

STERLING
Wildlife Management Area

Management Plan
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Idaho Department Of Fish and Game
Southeast Region
1345 Barton Rd.
Pocatello, Idaho 83204

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	i
LIST OF FIGURES	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
LOCATION	2
VISION	2
MISSION STATEMENT	2
DURATION OF PLAN	2
DESCRIPTION.....	2
MANAGEMENT ISSUES	4
GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND MONITORING	4
ISSUE 1 HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS	4
ISSUE 2: COOPERATIVE FARMING AGREEMENTS	9
ISSUE 3: NOXIOUS WEEDS.....	10
ISSUE 4: NEIGHBOR RELATIONS	11
ISSUE 5: PUBLIC ACCESS NEEDS	13
ISSUE 6: GAME FARM PHEASANT RELEASES.....	15
ISSUE 7: INCREASED PREDATOR POPULATION.....	16
ISSUE 8: FUNDING FOR NONGAME PROJECTS	17
ISSUE 9: NEED NEW ADMINISTRATIVE SITE.....	18
ISSUE 10: ACQUIRE ADDITIONAL PROPERTY	19
REFERENCES	21
APPENDIX I	22
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	22
APPENDIX II.....	23
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION	23
APPENDIX III.....	24
LAND ACQUISITION.....	24
APPENDIX IV.....	25
VEGETATION TYPES.....	25
APPENDIX V.....	26
HABITAT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS	26
APPENDIX VI.....	28
DEVELOPMENT HISTORY.....	28

APPENDIX VII	29
FAUNA SPECIES LIST	29
APPENDIX VIII.....	31
FLORA SPECIES LIST	31
APPENDIX IX.....	33
TRAVEL PLAN	33
APPENDIX X.....	34
PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS.....	34
APPENDIX XI.....	42
FEDERAL AID PROJECT STATEMENT AND PROGRESS REPORT.....	42

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Map of Sterling Wildlife Management Area.....	3
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sterling Wildlife Management Area (SWMA) is a partnership between the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR). It is located in Bingham County about 4 miles northeast of Aberdeen and 25 miles southwest of Blackfoot. The WMA consists of 3,332 acres of upland and wetland vegetation (1952 Department acres, 1,380 BOR acres) and is managed to provide public access and diverse wetland and upland vegetation types for wildlife. This management improves waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant and other wildlife production, public hunting, and general wildlife appreciation. WMA funding comes from hunting license dollars and Pittman-Robertson funds. The objective of this Management Plan is to provide direction for future land management of SWMA. Several open houses were held to collect public input on how Department management should evolve to meet the needs of the citizens of Idaho. Suggestions were incorporated into the planning process wherever possible.

The plan includes the vision and mission for SWMA as well as background information and detailed goals, objectives and strategies for each relevant issue. It supplements the Department's Policy Plan 1990-2005: A Vision for the Future and was developed using public involvement. This is a long-term plan for management of SWMA, with an indefinite life span. The plan will be modified as necessary to accommodate adaptive management, and to incorporate available new knowledge and techniques.

Issues were identified from public input as well as Department concerns. Those issues that are addressed include: habitat improvements, cooperative farming agreements, noxious weeds, neighbor relations, public access, game farm pheasant releases, predators, nongame funding, a new administrative site, and land acquisition. Additional issues that did not pertain to SWMA, or that are outside the scope of regional management, are mentioned in Appendix IX.

The Management Plan directs the Department to manage the vegetation on SWMA for the benefit of wildlife and the public. Habitat improvements will be made, through the use of cooperative farming agreements, wherever possible. Noxious weed control will be a top priority as will a variety of outreach efforts to improve relationships with WMA neighbors. Public access to the WMA will be improved as opportunities become available and the pheasant release program will continue, in some form, as long as the Fish and Game Commission authorizes the funding. Predator populations will be controlled and monitored to balance the impacts on ground nesting birds, particularly waterfowl. Nongame programs will be funded appropriately and funding sources for a new administrative building will be sought. Finally, land purchases will be made whenever opportunities arise that meet guidelines.

LOCATION

The Sterling Wildlife Management Area (SWMA) is located in Bingham County about 4 miles northeast of Aberdeen and 25 miles southwest of Blackfoot (Figure 1). The area is adjacent to the west side of American Falls Reservoir (T5S R 31E parts of sections 6,12,13,24,25; T5S R32E parts of sections 19, 30,31; T6S R31E parts of sections 1,2,12; T6S R32E part of section 6). Topographic map coverage appears on USGS 7.5-Minute Series Aberdeen, Big Fill and Schiller Quadrangles.

VISION

The SWMA will be managed to provide public access and for the benefit of wildlife and its habitat by providing diverse wetland and upland vegetation types.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (Department) will manage the vegetation on SWMA through burning, grazing, spraying, farming and cutting to provide a variety of vegetation types and successional stages for the benefit of wildlife. Also, the Department will provide both consumptive and non-consumptive public use opportunities that are compatible with high quality wildlife habitat.

This mission will provide for waterfowl, ring-necked pheasant and other wildlife production, public hunting, and general wildlife appreciation.

DURATION OF PLAN

This is a long-term plan for management of SWMA, with an indefinite life span. The plan will be modified as necessary to accommodate adaptive management, and to incorporate available new knowledge and techniques.

DESCRIPTION

The SWMA is a partnership of Bureau of Reclamation land (1380 acres managed by the Department) and Department land (1952 acres). The 3332 acres are a combination of 1500 acres of wetland and 1466 acres of upland habitat (Figure 1). This interspersion of vegetation types is required by many wildlife species. An additional 366 acres of agricultural ground provide the opportunities to better manage the entire WMA for the benefit of wildlife and sportsmen. All 366 acres of agricultural land on SWMA is share cropped by cooperating farmers.

SWMA is the most intensely used WMA in the Southeast Region. An estimated 4,000 man days of hunting opportunity, 2,000 man days of wildlife viewing opportunity and 150 man days of trapping opportunity are utilized by sportsmen and wildlife enthusiasts. This level of use translates into an approximate economic value of \$91,400 (based on \$22.85 per waterfowl hunting trip and \$28.84 per pheasant hunting trip).

STERLING WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

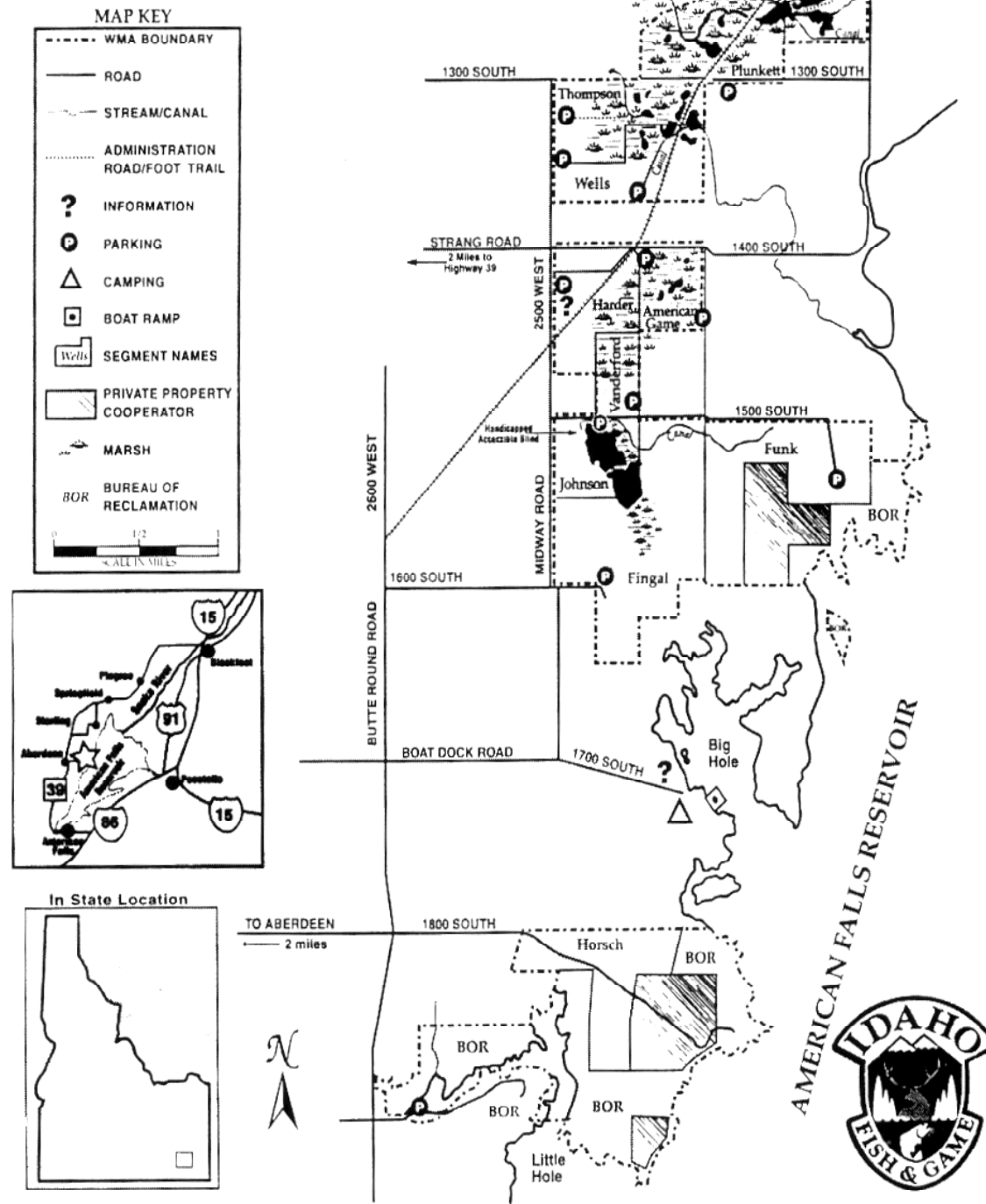


Figure 1. Map of Sterling Wildlife Management Area.

The area is also available for a variety of events that require an outdoor setting such as the youth pheasant hunt, the waterfowl workshop and retriever field trials.

SWMA is a highly visible example of how land can be managed for wildlife. The surrounding landscape of SWMA is intensively farmed and grazed. SWMA is a visual demonstration of the techniques and practices that the Department promotes for use on private lands. A landowner or sportsman can SEE what interspersed and diverse land looks like; can SEE what sufficient residual cover looks like; and can SEE how farming and grazing can be done and still provide wildlife habitat.

Also, the SWMA provides a wetland habitat managed for wildlife and available to the public for hunting without first acquiring permission. To many sportsmen, this is a vital benefit of SWMA.

Finally, for many sportsmen SWMA is a positive, concrete return for their license dollars. The land is something provided to them from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game in exchange for their years of license purchases.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES

GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND MONITORING

Issue 1: Habitat improvements need to be made on the SWMA (Appendix IX).

Discussion: The purpose of WMA management is to develop and/or protect wildlife habitat. Every reasonable opportunity to improve habitat is explored; however, financial and/or logistic problems often constrain projects. Because of SWMA's situation of being surrounded by farmed and grazed lands that provide little habitat for wildlife, enhancements are essential to sustain wildlife populations at levels requested by the public. Otherwise, the acreage could not provide the necessary habitat requirements. Additionally, since some wildlife species, such as the ring-necked pheasant, are closely linked to agriculture, a farming program is necessary to provide feeding, nesting and wintering habitat. Finally, to provide a diverse landscape for a variety of wildlife species, woody cover plantings are needed to provide wintering; loafing and escape cover for nongame as well as game species. Currently, many of the habitat improvements on SWMA are possible because of the sharecrop program.

I. Goal: Develop habitat improvement projects on SWMA.

A. Objective: Plant and maintain woody cover projects.

Strategies:

1. Identify areas that would benefit from additional woody cover.
2. Woody cover is deciduous or coniferous vegetation that provides winter protection, food, nesting sites, and year-round security cover for wildlife. Plantings may be made as shelterbelts (4 rows or more) or as thickets (groups of plants).
3. Identify areas that allow for irrigation of woody cover plantings.

4. Identify cooperative farming agreements that provide an opportunity to trade woody cover plantings for farming privileges.

B. Objective: Plant and maintain food plots.

Strategies:

1. Identify areas that would benefit from food plot plantings.
Food plots will be at least ½ acre in size. The shape of a plot should resemble a block configuration as much as possible and avoid thin strips. The more narrow designs tend to fill with snow more easily. Preferred crops are corn, sorghum, sunflowers, wheat, barley, or any mix of the above.
2. Use cooperative farming agreements to provide for food plots.
 - (a) Cooperators will have equipment for planting food plots.
 - (b) Cooperators will have equipment, and sometimes water to irrigate food plots.

C. Objective: Plant and maintain dense nesting cover.

Strategies:

1. Identify areas that would benefit from additional dense nesting cover.
Dense nesting cover is a mixture of several forbs (broadleaf, herbaceous plants) and grasses. Residual plant cover in the spring (from the previous growing season) is critical for early nesting birds like waterfowl and pheasants. Desirable plant height is 8 - 10". Critical qualities of a nesting area are the size and configuration of the area. Strips of cover provide too much advantage to hunting predators, whereas block shapes benefit the nesting bird. Larger acreages (greater than 5 acres) are preferred. Plant health and vigor are important to the density of the cover. Density is defined as the visual block provided by the plants (either through plant numbers or the shape and foliage of the plants.)
2. Use cooperative farming agreements to provide dense nesting cover.
 - (a) Cooperators will have equipment to plant nesting cover.
 - (b) Cooperators will have equipment, and sometimes water to irrigate nesting cover.

D. Objective: Use controlled grazing to maintain vegetation that provides nesting cover for ground nesting birds.

Strategy: Develop a grazing plan that considers the waterfowl production value of each segment and the best timing and amount of grazing.

Grazing is an effective management tool for increasing the vigor of many plant species and thus increasing density. This will then improve the likelihood of a successful nesting attempt. Grazing is more effective than

controlled burning when managing smaller acreages that have adequate fencing.

E. Objective: Provide fences to better control grazing of nesting areas.

Strategies:

1. Build additional fences that would better manage grazing.
 - (a) Approximately 2.5 of miles of fence will improve control in the Fingal/Funk/Johnson segments.
 - (b) Additional fences will impede hunter activity.
 - Fence stiles will be installed to minimize impacts. Placement will consider high use areas.
 - Temporary electric fence could be used and then removed after grazing season.
2. Maintain 22 miles of fences that currently control grazing.

F. Objective: Use controlled burning to maintain vegetation that benefits ground-nesting birds.

Strategy: Develop a burning plan that considers cumulative effects of other management practices and that improves vegetation where waterfowl production has decreased as a result of succession.

Burning is an effective management tool that increases the vigor of many plant species and thus increases density. This will then improve the likelihood of a successful nesting attempt. Burning is more effective than grazing where larger tracts of ground are being improved or where appropriate fencing is not in place for control purposes.

G. Objective: Remove Russian olive trees to improve nesting success of ground nesting birds.

Strategies:

1. Develop a Russian olive removal plan.
 - (a) Consider benefits that many wildlife species derive from Russian olives.
 - (b) Consider how several predators utilize Russian olives as nesting/denning sites to increase their population densities.
 - (c) Consider recommendations of current research.
 - (d) Target segments that would benefit from Russian olive removal.

Consider areas that have high waterfowl nesting potential but that have low nesting success due to predation.
 - (e) Identify areas where Russian olive would be left to benefit wildlife.

- Consider areas that provide limited waterfowl nesting opportunity and that are used by wintering wildlife.
- Consider areas where the additional food value and cover are needed.

2. Develop a Russian olive control program for re-invading trees.
 - (a) Identify the most effective chemicals to use.
 - (b) Identify the most effective time of year to spray.

H. Objective: Provide potholes to attract nesting pairs of ducks.

Strategies:

1. Blast or excavate additional potholes.
 - (a) Decide if management strategies suggest that additional potholes would provide benefits for waterfowl.
Potholes attract breeding pairs of ducks. Potholes adjacent to quality, dense nesting cover will result in increased nesting.
 - (b) Size of holes will be approximately 45' x 45' x 5' or larger.
 - (c) Number of holes will be determined by current amount of open water within 1/3 mile of proposed site and available funds.
Develop 6-10 breeding pair potholes (0.3 - 0.5 acres) per 100 acres of dense nesting cover.
 - (d) Location of holes dependent on where open water is limited, a high water table exists, and quality nesting cover is adjacent to project site.
Females will try to nest within 200-300 yards of the pothole.
2. Excavate existing potholes that fill in with sediment.
3. Chemically treat potholes that grow in with emergent vegetation (cattails, bulrushes etc.).

I. Objective: Provide large ponds for waterfowl brooding areas.

Strategies:

1. Manage ponds to provide 50% open water and 50% emergent vegetation (i.e. cattails, bulrushes) for optimal duckling habitat.
 - (a) Open water provides feeding areas while emergent vegetation provides security cover.
 - (b) Depths over 3 feet will remain open, depths fewer than 3 feet will grow emergent vegetation.
2. Provide a minimum of 1 a. of brooding habitat per 125 a. of nesting cover.
 - (a) Larger ponds will support more broods.

High interspersed of emergent vegetation and open water increases the capacity of a pond to support duck broods.

(b) Broods usually move up to ½ mile from nest to water.

3. Control emergent vegetation in ponds

Use approved chemicals (i.e. Rodeo), fire or grazing to kill emergent vegetation that has encroached into the open water of a pond.

J. Objective: Construct, maintain and monitor nesting structures.

Strategy: Use volunteers, such as Eagle Scouts, to construct, erect, maintain, and monitor structures.

- Mallards - Kestrels - Bluebirds
- Geese - Bats

K. Objective: Improve management of water levels to benefit habitat.

Strategies:

1. Construct or replace water control structures and measuring devices.

Improve precision of water level control.

2. Manage water levels in ponds.

(c) Avoid flooding of nests.

(d) Control emergent vegetation.

3. Maintain open water interspersed with emergent vegetation to provide for feeding and brooding areas for waterfowl.

4. Lower water levels in early August to provide feeding sites for migrating shorebirds.

Monitor closely to avoid botulism outbreaks.

5. Raise water levels in September to provide open water for staging waterfowl.

(a) Waterfowl prepare for migration by gathering in open water.

(b) American Falls Reservoir often provides this waterfowl requirement.

6. Maintain high water levels throughout fall to provide hunting opportunity.

7. Provide open water in early spring to attract breeding waterfowl.

II. Monitoring: The WMA will be mapped using Global Positioning System (GPS). This equipment was purchased by the Bureau of Reclamation and determines locations by using satellite triangulation. The equipment is extremely accurate. Analysis of the GPS data will be conducted with a Geographical Information System (GIS). Periodic re-mapping will show all changes in the types of vegetation, the acreage of each type, amount of open water, and number of nesting structures. This information can be compared yearly to allow tracking of the condition of the habitat.

Issue 2: Cooperative farming agreements should benefit wildlife (Appendix IX).

Discussion: All agricultural land that is farmed on SWMA (approximately 366 acres) is share cropped by cooperating local farmers. The compensation to the Department is in the form of food plots, maintenance, planting of trees and nesting cover, and irrigation of trees and nesting cover on the WMA. No cash payments are made to the Department. This form of compensation is critical to the functioning of SWMA. Because SWMA is a relatively small acreage surrounded by farmed and grazed lands that provide minimal habitat for wildlife, the habitat on the WMA that support wildlife populations must be supplemented. The Department does not have the means to develop needed irrigation or the equipment to properly supply the needs of these wildlife populations by farming. This program provides the Department with additional habitat developments on the WMA that, otherwise, would not be feasible. Species such as ring-necked pheasants are closely tied to agriculture and would not maintain their current levels without the cooperative farming program. Many nongame species also directly benefit from this program through the additional food sources and the woody cover plantings that supply wintering, nesting, loafing and escape cover. However, it is also important that the Department and the resource get a fair return on the leases that are made.

- I. Goal: Use cooperative farming agreements to enhance wildlife habitat in areas where either financial or irrigation constraints would make it impossible for the Department to develop the area.
 - A. Objective: Design agreements so that SWMA habitat development is enhanced.
Strategies:
 - 1. Use farming agreements to irrigate trees.
As of 1998, cooperators are irrigating 7,100 trees. This could be increased an additional 300 trees.
 - 2. Use farming agreements to provide food plots throughout the WMA.
Approximately 50 acres are provided per year.
 - 3. Use farming agreements to provide permanent dense nesting cover plantings.
Approximately 90 acres of nesting cover is provided as permanent cover or a delayed cutting of alfalfa.
 - B. Objective: Ensure that the Department receives equitable compensation for any farming or grazing done on the WMA.
Strategy: Develop payments that reflect current grazing or agricultural land lease rates.
 - C. Objective: Develop a cooperative agreement with the University of Idaho Experiment Station Plant Materials Center.
Strategy: Ensure that experimental plantings will benefit wildlife or wildlife management either directly or indirectly.

II. Monitoring:

- A. Monitor compliance annually.
 - 1. Conduct spring inspections of grazing use.
 - 2. Conduct summer inspections of hay cuttings.
 - 3. Conduct fall inspections of food plots and stubble height.
- B. Re-evaluate agreements as per Department Policy FW-17 to determine if changes need to be made to make the agreement more equitable (See Appendix V, Farming).

Issue 3: Noxious weeds are a problem on SWMA (Appendix IX).

Discussion: Traditionally, the wildlife profession and agri-business have disagreed on the effects of "weeds." This disagreement has been the root of the neighbor relations problem on SWMA for many years. Wildlife biologists considered the "forb" component (broad-leafed, herbaceous plants) as a critical part of the vegetation that makes up wildlife habitat. The forbs provide density and visual obstruction that increases the chances that a nest will be successful. The agri-business community however, saw weeds as a threat to their livelihood in the form of reduced crop production. Eventually it became obvious to the wildlife supporters that "noxious weeds" are everyone's concern. By law, weeds that are listed as "noxious" must be controlled by landowners. Since "noxious" weeds are usually exotic plants that have not evolved with the natural controls that native plants have, the result of an infestation is a monotypic plant community that usually is not suited for most wildlife species. These infestations tend to reduce crop and range yields as well as reduce the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat. There still is a division between the two groups concerning forbs that are not on the Noxious Weeds list. This may be one of those issues that are never resolved.

A major effort has been made over the past years to control noxious weeds on SWMA. This effort will be continued for as long as necessary or as long as finances allow. Crews of temporary employees have used tractors, 4-wheelers and backpack sprayers to work on problem areas. A helicopter has also been hired for aerial spraying. The Bingham County Weed Supervisor makes periodic checks on the area to help identify problem spots.

I. Goal: Control Canada thistle, whitetop and other noxious weeds on SWMA.

Objective: Use available resources to control noxious weeds through chemical, biological and mechanical means.

Strategies:

- 1. Use helicopter spraying.
For infestations of weeds greater than 15 acres or where vehicles and personnel with backpack sprayers can not reach the area.
- 2. Use seasonal temporary employees to apply chemical herbicides to infestations of less than 15 acres or where water, crops or houses are a concern for aerial spraying.

- Tractor
 - 4-wheeler
 - Backpack sprayers
3. Use cooperative agreements to help control weeds on leased ground.
Cooperators are responsible for controlling weeds on ground leased from the Department.
 4. Spraying will begin as early in the spring as possible and continue throughout the growing season.
 5. Biological controls may also be used.
Larinus planus and Cassida rubiginosa are two possible insect species to be used on Canada thistle.
 6. Infestations that can not be chemically treated prior to seed dispersal will be mowed to prevent seeds from maturing. The area will then be treated chemically as soon as possible.

II. Monitoring:

- A. Logs will be kept to document the man-hours, amount of chemical being used, number and species of released insects, and acres treated.
- B. Maps will be kept to document locations of insect releases
- C. Inspections of insect release sites will track effectiveness.
- D. Continue communication with the Bingham County Weed Supervisor to monitor the effort.

Issue 4: Neighbor relations need to be a high priority (Appendix IX).

Discussion: Since the inception of SWMA, neighbors and sportsmen have voiced concerns with the management practices used on the area. Often, the criticisms or suggestions were contradictory, unrealistic or contrary to the purpose and goals of the WMA. The topics included: "Not enough grazing," "Too much grazing," "Not enough farming," "Too much farming," "Too much wildlife," "Not enough wildlife," "Too many weeds," "Not enough vegetation." There were however, several suggestions that warranted action and were incorporated. The Department has worked very hard to make sure that neighbor relations receive equal consideration with sportsmen concerns. The Department understands that effective management of SWMA is significantly easier with the cooperation and support of the local landowners. Over the past few years, relations have improved greatly. An ongoing effort is being continued to further improve the relationships with neighbors. An Aberdeen office day has been established to allow better access to Department employees by neighbors. A local working team, consisting of local landowners, the local Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist, and sportsmen is now in place. The group meets to discuss issues, provide input and to help disseminate information. This is part of the increased effort to keep neighbors informed about activities on the WMA. Improving communication is a top priority and several areas for improvement have been identified. However, despite all efforts, there are several chronic issues

that may never be completely resolved to the complete satisfaction of some citizens (i.e. goose depredations and weeds). In these instances, it is important that both parties understand the positions and that efforts are made to minimize the impacts.

- I. Goal: Develop and maintain good relationships with neighbors.
 - A. Objective: Increase public awareness of issues, procedures and practices on the WMA.
Strategy: Use SCD and NRCS newsletters, local papers, and personal contacts.
 - (a) Submit articles describing activities on SWMA.
 - (b) Make personal contacts in the field to promote SWMA programs.
 - B. Objective: Maintain a high level of accessibility to Department personnel.
Strategies:
 - 1. Continue monthly office days in Aberdeen.
 - 2. Continue to have a Wildlife Technician.
 - C. Objective: Address neighbor concerns.
Strategy: Respond, in some way, to each concern raised by interested parties. Response may be that "nothing can be done," but an effort should be made to get back to the concerned party.
 - D. Objective: Increase the activity of the local working teams.
Strategy: Hold meetings 1-2 times per year with a formal presentation.
 - E. Objective: Solicit public opinion prior to beginning any significant projects.
Strategies:
 - 1. Hold public meetings.
 - 2. Involve working team.
Hold meetings to inform members and solicit input.
 - 3. Use the media.
Submit articles or provide interviews.
 - F. Objective: Keep local NRCS and SCD personnel informed on events and activities.
Strategy: Maintain monthly office meeting at SCD office. Inform SCD board members and NRCS conservationists of activities.
 - G. Objective: Attempt to reduce depredation problems on private ground when the solution is consistent with WMA direction.
Strategies:
 - 1. Provide goose pasture when compatible with WMA guidelines (Appendix IX).

- (a) Use grazing or burning.
 - (b) Farm land surrounding American Falls Reservoir and the Reservoir bottom often provides significantly more acres of goose pasture than SWMA will ever be able to offer.
 - 2. Provide lure crops when acreage is available.
 - Winter wheat
 - Spring wheat
- H. Objective: Manage water and waterways in a manner that provides the least inconvenience to neighbors while still fulfilling the goals of the WMA.

Strategies:

 - 1. Keep ditches maintained so that water does not flood neighbors.
 - 2. Maintain pond levels so that wildlife requirements are met but impacts on neighbors are reduced.
- II. Monitoring: Conduct periodic "checks" on public opinion.
 - 1. Utilize the working team.

Solicit input on the "feel" of the community during meetings.
 - 2. Make personal contacts.
 - (a) Directly ask for opinions on issues.
 - (b) Complete "User Survey" forms throughout year and compile information annually.
 - 3. Hold formal or informal meetings.

Hold meetings for the sole purpose of inviting opinions and ideas when specific activities are pending or issues are raised.

Issue 5: Public access needs to be available but consistent with SWMA goals (Appendix IX).

Discussion: Part of the mission of SWMA is to provide public access for consumptive and non-consumptive uses without compromising the quality of the wildlife habitat. The question of how much access to state land is appropriate has been a point of contention for a long time. The Department has had to consider the effects of providing opportunity for a wide range of constituents and protecting the wildlife and wildlife habitat. Sportsmen dollars were used to purchase Department lands so sportsmen and women should be allowed to utilize the resource. The conflict comes with the questions of "How accessible should the land be?" and "What type of access is appropriate?"

Foot access does not seem to cause many problems for wildlife during most times of the year. A possible exception would be nesting geese and their vulnerability to curious recreationists. Vehicle access, however, can be detrimental to the quality of wildlife habitat and to the condition of animals. Harassment during high stress winters and during nesting and brooding times can

significantly impact populations. Higher vulnerability during the hunting season is also a direct result of increased access. Finally, many sportsmen define the quality of their experience by the amount of traffic and number of hunters that they encounter during an outdoor experience. The Department needs to provide access to state lands but not compromise the quality of the habitat, the security for the wildlife, or the outdoor experience.

I. Goal: Provide controlled vehicle and foot access to the WMA.

A. Objective: Provide and maintain access points throughout the WMA.

Strategies:

1. Provide and maintain 10-13 parking areas near high-use segments.
2. Install fence stiles.
Place one stile every 1/4 mile of interior fence and every 1/2 mile of boundary fence that is adjacent to a public right-of-way and where no gates or walk-through gaps are present (approximately 20 stiles).
3. Install walk-through gaps in fences adjacent to gates at parking areas.
Provide wheel chair and barrier-free access at gates where appropriate (approximately 5 gaps).
 - Johnson segment
 - Orth segment
 - Wells segment
 - Thompson segment
 - Vanderford segment
4. Promote the availability of the Barrier free blind to appropriate groups and organizations.

B. Objective: Control off-road vehicle access throughout the WMA.

Strategies:

1. Improve SWMA brochure to better inform public on approved routes and restrictions (See Appendix VIII).
2. Use signing to mark approved roads as well as closed areas.
3. Use barriers. In most cases this is not practical due to the terrain. Vehicles can usually go around barriers.
4. Use personal contacts.
5. Focus on Fingal, Funk and Horsch segments where control is more difficult.
6. Provide 3 additional parking areas at Fingal, Horsch and Little Hole segments.

C. Objective: Maintain facilities, like barrier-free blind, so that public use is maximized.

Strategy: Develop an inspection and maintenance schedule to improve conditions of facilities.

Adopt-A-Wetland program cooperators will assist with maintenance.

- Spring -- After weather improves.
- Early Fall--Prior to hunting seasons
- Late Fall--After hunting seasons, in preparation for winter.

II. Monitoring:

Periodically inspect problem areas and assess condition. Signs and barriers will need to be replaced regularly.

1. Inspections should be made once during winter, once in spring, twice in summer, and twice in fall.
2. Complete "User Survey" forms throughout year and compile information annually.
3. Conduct Hunter Survey every five years.

Issue 6: Game farm pheasant releases are an inefficient use of Sportsmen's dollars (Appendix IX).

Discussion: Research has shown that stocking pheasants is NOT a viable solution to increasing a population. Research has also shown that introducing pen-reared pheasants can be detrimental to the wild population by attracting predators, spreading disease, and passing on genetic problems. The sole reasoning for stocking pheasants is to provide short term hunting opportunity. The current statewide stocking program costs the Department approximately \$50,000 per year for the birds. Department employee time and operating expenses are additional. SWMA receives approximately 1300 of the 5000 birds that are available statewide. This program has been in place for many years and has developed a strong support base. Seniors and young hunters seem to benefit most from this type of hunting. Currently, sportsmen that hunt game farm pheasants on a WMA purchase a WMA pheasant permit. In effect, the people that use the program pay for the program. The permit allows a hunter to harvest 10 pheasants from a WMA where game farm birds are released.

Goal: Collect information on hunter utilization of pen-reared pheasants on SWMA.

Objective: Determine level of harvest of pen-reared pheasants.

Strategies:

1. Conduct yearly "User Survey".
2. Conduct Hunter Survey every five years.
3. Field contacts

Issue 7: WMA's have an increased predator population that may be inconsistent with priorities (Appendix IX).

Discussion: For many years wildlife professionals believed that because predators and prey evolved together, predation would not reduce a prey population below a level that the population could survive. Recent research has shown that in some instances this theory does not hold true. In cases where habitat quality and/or quantity has been severely degraded or where predator levels are being sustained at unusually high levels, prey populations are being significantly impacted. In particular, waterfowl numbers on SWMA are being suppressed at unhealthy levels by predators such as feral cats, skunks, foxes and raccoons. All of these predators are maintaining unusually high population levels because of human subsidized den sites and food sources. These subsidies combined with fragmented nesting cover for waterfowl allow the predators to have an insurmountable advantage over the nesting birds.

Research has shown that predation on the SWMA waterfowl nests has an unusually high impact. Since the top priority of SWMA is waterfowl production, a change in management seems to be appropriate. Several possibilities exist which include, but are not limited to, predator habitat management, sub-lethal poisoning, trapping and re-locating, and lethal removal. The statewide goal on WMA's is to achieve 30% nesting success. The recent study showed that SWMA is well below that level. The goals of the WMA do not include removing all predators. The goal is to create a better balance between predators and their prey. A "step down" approach to predator management is outlined in the State Waterfowl Management plan.

I. Goal: Maintain predator levels that are consistent with the purpose and goals of the WMA.

A. Objective: Monitor predator levels.

Strategy: Periodically census predator populations.

B. Objective: Monitor waterfowl nesting success.

Strategies:

1. Determine if low nesting success is related to predation.

2. Periodically census nesting success.

Keep techniques consistent.

C. Objective: Incorporate passive predator management for 3 years.

Strategies:

1. Identify human-caused habitat improvements.

Locate old foundations, culverts, and rock piles that are used as den sites.

2. Reduce human-caused habitat improvements.

Fill old foundations, screen culverts and remove rock piles.

- D. Objective: Incorporate active predator removal for 3 years if passive management does not produce desired results (See Discussion).

Strategies:

1. Use live trapping.
2. Use hunting. Encourage public hunting and trapping.
3. Use sub-lethal poisoning.
Use eggs treated with low dosages of poison that do not kill the predator but does cause illness and a negative experience by the predator.
4. Use kill sets.

- II. Monitoring: Survey waterfowl nests every five years to determine if success meets Statewide Waterfowl Management Plan goal of 30%. If nest success does not respond to current management then move to next step and monitor. If active removal does not produce desired results after 3 years, then re-establish program.

Issue 8: Funding for nongame projects should come from appropriate sources (Appendix IX).

Discussion: Most of the Department programs are funded, either directly or indirectly, by sportsmen dollars. This segment of the population is more interested in consumptive uses of wildlife and therefore prefers that their money be used in a way that benefits that type of use. In many cases they prefer that the dollars that they contribute by buying hunting licenses go to making hunting (or fishing) better. Efforts are being made on a national level to create a means by which the non- consumptive recreational users will also help support Fish and Wildlife programs. But at this time, the major share of wildlife programs are funded by the consumptive users.

All projects that are targeted specifically for a nongame species will be funded through appropriate nongame funds or through donations. Most projects that are funded with license dollars also provide significant benefits to nongame species. However, the reverse is not necessarily true. Many of the nongame projects are nesting structures that are only suitable for nongame species. Most license-funded projects are general habitat-oriented plantings.

- I. Goal: Use nongame budgets or outside donations to fund nongame projects.

Objective: Ensure that projects that only benefit nongame species will be funded through nongame budgets.

Strategies:

1. Use volunteer efforts to produce nongame projects.
 - Scouts
 - Civic groups
 - High school classes
2. Approach outside groups to fund nongame projects.

- Audubon Society
- Idaho State University

II. Monitoring: Evaluate each project to ensure an appropriate funding source.

Issue 9: SWMA needs a new administrative site to replace the current dilapidated structure (Appendix IX).

Discussion: A common perception by the public is that the Department spends more dollars on equipment (such as trucks) than on wildlife. In fact, equipment and facilities are critical to the Department being able to effectively carry out its programs.

The "Headquarters" on SWMA is used to store equipment, provide a work area for repairs and construction, and provide a shelter for employees and visitors during meetings and events. The current facility on SWMA is inadequate. The building is not weather proof, animal proof or secure. Equipment and supplies are constantly being damaged by birds and mice. In addition, conditions are conducive to health problems, such as Hantavirus, associated with deer mice. Very little work can be done inside of the building during the winter because of the cold temperatures, rain, wind, and snow accumulation. Equipment that is stored outside of the building is subject to vandalism and theft because of the poor condition of the fence and the remoteness of the compound. Finances will not allow a new building to be constructed entirely with Department funds. A continuing effort is being made to locate outside cost sharing to help fund the project.

I. Goal: Construct a new administrative facility on SWMA.

A. Objective: Secure funding for a new building.

Strategies:

1. Determine needs for new building. A design has been approved by Department Engineering Bureau.
2. Apply to the Bureau of Reclamation for cost sharing on a new building.
3. Budget for Department cost-share.
4. Identify a third partner.

B. Objective: Provide temporary office/living space.

Strategy: Pursue options to acquire a Federal surplus trailer.

C. Objective: Maintain existing facility as much as possible.

Strategy: Budget sufficient funds and time to keep existing facility functional. However, the poor condition of the facility limits the cost-effectiveness of trying to enhance the building in any way.

II. Monitoring: Continue to request funding from possible sources on an annual basis.

Issue 10: The Department will acquire additional property to help achieve the SWMA mission.

Discussion: The Department has purchased land for many years to improve and protect wildlife habitat as well as to provide public access. The practice has been welcomed by some but has been a topic of controversy for others. Sportsmen have always encouraged the Department to purchase additional land in order to provide the benefits listed above. However, some sportsmen have been concerned about how land purchases are funded.

County commissions have resisted the Department's purchase of lands because those lands were then removed from the county tax base. Private individuals resented the Department taking productive lands out of the hands of citizens who could farm or graze those lands for income. Both groups have felt that the Department has had enough problems managing the lands that they already owned without adding more land.

In order to reduce the resistance to Department ownership of land, several steps were taken. First, the Department introduced legislation that now allows "in lieu of taxes" payments to each county where the Department owns land. This satisfied county concerns. Secondly, the Department decided to focus its acquisition dollars towards: 1) key big game habitat, 2) wetlands capable of producing significant numbers of waterfowl and hunting opportunities, 3) access to waterways for fishing, 4) access for hunting, 5) lands adjacent to existing wildlife management areas, 6) upland habitats close to population centers, and 7) sites for fishing reservoir development (Dept. Policy A-14.04). The purchase of agricultural lands will be avoided, mostly due to their high cost. Also, when possible, easements will be purchased to provide access to the public and not take the land from private ownership.

Department policy A-14.04 states "The primary sources of funds for land acquisition are the Land Acquisition and Habitat Development (HB530) account [I.C. 36-107(c)], the waterfowl Habitat Improvement Program, Pittman-Robertson and Dingle-Johnson funds, Ducks Unlimited M.A.R.S.H. funds, some limited license funds, salmon-steelhead tag funds, and occasionally mitigation funds. Most of these funding sources have some restrictions on the kinds of properties which can be acquired." This policy controls how a particular acquisition can be funded.

For the WMA's within the Southeast Region, additional land will be acquired if some or all of the following criteria are met: 1) the land is adjacent to the WMA, 2) there is a willing seller, and 3) the land provides a benefit to wildlife (winter range, wetlands, etc).

I. Goal: To improve and protect wildlife habitat by acquiring land or easements.

A. Objective: Purchase land adjacent to WMA's.

Strategies:

1. Identify land that is being offered for sale and/or that falls within guidelines.
 - (a) Approach owners with proposals that follow all Department policies.
 - (b) Make neighbors and other agencies aware that the Department is interested in land purchases from willing sellers.

- (c) Advise appropriate County commissions prior to any land purchase, and hold public meetings as requested.
 - 2. Identify land that may be acquired through trades with other individuals and/or agencies.
- B. Objective: Acquire easements on lands that have high wildlife value and are not for sale.
Strategies:
 - 1. Identify land that is not for sale but that is deemed to have important wildlife values.
 - 2. Approach owners with easement options.

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APPENDIX I

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The WMA is named after the town of Sterling, a farming community established in the early 1900's, located just northeast of the management area. The townsite was laid out in anticipation of the flooding of the bottoms to the east by American Falls Reservoir. Sterling seems to have absorbed some other small communities which had been located in or near the bottoms. A store, post office and school were moved from the town of Otis, located in the bottoms to the southeast. A church from the community of Tilden was moved about the same time.

The name "Sterling" was reportedly drawn from a hat and referred to the sterling quality of the soil in the area. The town thrived for a number of years but was becoming a ghost town by the late 1940's, probably due to continuing drought and the consolidation of services at neighboring towns such as Aberdeen.

The wetlands in the area have long been recognized for their recreational value due mainly to the waterfowl they attract. Since the turn of the century the character of the wetlands has varied. Water developments and management practices have constantly evolved beginning with the completion of the Aberdeen-Springfield Canal in 1910. This project brought water from the Snake River up onto the bench, which undoubtedly augmented various wetlands. More recently, drainage of wetlands, deep wells and sprinkler irrigation has caused permanent, or at least seasonal, variations in the water table.

APPENDIX II

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The 3,332-acre WMA consists of 1,952 acres of Department land interspersed with 1,380 acres of Bureau of Reclamation land that is managed by the Department. The landscape is low-rolling, loess-covered lava reefs vegetated by both native and exotic trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses. The area is a mixture of uplands (44%), marshes (25%), wet meadows (10%), open water (10%) and agricultural lands (11%). Approximately 366 acres of the WMA are currently being cooperatively farmed. The elevation is 4,400 feet and the average growing season is 125 days. Annual precipitation is 8-12 inches, most of which falls outside of the growing season. Temperatures range from -30 to 104 degrees Fahrenheit with high winds being common, particularly in the spring.

APPENDIX IV
VEGETATION TYPES

A vegetation map is currently being developed for Sterling WMA using a Global Positioning System. Preliminary results show the following vegetation types and estimated acres:

<i>Vegetation Type</i>	<i>Number of Acres</i>	<i>Percent of Total</i>
Sagebrush (Shrub)	850	25.5
Cattail/Rush (Marsh)	833	25.0
Agricultural	366.5	11.0
Grass (Upland Nesting)	350	10.5
Juncus (Wet meadow)	333.2	10.0
Open Water	333.2	10.0
Russian Olive	266.1	8.0

APPENDIX V

HABITAT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS

Water Management

This program is designed to provide high quality habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds. The Orth and Johnson ponds are designed to give managers the ability control water levels. Levels are kept high in the spring and summer to provide nesting and brooding habitat for waterfowl. The water is lowered in early August to provide feeding sites for migrating shorebirds. Levels are then raised again to provide open water for staging waterfowl and to provide hunting opportunities for sportsmen. Potholes on the Plunkett and American Game segments and ponds on the Plunkett, Thompson, Wells, and American Game segments are managed more by controlling vegetation than manipulating water levels, although some manipulation is possible.

Grazing

The goal of the program is to manage the vegetation to provide high quality nesting cover for waterfowl and pheasants. A new grazing plan is being developed that will better address the timing of grazing with respect to the peak nesting periods in each management segment. Currently, 225 Animal Unit Months (AUM's) are being grazed on the WMA and pastures are rotated on a 3-4 years basis.

Burning

A burning program is being used on SWMA to control emergent vegetation. Burning is being conducted on an infrequent basis during winter.

Chemical Weed Control

An ongoing effort is in place to control noxious weeds with chemical treatments. This program is in response to neighbor concerns and legal responsibilities. (See Issue #8, Appendix X)

Farming

Cooperative farming is being used as a tool to provide habitat benefits that the Department would be unable to provide. Farming agreements are written to provide food plots, dense nesting cover plantings and tree plantings in areas where the Department does not have the ability or means to develop irrigation or plant and raise crops. Specific guidelines are incorporated into the agreements so that any practices used on the WMA are in the best interest of wildlife and habitat.

Agreements are re-evaluated every 3 years to ensure that appropriate compensation is being realized by the Department. All new leases are bid out for the highest compensation possible (Dept. Policy FW-17). A lease may run for 3 years and may be renewed once before it must be re-bid. Inspections are also made regularly to ensure compliance with agreement specifications. Currently, 366 acres are being farmed on SWMA. In return, approximately 62 acres of food plots, 105 acres of nesting cover, and 16 acres of shelterbelts are being maintained.

Russian Olive Management

In conjunction with a waterfowl nesting success study on the SWMA, a program to reduce Russian olive trees has been in progress for the past four years. The study is designed to look at the relationship between Russian olive trees and waterfowl nesting success. In particular, how the trees provide an advantage to depredating magpies. The treatment area consisted of American Game, Vanderford, Harder, Funk, and Fingal segments. All Russian olive trees were removed in this area. An ongoing program is in place to control sprouting and re-introduction of the trees. Results show an increase in nesting success from 2.9% in 1994 to 15% in 1997 within the treatment area (Mayfield estimates). The most recent survey did not include "over water nests." Approximately 600 additional acres will be treated within the Plunkett, Thompson and Wells segments of the WMA. The goal is not to remove all of the trees. Each segment will have some stands left to provide cover and food for wildlife. Those stands will be selected based on: 1) the likelihood that the trees will not readily spread, and 2) the importance of additional cover in the area.

APPENDIX VI

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Developments were initially concentrated on removal of unneeded structures and fencing, the replacement or addition of fencing to facilitate controlled grazing and prevention of trespass grazing, and the construction of parking areas. During the mid-1980's, work on the Orth and Johnson segments providing an additional 50 acres of wetland. The development of the Johnson Segment also included the drilling of a well, installation of an electric pump to augment natural flows into the marsh, and a barrier-free hunting/viewing blind. Also since 1985, the area boundary fences were marked and an extensive signing program was put in place. A large sign was located on state highway 39 and two information centers were located on the property. Access signs were also located on county roads in the area and sign boards were placed at most parking areas with displays of areas maps and regulations. New gates were installed on various administrative access roads with stiles to allow foot traffic. Footbridges and fence stiles were placed strategically over the area to improve public access. Six shrub shelter belts have been planted and cared for through cooperative farming agreements and in conjunction with the Habitat Improvement Program. Forty-eight additional goose nest structures and 27 mallard nest structures were placed on the marshes in the later 1980's to replace or augment available nesting habitat. In cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation, 9 potholes were excavated on the American Game segment (1995), 10 were blasted on the Plunkett segment (1996), 2 were blasted on the Thompson segment (1996), and 7 were blasted on the Fingal segment (1997). In response to neighbor concerns, a dike has been constructed on the Thompson segment to catch run-off from the Thompson agricultural land (1996). This structure has created a pond that is approximately 3 acres in size. Additionally, a culvert has been installed under Midway road at the Johnson segment to allow a neighbor to run excess water onto the WMA and create an additional 15 acres of wetland (1997). As part of a mitigation agreement with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, a private citizen constructed a dike on the Johnson segment to back up the water spilled onto the WMA by the neighbor mentioned above (1998).

APPENDIX VII
FAUNA SPECIES LIST

BIRDS

Ring-necked Pheasant
Grey Partridge
Sharp-tail Grouse
Mourning Dove
Yellow Warbler
Audubon's Warbler
McGillivary's Warbler
Yellow-Breasted Chat
House Sparrow
Western Meadowlark
Brewer's Blackbird
Brown Headed Cowbird
Lazuli Bunting
Evening Grosbeak
Cassin's Finch
American Goldfinch
Green-tailed Towhee
Rufous-sided Towhee
Savannah Sparrow
Vesper Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Brewer's Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Oregon Junco
Common Night Hawk
Calliope Hummingbird
Red Shafted Flicker
Hairy Woodpecker
Eastern Kingbird
Western Kingbird
Western Wood Pewee
Horned Lark
Violet-green Swallow
Black-Billed Magpie
Common Raven
Common Crow
Black-Capped Chickadee
Dipper
Sage Thrasher
Robin
Hermit Thrush
Buby Crowned Kinglet

Cedar Waxwing
Northern Shrike
Loggerhead Shrike
Starling
Warbling Vireo
Marsh Wren
Red-winged Blackbird
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Common Snipe
American Avocet
Black-necked Stilts
Western Grebe
Double-crested Cormorant
Tundra Swan
American Coot
American White Pelican
Herring Gull
California Gull
Franklin's Gull
Forster's Tern
Great Blue Heron
Black-crowned Night
Heron
Snowy Egret
White-faced Ibis
Killdeer
Long-billed Curlew
Willet
Wilson's Phalarope
Snow Goose
Canada Goose
Northern Pintail
Wood Duck
American Widgeon
Mallard
Gadwall
Cinnamon Teal
Green-winged Teal
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Redhead
Canvasback
Lesser Scaup

Ruddy Duck
Ring-necked Duck
Bald Eagle
Golden Eagle
Northern Harrier
Northern Goshawk
American Kestrel
Roughed-legged Hawk
Turkey Vulture
Red-tailed Hawk
Swainson's Hawk
Great Horned Owl
Short-eared Owl

MAMMALS

Mule Deer
Antelope
Blacktailed Jackrabbit
Cottontail Rabbit
Mink
Muskrat
Pocket gopher
Vole
Deer mouse
Marmot
Porcupine
Red Fox
Striped Skunk
Raccoon
Coyote
Badger

REPTILES

Common Garter Snake
Great Basin Rattler
Blue Racer
Gopher Snake
Rubber Boa
Western Fence Lizard
Sagebrush Lizard
Skink

FISH

Chubs

AMPHIBIANS

Northern Leopard Frog
Chorus Frog

APPENDIX VIII
FLORA SPECIES LIST

WETLAND

Rush (*Juncus balticus*)
Spike-rush (*Eleocharis plaustris*)
Sedge (*Carex* spp.)
Cattails (*Typha latifolia*)
Bulrush (*Scirpus acutus*)
Clubmoss (*Lycopodium* spp.)

TREES

Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*)
Juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*)
Willow (*Salix* spp)

SHRUBS

Sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*)
Rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus* spp.)
Greasewood (*Atriplex patula*)
Wild Rose (*Rosa woodsii*)
Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia*)

FORBS

Pigweed (*Chenopodium album*)
Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)
Bull thistle (*C. vulgare*)
Willow-weed (*Epilobium* spp.)
Whitetop (*Cardaria draba*)
Morning glory (*Convolvulus* spp.)
Water hemlock (*Cicuta douglasii*)
Poison hemlock (*C. pacificum*)
Climbing nightshade (*Solanum dulcamara*)
Cinquefoil (*Potentilla anserina*)
Muhlenbergia (*Muhlenbergia asperifolia*)
Asters
Allenrolfea occidentalis
Saltwart (*Salicornia rubra*)

GRASSES

Squirreltail (*Sitanion hystrix*)
Cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*)
Great Basin Wild Rye (*Elymus cinereus*)

Inter. Wheatgrass (*Agropyron intermedium*)
Tall Wheatgrass (A.
Bluebunch Wheatgrass (*A. spicatum*)
Crested Wheatgrass (*A. cristatum*)
Saltgrass (*Distichlis stricta*)

APPENDIX IX

TRAVEL PLAN

The Sterling WMA is open to public travel use with some restrictions.

- Vehicles must remain on established, open roads.
- No overnight camping is allowed.
- Visitors may not harass wildlife during non-hunting seasons.

Eleven parking areas are provided throughout the WMA for visitor convenience: Orth, Plunkett, Thompson, Wells (2), Harder (2), American Game, Vanderford, Johnson, and Funk (Figure 1). Three additional parking areas are planned for the Fingal, Horsch and Little Hole areas.

Unauthorized vehicle access is a problem on the Funk, Fingal and Horsch segment. A signing program and personal contacts are being used to try to reduce this activity. The open topography of the area makes control of unofficial roads difficult.

APPENDIX X

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROCESS

The regional wildlife habitat staff conducted three open house public meetings in March, 1996. The purpose of the meetings was to discuss the future management of the Wildlife Management Areas in the Southeast Region. Meetings were held in Aberdeen, Pocatello, and Soda Springs.

We created displays demonstrating 1995 projects and the future management issues that we had identified prior to the meetings. We encouraged the attendees to give us written or verbal comments regarding management of the WMA's and any issues they felt that we need to address in our future management. We provided comment sheets for this purpose.

Over 400 invitations were mailed to neighbors, cooperators, legislators, sportsmen's groups, land management agencies and concerned citizens. Display advertisements were placed in area newspapers and a news release was issued concerning the open house meetings.

Fourteen people attended the public open house in Aberdeen on March 11, twelve attended the open house in Pocatello on March 12, ten people attended in Soda Springs on March 13 and two people telephoned with their input. The final document will be provided to the public in an open-house forum in February, 1999.

The following is a list of issues mentioned by members of the public at the open house meetings or in written comments with a discussion of each issue.

Issue 1: Establish a fish-rearing facility on BRWMA.

Discussion: This idea was proposed as a method to help speed up the recovery of cutthroat populations in the Blackfoot River system. Fisheries biologists place fertilized cutthroat trout eggs in incubation boxes in some of the Blackfoot River tributaries. When the fry hatch and swim up, they enter the river from these tributaries and, it is hoped, return to these streams to spawn as adults. The project has been implemented with incubation boxes placed in tributaries of the Blackfoot River on BRWMA in 1997 and 1998 and will continue subject to evaluation of its efficacy by regional fisheries biologists.

In 1990, after considerable study of historical data and meetings with the public, the Fish and Game Commission approved an upper Blackfoot system fishery management plan to restore the wild cutthroat trout. The plan included ample harvest opportunity for hatchery trout in the reservoir, selective release of all wild cutthroat in the reservoir and limited harvest opportunity of only post-spawning cutthroat trout in the upper river and tributaries. In October 1997, the Commission approved rules allowing no harvest of cutthroat trout in the upper river and its tributaries. Artificial flies and lures with one barbless hook (no bait) are required as well. The plan also proposed to improve habitat. The 1995 purchase of the Stocking Ranch at the head of the Blackfoot River by the Department was a major boost to habitat improvement, as well as guaranteed sportsmen access to 6.4 miles of the upper Blackfoot River (18.5% of the river's total length) and 1.3 miles of lower Angus Creek. Riparian areas on the BRWMA have been rested from livestock grazing in both 1995 and 1996. Stream bank stability has improved and sedge

and willow communities have expanded. The only uncontrolled aspect of fishery habitat on the BRWMA is the quality of water entering the area from adjacent upstream lands. The proposed land use trade with upstream neighbors will partially alleviate this water quality problem on the BRWMA.

Ideal cutthroat trout habitat exhibits the following characteristics: cool, clean water with deep pools for cover and resting, clean gravel bottom for spawning, aquatic insect diversity, stable stream banks and riparian vegetation for shade and woody debris. We are using available funding and manpower into rehabilitating trout habitat in the Blackfoot River on the BRWMA. With improved habitat, the cutthroat trout numbers will increase.

Issue 2: I would like to see more educational programs for families and children in Bear Lake and Caribou counties.

Discussion: Wildlife Management Areas provide excellent opportunities for educational programs dealing with fish and wildlife habitat. They also provide examples of habitat manipulation practices that can be used to benefit fish and wildlife. However, this issue seems to deal more with educational programs that do not necessarily relate to the management of our WMAs and, therefore, is outside the scope of this document.

We currently work with schools and summer camps to provide speakers on wildlife topics. Conservation officers, biologists and I&E staff make presentations to civic groups, in school classrooms and at outdoor activities. We also use volunteers/school groups to carry out habitat improvement projects.

Issue 3: Big game crossing Highway 30 at Georgetown Summit and are frequently involved in vehicle/game collisions.

Discussion: This continues to be a problem not only at GSWMA, but also at the PWMA (Highway 91) and MWMA (Highway 89). The Idaho Department of Transportation (IDT) has erected warning signs. The cost of building and maintaining a deer and/or elk-proof fence would be prohibitive.

By improving the quality and quantity of the available forage, we are working to reduce depredation problems as well as the incidence of big game/vehicle collisions.

Issue 4: No more money should be spent on pheasants - spend more money on native species.

Discussion: Pheasants are the most popular upland game bird in Idaho. As a result, pheasant production is an important goal at SWMA. However, pheasants are not an indigenous species to Idaho, or even to the United States. Although pheasant hunting has become a traditional past time, there is a percentage of professionals, sportsmen and non-consumptive users who would prefer to focus Department time and finances on the native species of the area (sharp-tailed, sage and forest grouse). The thought is that in order to maintain populations of exotic bird species, if indeed it can be done, unacceptable levels of funding will be required. Since these birds are not evolved for this environment, extensive and expensive alterations are needed to create suitable

habitat. Native species, on the other hand, are suited to this area and can be managed more effectively without having to artificially manipulate the habitat.

In conjunction with the widespread appeal of the ring-necked pheasant is the fact that much of the funding available for upland game bird management is generated by the popularity of pheasant hunting. A major thrust of the Habitat Improvement Program, which is funded by the sale of upland game stamps, is to improve habitat for pheasants and some other upland game birds. Sharp-tailed, sage and forest grouse are not, at this time, included in that program.

Issue 5: No license funds should be spent on nongame projects.

Discussion: Most of the Department programs are funded, either directly or indirectly, by sportsmen dollars. This segment of the population is more interested in consumptive uses of wildlife and, therefore, prefers that their money be used in a way that benefits that type of use. They prefer that dollars generated by license sales go toward improving hunting and fishing. Efforts are being made on a National level to create a means by which the non-consumptive recreational users will also help support Fish and Wildlife programs. But at this time, the major share of wildlife programs are funded by the consumptive users.

All projects that are targeted specifically for a nongame species will be funded through appropriate nongame funds or through donations. Most projects that are funded with license dollars also provide significant benefits to nongame species. However, the reverse is not necessarily true. Many of the nongame projects are nesting structures that are only suitable for nongame species. Most license-funded projects are general habitat-oriented plantings.

Issue 6: Do not use any license fees for the pheasant release program.

Discussion: As mentioned in Issue #4, above, some sportsmen prefer that Department funds go toward the management of native game bird species. In addition to that segment of the Department's constituency, is a group that prefers to put money into managing for wild bird populations rather than game farm pheasants. Pheasants Forever is an example of a group that promotes wild bird management and denounces game farm production.

Research has shown that stocking pheasants is NOT a viable solution to increasing a population. The sole reasoning for the stocking program is to provide hunting opportunity. In addition to not supplementing the wild population, research has also shown that introducing pen-reared pheasants, in fact, can be detrimental to the wild population by attracting predators, spreading disease, and passing on genetic problems. The stocking program currently costs the Department approximately \$50,000 per year for the birds. Department employee time and operating expenses are additional. This program has been in place for many years and has developed a strong support base. Seniors and young hunters seem to most benefit from this type of hunting.

Currently, sportsmen that hunt game farm pheasants on a WMA purchase a WMA pheasant permit. In effect, the people that use the program pay for the program. The permit allows a hunter to harvest 10 pheasants from a WMA where game farm birds are released.

Issue 7: On Sterling WMA, leave 10-20 acre plots of 3-4" vegetation for goose pasture, May through July. Use grazing and burning to achieve and maintain these areas. One acre per 100 acres.

Discussion: As the new grazing plan is developed, consideration will be given to how to best provide goose pasture and not adversely impact waterfowl nesting habitat. Neighbors have brought this point up previously. Although attempts have been made to provide this type of area, they have been ineffective. American Falls reservoir is an extremely large body of water that attracts thousands of geese. The acreage that SWMA could manage for goose pasture is insignificant when compared to the available area around the reservoir. Other landowners adjacent to American Falls reservoir often provide the conditions for goose pasture just by the nature of the land use. These uses, however, typically do not provide high quality nesting cover. A main stumbling block for the Department is the cost and labor involved to adequately fence an area in order to control the grazing intensity that would be required to provide goose pasture. An additional concern would be that this high intensity grazing would be incompatible with the SWMA goal of providing quality nesting cover.

Goose pasture management may be considered for the BRWMA. There again, we will consider the overall need for this habitat component. We will also consider costs in terms of reduced nesting cover which may be at more of a premium than goose pasture.

Issue 8: There is still a weed problem on Sterling WMA.

Discussion: Traditionally, the wildlife profession and agri-business have disagreed on the effects of "weeds". This disagreement has been the root of the neighbor relations problem on SWMA for many years. Wildlife biologists considered the "forb" component (broad-leafed, herbaceous plants) as a critical part of the vegetation that makes up wildlife habitat. The forbs provide density and visual obstruction that increases the chances that a nest will be successful. The agri-business community however saw weeds as a threat to their livelihood in the form of reduced crop production. Eventually it became obvious to the wildlife supporters, that "noxious weeds" are everyone's concern. By law, weeds that are listed as "noxious" must be controlled by landowners. "Noxious" weeds are usually exotic plants that have not evolved with the same natural controls as native plants. The result of a noxious weed infestation is a monotypic plant community that usually is not suited for most wildlife species. These infestations tend to reduce crop and range yields, as well as reduce the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat. It now is accepted that noxious weed control is a problem for everyone. There still is a division between the two groups concerning forbs that are not on the Noxious Weeds list. This may be one of those issues that is never resolved. However, SWMA neighbors do acknowledge that the Department has recognized the problem and is taking active measures to fulfill their responsibility.

A major effort has been made over the past years to control noxious weeds on SWMA. This effort will be continued for as long as necessary or as long as finances allow. Crews of temporary employees have used tractors, 4-wheelers and backpack sprayers to work on problem areas. A helicopter has also been hired for aerial spraying. The Bingham County Weed Supervisor makes periodic checks on the area to help identify problem spots. Logs are kept of the time and dollars spent on this problem.

These efforts to control noxious weeds are carried out just as intensively on all of the WMA's in the region. In particular, Department staff and temporary employees as well as the Bannock County Inmate Labor Detail have sprayed, dug and pulled dyer's woad and white top on PWMA. Department personnel have sprayed dyer's woad, thistle and henbane on GSWMA and MWMA. We have sprayed and pulled Canadian thistle and yellow toadflax on BRWMA. The regional habitat biologist stays in contact with the county weed supervisors in regards to weed infestations, new technologies for controlling weeds and contracting with counties to help control weeds.

Issue 9: Predators need to be controlled on SWMA.

Discussion: For many years wildlife professionals believed that because predators and prey evolved together, predation would not impact a prey species beyond the tolerance of that prey population. Recent research has shown that in some instances this previous theory does not hold true. In cases where habitat quality and/or quantity has been severely degraded or where predator levels are being sustained at unusually high levels, prey populations are being significantly impacted. In particular, waterfowl numbers are being suppressed at unhealthy levels by predators such as feral cats, skunks, foxes and raccoons. All of these predators are maintaining unusually high population levels because of human subsidized den sites and food sources. These subsidies combined with fragmented nesting cover for waterfowl allow the predators to have an insurmountable advantage over nesting birds.

Research has shown that predation on the SWMA waterfowl nests is consistent with that unusually high impact. Since the top priority of SWMA is waterfowl production, a change in management seems to be appropriate. Several possibilities exist which include, but are not limited to, predator habitat management, sub-lethal poisoning, trapping and re-locating, and lethal removal. The statewide goal on WMA's is to achieve 30% nesting success. The recent study showed that SWMA is well below that level. The goals of the WMA do not include removing all predators. The goal is more to create a better balance between predators and their prey.

Issue 10: Do not construct a new building on SWMA

Discussion: A common perception by the public is that the Department spends more dollars on equipment (such as trucks) than on wildlife. In fact, equipment and facilities are critical to the Department being able to effectively carry out its programs.

The "Headquarters" on SWMA is used to store equipment, provide a work area for repairs and construction, and provide a shelter for employees and visitors during meetings and events. The current facility on SWMA is inadequate. The building is not weather proof, animal proof or secure. Equipment and supplies are constantly being damaged by birds and mice. In addition, conditions are conducive to health problems, such as Hantavirus, associated with deer mice. Very little work can be done inside of the building during the winter because of the cold temperatures, rain, wind, and snow accumulation. Equipment that is stored outside of the building is subject to vandalism and theft because of the poor condition of the fence and the remoteness of the compound. Finances will not allow a new building to be constructed entirely

with Department funds. A continuing effort is being made to locate outside cost sharing to help fund the project.

Issue 11: Crop sharing should be stopped on SWMA and that land planted with habitat.

Discussion: The purpose of WMA management is to develop and/or protect wildlife habitat. Every reasonable opportunity to improve habitat is explored, however, financial and/or logistic problems often constrain projects. Because of SWMA's unique situation of being a relatively small area surrounded by intense farming and grazing, habitat enhancements are required to sustain wildlife populations at levels requested by the public. Otherwise, the acreage could not provide the necessary habitat requirements. Additionally, wildlife species such as the ring-necked pheasant are closely linked to agriculture. In order to manage for pheasants, a farming program is necessary to provide the feeding, nesting and wintering habitat. Finally, in an effort to provide a diverse landscape to provide for a variety of wildlife species, woody cover plantings are needed to provide nesting, wintering, loafing and escape cover for nongame as well as game species. Currently, all agricultural land that is farmed on SWMA (approximately 366 acres) is part of the sharecrop program. Cooperating local farmers provide compensation to the Department in exchange for the opportunity to farm on the WMA. The compensation is in the form of food plots, maintenance, planting of trees and nesting cover, and irrigation of trees and nesting cover on the WMA. No cash payments are made to the Department. This form of compensation is critical to the functioning of SWMA. The Department does not have access to equipment or the means to develop irrigation to properly supply the needs of wildlife populations. This program provides the Department with additional habitat developments on the WMA that, otherwise, would not be feasible. However, it is also important that the Department, and the resource, get a fair return on the leases that are made.

Issue 12: Restrict access to roads and trails necessary to satisfy diverse recreation objectives.

Discussion: Part of the mission of WMA's is to provide adequate public access for consumptive and non-consumptive public uses without compromising the quality of the habitat, the wildlife security, or the outdoor experience. License fees have been used in the purchase of WMA property and license holders, as well as others, need to have adequate access to these properties. The questions that arise are "How accessible should the land be?" and "What kinds of access are appropriate?" Foot access does not seem to cause many problems for wildlife during most of the year. An exception in the case of PWMA would be during a severe winter when animals are stressed by the cold temperatures and/or snow levels.

Vehicle access, however, can be detrimental to the quality of wildlife security and to the condition of the animals. Higher vulnerability during the hunting season is also a direct result of increased vehicular access. In addition, many sportsmen and women define the quality of their experience by the amount of traffic or the number of other hunters they encounter during an outdoor experience. The Department has always tried to provide opportunity for a wide range of constituents while protecting wildlife and its habitat.

Issue 13: Neighbor relations need to be improved on SWMA.

Discussion: Since the inception of SWMA, neighbors and sportsmen have voiced concerns with the management practices used on the area. Often, the criticisms or suggestions were contradictory, unrealistic or contrary to the purpose and goals of the WMA. The topics included: "Not enough grazing," "Too much grazing," "Not enough farming," "Too much farming," "Too much wildlife," "Not enough wildlife," "Too many weeds," "Not enough vegetation." There were however, several suggestions that warranted a change and were incorporated. The Department has worked very hard to make sure that neighbor relations receive equal consideration with sportsmen concerns. The Department understands that effective management of SWMA is significantly easier with the cooperation and support of the local landowners. Over the past few years, relations have improved greatly. An ongoing effort is being continued to further improve the relationships with neighbors. An Aberdeen office day has been established to allow better access to Department employees by neighbors. A local working team has been developed that is made up of local landowners, the local Natural Resources Conservation Service District Conservationist, and sportsmen. This group meets to discuss issues, provide input and to help disseminate information. This is part of the increased effort to keep neighbors informed about activities on the WMA. Improving communication is a top priority and several areas for improvement have been identified. However, despite all efforts, there are several chronic issues that may never be completely resolved to the complete satisfaction of some citizens (i.e. goose depredations and weeds). In these instances, it is important that both parties understand the positions and that efforts are made to minimize the impacts.

Issue 14: The public should never be locked out of a WMA. The BRWMA should have some sort of motorized access to forest property on both the north and south side of the river.

Discussion: In comparing this issue with Issue #12, one can see that as WMA managers, Department personnel are caught in trying to satisfy constituents who have varying ideas regarding the kind and amount of access that should be provided on our WMA's. Some sportsmen and women want increased levels of motorized access while other hunters and anglers want to see reduced levels of motorized access. The Department has attempted to provide varying degrees of motorized access on the WMA's in the Southeast Region. Please refer to the travel plans and maps for each WMA.

Motorized access to the Caribou National Forest (CNF) exists on the south side of the Blackfoot River at this time. Access can be gained by fording the river near the southwest corner of the BRWMA and following a four-wheeler trail up a draw along the west boundary of the BRWMA. Also, access can be gained by driving up Kendall Canyon to Mill Canyon at the southeast corner of the BRWMA.

Access to the CNF is also available on the north side of the Blackfoot River by driving up the Rasmussen Valley road and on to a road system on Rasmussen Ridge.

Issue 15: Children, senior citizens and handicapped people need closer access to the Blackfoot River.

Discussion: As stated previously, public access is a major part of the mission of all Department WMA's. This includes access for those of all physical abilities. Varying levels of barrier-free access is considered on all Department properties and is provided based on the level of use at each area. At the current time, the level of use at the BRWMA does not warrant the expenditure of funds and manpower that would be involved in creating barrier-free access. This situation will undoubtedly change as more people use the area for hunting, fishing and outdoor appreciation. We will continue to monitor the level of use and respond to the needs of our users. We will also consider providing barrier-free access at points further downstream that receive higher levels of traffic.

Issue16: Mutual cooperation with other land management agencies (USFS and BLM) to accomplish habitat improvements.

Discussion: Wildlife and their associated habitats obviously cross the jurisdictional boundaries of several agencies and private land ownerships. Cooperation with these other land managers is necessary to provide the best possible habitat for fish and wildlife. We have worked with these agencies on fish and wildlife habitat projects on Department lands and well as on BLM, USFS, IDL and private property.

Projects such as prescribed burns, bitterbrush and Hobble Creek sagebrush plantings and Hobble Creek sagebrush seeding have been carried out on PWMA in cooperation with BLM. We have also planted bitter brush seedlings on critical winter range on BLM land.

The regional habitat biologist is working on a Coordinated Resource Management Plan for the Georgetown Summit area with IDL and private landowners. The Department would then have the opportunity to influence a larger portion of the big game winter range than that encompassed by the GSWMA. We also work with IDL and USFS in the BRWMA area on grazing and logging issues.

Issue 17: Exclude livestock grazing on elk calving meadows on the BRWMA.

Discussion: The presence of domestic livestock can displace elk from traditional calving areas. Therefore, the timing of any livestock grazing that occurs on the BRWMA should be such that it does not interfere with elk calving. Any livestock grazing done on the BRWMA must be consistent with the mission of the area and will be timed so as not to conflict with wildlife production and/or use of the BRWMA.

APPENDIX XI
FEDERAL AID PROJECT STATEMENT AND PROGRESS REPORT
Southeast Region Habitat Management

WEST HABITAT DISTRICT AND STERLING WMA

Management Priorities:

1. Waterfowl Production
2. Public Hunting
3. Pheasant Production
4. Other Wildlife Appreciation and Production

ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY CODE	UNITS OF WORK		COST		COMMENTS
		Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	
WATERFOWL PRODUCTION						
Management Program - Provide nesting cover						
Provide grass/legume nest cover	1211	2 weeks 80-100 acres		1,800		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Treatment of nest cover through grazing	1211	2 week 300 acres		1,800		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Noxious weed control	1211	8 weeks		7,200		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Manage water level	1211	1 week		900		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Monitor Russian Olive Removal	1211	4 weeks		3,600		Species benefited: Waterfowl

ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY CODE	UNITS OF WORK		COST		COMMENTS
		Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	
Monitor muskrat populations and manage trapping	1460	.5 weeks		450		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Service mallard nest structures	1211	27 structures 1 week		900		Species benefited: Waterfowl
Service goose nest structures	1211	78 structures 1 week		900		
Management Program - Provide brood habitat						
Maintain escape cover and water levels	1211	1 week		900		Species benefited: Waterfowl
Provide goose pasture through controlled grazing	1211	1 week 2-5 acres		900		Species benefited: Waterfowl
Management Program – Monitoring						
Conduct Hunter Survey	1460	3 weeks		2,700		Species benefited: Pheasants and Waterfowl
Conduct brood survey, breeding pair counts, nest searches, and monitor use of all nest structures (assisted by research/game management)	1460	100 structures 3 weeks		2,700		Species benefited: Waterfowl
Management Program - Provide access						
Maintain parking areas	1332	12 parking areas 1 week		900		Species benefited:
Upgrade one parking area	1332	1 week		900		Species benefited:
Maintain Handicap blind	1334	1 week		900		Species benefited:

ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY CODE	UNITS OF WORK		COST		COMMENTS
		Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	
Maintain gates, stiles, and foot bridges	1211	2 weeks		1,800		Species benefited:
Maintain signs/information boards	1211	2 weeks		1,800		Species benefited:
Maintain hunting cover and provide food plots to attract game	1322	3 weeks		2,700		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Enforce regulations and WMA management policies	30 (M)	2 weeks		1,800		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
PHEASANT PRODUCTION						
Management Program - Provide Brood Stock						
Provide shelterbelts/shrub thickets - storm cover	1322	21 acres 4 weeks		3,600		Species benefited: Pheasants
Provide high energy grains adjacent to storm cover	1322	25 acres 1 week		900		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Provide brood habitat - treat with grazing/burning	1211	2 weeks		1,800		Species benefited: Pheasants
Management Program - Provide Nesting Habitat						
Provide nesting cover by fencing	1211	2 weeks		1,800		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Provide irrigated grass/ legume nesting cover through coop. farming	1211	90 acres 1 week		900		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
Management Program – Monitoring						
Conduct crow counts, nest searches and brood surveys (assisted by research/game management)	1460	2 weeks		1,800		Species benefited: Pheasants

ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY CODE	UNITS OF WORK		COST		COMMENTS
		Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	
Assist with duck nesting success research	1460	1 week		900		Species benefited: Waterfowl and Pheasants
OTHER WILDLIFE APPRECIATION AND PRODUCTION						
Management Program – Production						
Provide shelterbelts/shrub thickets	1322	(See pheasant production)				Species benefited:
Service kestrel and bluebird nest boxes	1211	25 boxes .5 week		450		Species benefited: Kestrels and bluebirds
Install additional nest boxes	1211	10 boxes .5 week		450		Species benefited: Kestrels and bluebirds
Management Program - Provide viewing opportunity						
Provide brochure, species lists, signs, information boards and parking areas	1211	.5 weeks		450		Species benefited:
ADMINISTRATION						
Management Program - Provide technical assistance						
Review environmental impacts of proposed projects	1710	5 projects .5 week		450		Species benefited:
Assist landowners on wildlife management practices	1720	25 landowners 1 week		900		Species benefited:
Management Program – Administrative Duties						
Coordinate with "Adopt-a-Wetland" group to maintain a portion of wetlands	1211	15 structures .5 week		450		Species benefited: Waterfowl

ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY CODE	UNITS OF WORK		COST		COMMENTS
		Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	
Develop planning documents, review, and evaluate	1630	5 documents 1 week		900		Species benefited:
Provide tours and information on policies and goals, respond to concerns of neighboring landowners	1630	3 weeks		2,700		Species benefited:
Maintain files; prepare administrative documents (reports, budgets, purchasing requests, time sheets, etc.)	1630	4 weeks		3,600		Species benefited:
Other duties (as assigned)	1211	2 week		1,800		Species benefited:
Management Program - Cooperation with other agencies						
Attend coordination meetings, tours, and meetings related to projects by land management agencies	33	3 weeks		2,700		Species benefited:

Total PR Contract With Overhead	\$0
Other Funds	\$62,100
Grand Total	\$62,100

NARRATIVE

This project will provide for the production of about 200 goslings, 1,000 ducklings, and 200 cock pheasants. This project will provide 4,000 man-days of hunting opportunity and 2,000 man-days of wildlife viewing opportunity. The project will provide 70 acres of high energy grain for winter food and 1,600 acres of dense winter storm cover.

Additional technical and financial assistance will be given to private landowners through the Habitat Improvement Program (15 weeks). Technical review of projects that may impact wildlife habitat off the project area will require 5 weeks of work.

During FY 99, noxious weed control will continue to be a major issue. Helicopter spraying will be utilized to treat approximately 400 acres on the WMA.

An intensive effort will be made to treat any Russian olive stumps that sprout in the American Game, Harder and Vanderford study areas. Additionally, the Thompson, Wells and Plunkett segments will be targeted to have trees removed.

A hunter survey will be conducted during the fall to determine hunter use of the WMA. This survey is done every 5 years.

Sterling Wildlife Management Area Plan

Submitted by:

Dean Rose, Regional Habitat Biologist

Date:_____

Reviewed by:

Paul Wackenhut, Regional Habitat Manager

Date:_____

Tom Parker, State Habitat Manager

Date:_____

Approved by:

Dexter Pitman, Regional Supervisor

Date:_____