

RUBY LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

RUBY VALLEY, NEVADA

FY 74

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NARRATIVE REPORT

FY 74

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR

U. S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

RUBY VALLEY, NEVADA

Permanent Personnel

Lynn C. Howard, Refuge Manager	Trans. 12/10/73
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Katie L. Hotchkiss, Clerk typist	
Ray A. Hotchkiss, Engineering Equipment Mechanic	

Temporary Personnel

Gordon L. Spelts, Biological Aid	06/24/74-09/23/74
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I GENERAL

A. Weather

There were no noteworthy extremes in temperatures for the year. The high was 98° on July 10; the low was -3° on January 9.

Total precipitation of 7.97 inches was much below the normal of 13 inches. The lack of precipitation was evident throughout winter and spring.

B. Habitat Conditions

In spite of reduced moisture, runoff and spring flows were adequate to maintain water levels in the diked units. However, water levels in the South Sump began falling below former levels in late June.

Emergent and submergent growth was adequate for nesting and feeding. Upland cover was reduced somewhat from years of normal spring precipitation.

II WILDLIFE

A. Migratory Birds

1. Waterfowl

a. Swans

Three pairs of trumpeter swans produced three cygnets. Three pairs were again observed nesting in the spring of 1974. The peak population of trumpeter swans was 41 in December. Sixteen whistling swans also used the refuge in December.

b. Geese

An estimated 160 geese were produced in FY 74. This is somewhat less than recent estimates of 250.

Total use was 39,180, down for the year by about 2,770 from the previous year.

c. Ducks

Total duck production was 8,700, which is about 1,500 above the past five year average. Important nesting species in order of number of young produced were: canvasback 2,255; redhead 2,000; gadwall 1,090; bw/cinnamon teal 1,085; lesser scaup 860; and ruddy 530.

The objective level for production of canvasbacks and redheads is 2,500 each.

Use days for the year were 2,028,720, down by 37% from the preceding year, but only slightly below the past five year average.

d. Coots

Coot production was 1,790 and use days were 2,574,750; down 65% and 8% respectively from the past five year average.

2. Water, Marsh and Shorebirds

Greater sandhill cranes occurred in numbers comparable to past years with a peak population of 40 on June 30. No young were produced on the refuge.

Other special recognition species of numerical importance to the refuge are listed followed by peak number for the fiscal year: eared grebe 100; pied-billed grebe 100; Forester's tern 200; black tern 400; American bittern 50; great blue heron 150; black-crowned night heron 150; sora rail 1,000.

Great blue and black-crowned night herons caused considerable depredations at the Gallagher State Fish Hatchery which led to indiscriminate killing of these species by hatchery personnel under their federal control permit. This situation has since been resolved.

B. Upland Game Birds

Three sage grouse broods were observed on the refuge. Approximately 50 birds used the refuge.

Gray partridge were seen but were uncommon.

C. Big Game

An estimated 300 mule deer used the refuge during the winter.

A higher than normal fawn loss has been detected for this herd of wintering deer by the Nevada Fish and Game Department. State technicians feel an important factor is overgrazing of critical range by cattle.

Coyotes also take their toll as evidenced by kills observed by refuge personnel over the winter.

D. Fur Animals and Predators

An estimated peak muskrat population of 15,000 is, at best, an approximation.

Coyotes remain abundant on the refuge finding security from constant harassment from trappers and hunters. Several dens were located on the refuge.

E. Hawks and Eagles

One peregrine and five prairie falcons were observed on the refuge during the fall and winter.

Peak numbers of eagles occurred during the winter with seven golden and two bald eagles observed along the west refuge boundary.

A new eagle rehabilitation facility was completed. Two golden eagles and one rough-legged hawk were handled in the facility. One of the eagles and the rough-legged hawk responded to treatment and were released.

F. Fish

A state record brook trout weighing 5 lbs 4 oz, was taken

this year in the collection ditch below refuge headquarters.



A new state record brook trout.

One of the largest bass taken this year weighed a little over 6 lbs. The average size of the bass taken on the refuge was slightly over 10 inches in length. Very few large bass occur on the refuge due to the short growing season, lack of forage fish, and periodic winter kills.

There was certainly no scarcity of bass though and limits of 20 bass were assured through the summer to even the most inexperienced of fishermen.

A total of 40,559 fish consisting of 1,365 lbs. of brown trout, 4,196 lbs. of brook trout, and 5,686 rainbow trout averaging 10.14" in length were planted on the refuge.

III REFUGE DEVELOPMENT & MAINTENANCE

Six new outhouses consisting of plywood fir construction and containing enclosed vaults replaced older fiberglass facilities.

All of the trash barrels north of the Brown Dike were removed and a policy of "Pack it in Pack it out" was instituted. This freed the refuge staff from the burden of weekly maintaining and servicing 25 trash barrels. Public cooperation in this program has been excellent.

Several changes were made in signing the diked units. The waterproof paper signs were covered with plastic sensitive film rather than wire mesh to prevent bird damage. This led to an easier read, better looking sign. All metal sign posts were replaced with 4" x 4" stained redwood posts. Sign placement was changed which allowed elimination of two thirds of the signs.

All quarters were rewired to conform to SAFETY standards.

Discontinued use of an auxiliary electric pressure pump to irrigate the headquarters lawn resulted in significant energy savings.

IV RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

A. Grazing

Four grazing permits were issued. A total of 5,277 AUM's were used. Grazing fees were \$1.50/AUM for cattle and \$2.00/AUM for horses. These fees will be increased in increments of \$.50 thru 1976.

B. Haying

Wild hay was cut on about 300 acres and left in place for fall cattle feed. These hayed lands provide feed for about 200 geese through a part of the winter and spring, but, of course, are valueless for nesting waterfowl.

C. Fur Harvest

Two trappers harvested 1,200 muskrats on trapping units No. 2 and 3. The quota was 4,000.

V. PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public use was 42,800 visits - 4,000 less than for FY 73. Fishing visits, divided equally between warm water and cold-water, numbered 38,700. Water skiing accounted for 3,700 visits, waterfowl hunting 300.

Waterskiing on the 50 acre water ski area in the marsh increased by 66% over the previous year.



As many as 14 boats could be seen using the water ski area at one time.

Another unfortunate trend in the boating use on the marsh is the ever-increasing number of large power boats being used ostensibly for fishing but probably more realistically for boating for boatings sake.



Inboard-outboard boats over 18 feet are not uncommon on the marsh.



The larger boats are moored on the refuge throughout the summer.



Over 100 boats are stored at the boat landing.



Boat wakes from large boats cause environmental degradation and pose SAFETY hazards to small boats.



Powerboating causes constant disruption of canvasback broods.

A major law enforcement effort was undertaken at the start of the 1974 recreation season. Of particular concern was the enforcement of the area within the marsh closed to motor boating until July 1. Twenty field violation reports were sent in for prosecution in Federal Court through special agent Dick Branzell. Three warnings were issued.

Fines for closed motorboating violations were \$50.00. All cases have been completed but one.



Special Agent Jim Micuda checks young fishermen.

VI OTHER ITEMS

A. Credits

Report prepared by R. V. Papike, typing by Katie L. Hotchkiss.

Submitted by: R. V. Papike
Date: 3-12-75

Approved by: _____

Date: _____