BTL - D01 — Salt Creek Wilderness Study Area

SALT CREEK

A WILDERNESS STUDY AREA ON THE BITTER LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Salt Creek Study Area, a part of the Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge, is made up of the watershed of Salt Creek which empties into the Pecos River in southeastern New Mexico. Thus, its 11,500 acres comprise river bottomlands, grasslands, sand dunes, and mixed shrub communities. The gently rolling terrain is cut by many small arroyos and contains red clay bluffs and numerous gypsum sinks.

The Salt Creek Area is being studied for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness System because Congress directed that roadless areas of 5,000 acres or more be studied to determine their suitability for inclusion. Section 4(a) of the Act states that: "The purposes of this Act are hereby declared to be within and supplemental to the purposes for which... units of the... national wildlife refuge system are established and administered.

HISTORY

Coronado was the first European to visit the study area. In 1541, his expedition passed through in their search for the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola, but found only the primitive dwellings of nomadic Plains tribes—Kiowa, Comanche, and Apaches.

This part of New Mexico was governed by Spain and Mexico before coming under control of the United States in the 1840's. Three homesteads were established on the study area during the 1900's, mainly as grazing ventures. In 1937, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service began acquiring lands here for refuge purposes. At that time, the Salt Creek drainage was a marsh, showing promise for waterfowl habitat development.

RESOURCES

There are no timber or mineral resources known to exist on the Study Area. Deer and antelope are recorded but are not common. Coyotes, bobcats, skunks, badgers, along with many species of rodents, are common on the Study Area. Because of the shortage of water, the bird species are limited to dry land types. There are no species of fish of sport or economic importance present on the area.

RECREATION

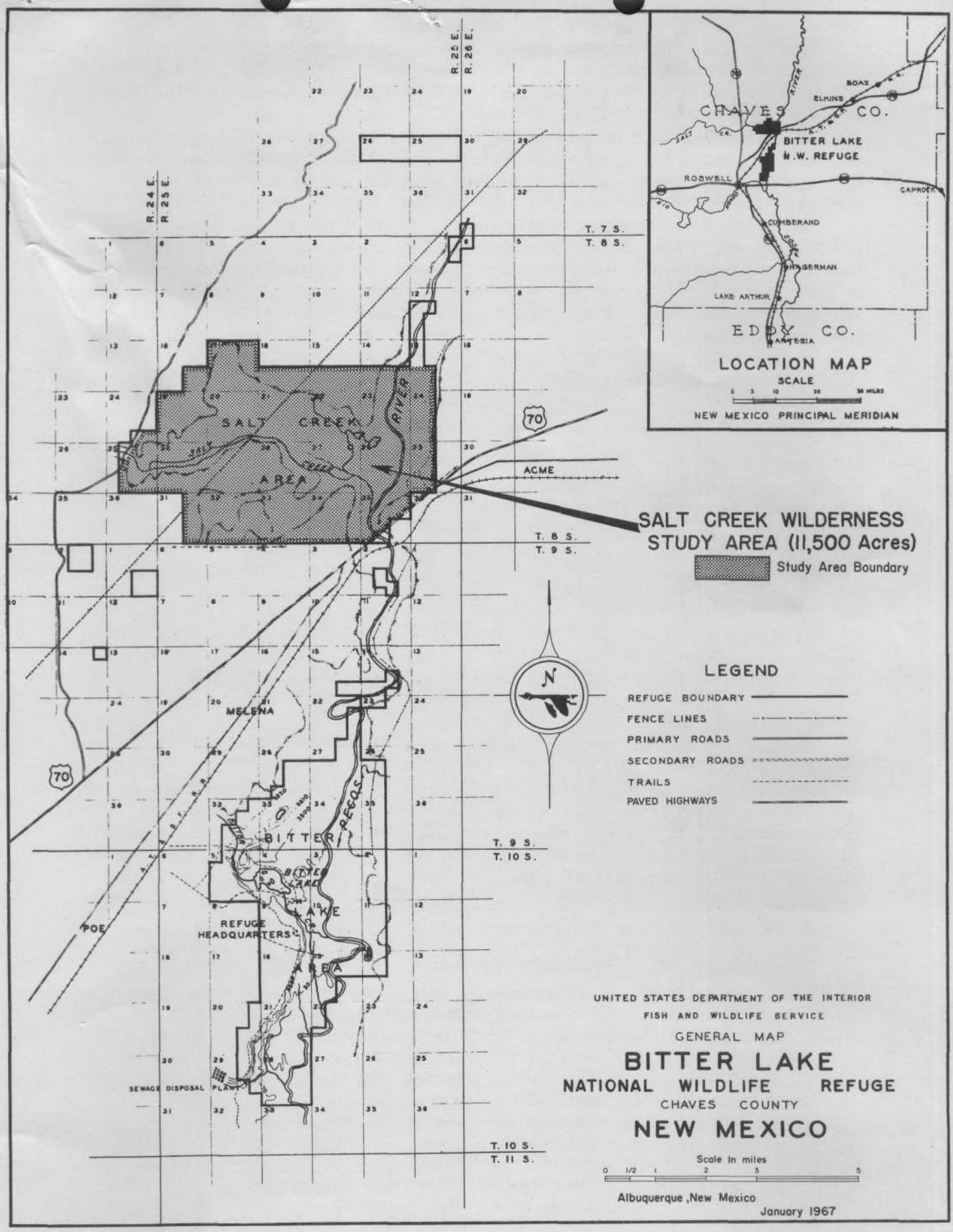
At the present time, recreational use is limited to hunting of mule deer and quail on that portion of the Study Area lying east of the Pecos River. There is some interest in "rockhound" searching for minerals of value to collectors.

DEVELOPMENT

Sand and gravel pit operations were conducted on three separate sites within the study area until 1956. Much healing has occurred since this was stopped.

Approximately 20 miles of barbed wire fence crosses the Study Area. A two-room adobe patrol cabin overlooks the Ink Pots. Below the cabin, a small dike was constructed to impound the overflow from the Pots. A well and a 60-acre farm tract are present on the west part of the Study Area. Although the farming effort was abandoned in 1963, the well, dike, impoundment, and irrigation lines are still evident.

A 3.8-mile long pipeline crosses the Study Area diagonally. There is a right-of-way easement which allows the pipeline company access to the line. An electric transmission line runs within the tract for 5.5 miles, along the south edge. Firelanes are maintained along most of the south, west, and north boundaries. Ten miles of bladed roads penetrate the unit.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

GENERAL MAP

BITTER LAKE
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
CHAVES COUNTY
NEW MEXICO

Scale in miles
0 1/2 1 2 3 5

Albuquerque, New Mexico
January 1967

SOCIO-ECONOMIC VALUES

The Salt Creek Study Area is of little economic or social significance to the local communities. An annual payment in lieu of taxes is made to Chaves County. Wilderness classification is not expected to cause any major changes in the effects of the Study Area on the local people.

The Bureau of Reclamation has developed extensive plans for a salt cedar control program in the lower Pecos Valley. They have estimated that two additional acre-feet of water will be available each year for each acre of salt cedar effectively controlled.

The Study Area contains approximately 1,500 acres of salt cedar infested lands along the Pecos River. The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife has entered into a cooperative agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation for control of most of this introduced pest plant on the valley portion of the Study Unit. Wilderness classification would conflict seriously with this planned phreatophyte control program.

Any questions not answered by this leaflet should be directed to one of the following:

Regional Director
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife
P. O. Box 1306
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103

Refuge Manager
Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge
P. O. Box 7
Roswell, New Mexico 88201

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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BUREAU OF SPORT FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE

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