C. Fur Harvest

None.

D. Timber Removal

As directed by new Service policy, the cutting of dead and down cottonwood for personal use was terminated.

V. PUBLIC RELATIONS

A. Refuge Participation

The Refuge Manager worked with the BIA and the Ute Tribe as Planning Adviser for the Wisiup Waterfowl Unit for the Duchesne River, and with the BLM on the Parriette Wash waterfowl marsh unit.

He assisted Ute Tribe and Service Wildlife Biologist Barry Betts run browse transects.

There was a gratifying increase in the use of the refuge for conducted tours by Cub Scouts, grade schools, one high school, and one college group.

B. Hunting

The refuge was opened to archery and rifle deer and pheasant hunting during the regular State of Utah seasons. Archers were unsuccessful, rifle deer hunters harvested six bucks and one illegal doe (no arrest). Pheasant hunters were disappointed with the population low, widely scattered or unavailable in the closed area. Three birds were taken opening morning.

C. Violations

No apprehensions.

D. Safety

The station personnel suffered no lost time accidents during the report period. There have been 3,393 days since the last lost time accident.

E. Items of Interest

Assistant Manager Phillip M. Arnold and family transferred with promotion to Arrowwood National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota, on November 24, 1974. Following his departure, the Assistant Manager position was abolished.

Mrs. Mary Sangster, Biological Aid, GS-4, was terminated on October 26, 1974.

Appendix Table 1.

SUMMARYFY 1975 Pumping by Unit

<u>Fall 1974</u>				
<u>Unit</u>	<u>Hours</u>	<u>KWs</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Acre Feet</u>
Sheppard	2,265	41,223	721.40	1,037
Leota	696	70,560	1,234.80	580
Wyasket	833	8,791	153.84	243
Woods	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Sub-Total:	3,794	120,574	2,110.04	1,860
 <u>Spring 1975</u>				
Sheppard	745	23,637	413.65	341
Leota	438	42,560	744.80	364
Wyasket	1,518	14,915	261.01	442
Woods	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>300.00</u>	<u>0</u>
Sub-Total:	2,701	81,112	1,719.46	1,147
 TOTAL:	 <u>6,495</u>	 <u>201,686</u>	 <u>3,829.50</u>	 <u>3,007</u>

Submitted by:

H. J. Johnson, Refuge Manager

Approved:

Area Manager

Date: _____

Concurred:

Chief, Division of Land Management

Date: _____