

SMITH CREEK

Author: Earl Chapin

Site P-1 — Map P-1

Highlights: Black Swift, Boreal Chickadee, White-winged Crossbill

Major Habitats: Mixed Conifer Forest

Location: Boundary Co., 24 miles northwest of Bonners Ferry

Spring: N/A **Summer:** *** **Fall:** ** **Winter:** N/A

Just six miles from Canada, this 30-mile-long route will take you to Idaho's northern-most birding spot. All of Idaho's boreal bird species can be found here.

DIRECTIONS:

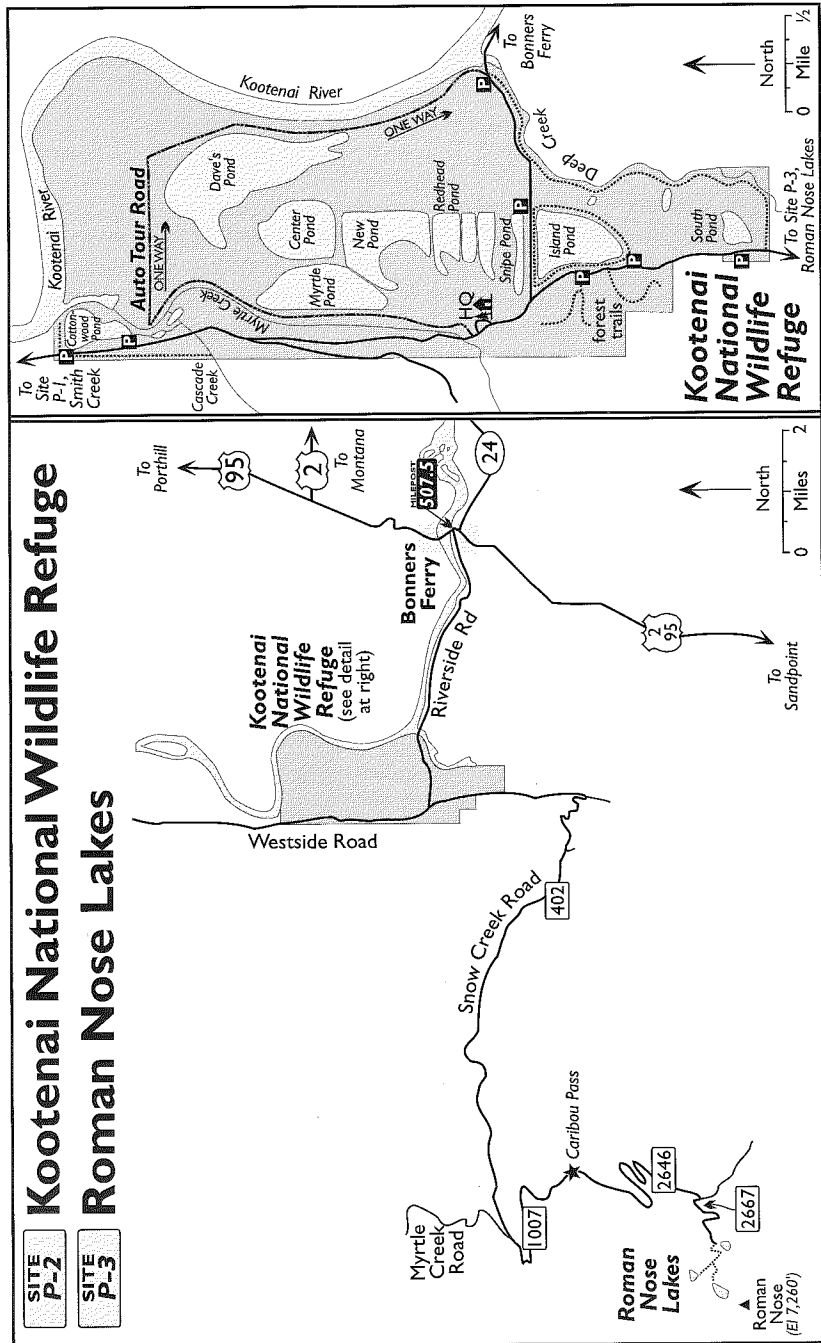
From Bonners Ferry follow US 95 north 14 miles. At milepost 522.9, turn left (north) on ID 1 (toward Porthill) and zero your mileage. At mile 1.0 turn left (west) on Copeland Road (toward Sportsman Access). At the Y at mile 2.2, continue straight (west) and cross the Kootenai River at mile 2.7. Stop to bird the bridge area, which can be very productive. Continue west to mile 4.7 and the T intersection. Turn right (north) onto Westside Road and follow it about 9 miles. (Mileposts here are marked with small white square signs.) At milepost 22.6 (mile 13.7), follow Westside Road as it makes a sweeping left curve and becomes FR 281 heading up Smith Creek. This is all public land (FS). (Mileposts here are the regular brown-and-white rectangular signs used by the FS.) FR 281 is paved for 6 miles, then turns to gravel. There's a pit toilet at milepost 6.5. Stay right at the Y at milepost 7. At milepost 7.9, FR 281 turns left (south; toward Westfork Lake), while FR 655 continues west (toward Shorty Peak) along Cow Creek.

BIRDING:

As you ascend FR 281, watch for Spruce Grouse along the road. The entire area by the FR 655/281 junction is excellent birding. Look in any forest opening (creeks, clearcuts, meadows) for flying Black Swifts. This is Idaho's most dependable spot for this elusive, enigmatic species. In forest areas, watch and listen for Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Boreal Chickadees, and White-winged Crossbills, as well as for a variety of more typical mixed conifer forest species.

The best place to look for Boreal Chickadees is along the first 3 miles of FR 655 west of the FR 655/281 junction. You'll cross a cattle-guard 1.2 miles west of this junction. Boreals are usually found within a few hundred feet either up or down the road from here. They are typically mixed in with other chickadees, nuthatches, and warblers, so look at every flock carefully.

A nice side trip is to backtrack all the way down FR 281 to where milepost 0 would be, and turn left (north) onto graveled Boundary Creek Road (a.k.a. FR 2450). In 0.4 mile stay left at the Y, and in about another mile you'll reach



the junction of FR 2450 and FR 2258. FR 2258 continues upstream along Boundary Creek. If the road is gated, walk. The first 3 to 4 miles are very good birding. At times as many as 25 to 30 Varied Thrushes can be seen along the road.

OTHER:

Bonners Ferry is a full-service community. A FS map can be very useful. Maps may be purchased at the FS station (208/267-5561) in Bonners Ferry (at US 95 milepost 505.2). It's possible that a Grizzly Bear could be somewhere in this general area, so remain alert.

KOOTENAI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Author: Earl Chapin

Site P-2 — Map P-2/P-3

Highlights: Waterfowl

Major Habitats: Wetland, Meadow

Location: Boundary Co., 5 miles west of Bonners Ferry

Spring: *** **Summer:** *** **Fall:** *** **Winter:** *

Large expanses of cattail marsh are rare in the Idaho Panhandle, making 2,774-acre Kootenai NWR a unique birding spot. Over 200 bird species have been recorded here. The refuge's location at the south end of the Purcell Trench increases the probability of finding vagrants.

DIRECTIONS:

Just south of the Kootenai River bridge at the north end of downtown Bonners Ferry, turn west at US 95 milepost 507.5 toward Kootenai NWR. Immediately bear right onto paved Riverside Road and follow it and the Kootenai River toward Kootenai NWR. Stay on pavement, and after about 5.5 miles you'll reach headquarters. Stop for a map and a checklist.

BIRDING:

The best way to bird the refuge is to drive the graveled 4.5-mile-long auto tour road that begins at headquarters, then hike along the 5 miles of trail. The 1.5-mile-long Island Pond Wildlife Trail has interpretive stops around a cattail marsh. Be aware that the auto tour is closed on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and weekends during the fall waterfowl hunting season.

Kootenai NWR can be a great spot for both waterfowl and shorebirds. In spring and fall Greater White-fronted Geese sometimes rest here, while Tundra Swans, Canada Geese, Barrow's Goldeneyes, and tens of thousands of Mallards stop by every year. Red-necked Grebe, American Bittern, Bald

Eagle, Gray Partridge, and Black Tern are a few of the more interesting local breeding species. Watch for American Redstarts, too.

Rare species recorded at the refuge include White-winged and Surf Scoters, Great and Cattle Egrets, White-faced Ibis, Black-necked Stilt, Stilt Sandpiper, and Barn Owl. In winter, this is the best place in Idaho to find Common Redpoll flocks (check for Hoaries) feeding on seed plants surrounding the marsh. Deer and Coyotes are common, and there is usually a Moose or two living in the swamps.

OTHER:

Bonnars Ferry is a full-service community. Kootenai NWR headquarters (208/267-3888) is open weekdays 8 am to 4:30 pm. See also Roman Nose Lakes, the next site.

ROMAN NOSE LAKES

Author: Earl Chapin

Site P-3 — Map P-2/P-3

Highlights: Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers

Major Habitats: Mixed Conifer Forest

Location: Boundary Co., 12 miles west of Bonners Ferry

Spring: N/A **Summer:** ** **Fall:** * **Winter:** N/A

The Selkirk Mountains extend south from British Columbia, forming a long narrow peninsula. This is the most "boreal flavored" of Idaho's mountain ranges. It's here that the state's Woodland Caribous and Grizzly Bears precariously hang on to existence.

DIRECTIONS:

In Bonners Ferry turn west at US 95 milepost 507.5 (just south of the Kootenai River bridge) toward Kootenai NWR. Immediately bear right onto paved Riverside Road and follow it and the Kootenai River toward Kootenai NWR. After about 5 miles (inside Kootenai NWR) you'll come to a Y. Go left (south) onto the gravel road (Westside Road; unmarked). In another 3 miles, turn right (west) onto graveled FR 402 (a.k.a. Snow Creek Road) and head up Snow Creek. On the 20-mile-long trip to Roman Nose Lakes, both the road and the trails are well-marked. Stay on the well-traveled, well-maintained road. There are only two ungated roads. The first is about ten miles up FR 402; there, stay left (south), crossing Snow Creek, rather than dropping down Myrtle Creek Road. After crossing Snow Creek, the main road changes from FR 1007 to FR 2646 and finally to FR 2667. At mile 18, turn right toward Roman Nose Lakes. The road ends at Roman Nose Lake #3. From the trailhead here, it's an easy 3-mile round-trip to Roman Nose #1 and #2.

BIRDING:

Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks, Downy, Hairy, Three-toed, and Black-backed Woodpeckers, Clark's Nutcrackers, both kinglets, Swainson's and Hermit Thrushes, and Pine Grosbeaks frequent this area. This is a beautiful hike, and huckleberries are abundant in July and August.

OTHER:

A FS map can be very useful. Maps can be purchased at the FS station (208/267-5561) in Bonners Ferry (US 95 milepost 505.2). Bonners Ferry is a full-service community. See also Kootenai NWR (p. 25) and Smith Creek (p. 23).

WESTERN SELKIRKS

Author: Earl Chapin

Site P-4 — Map P-4

Highlights: Spruce Grouse, Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers

Major Habitats: Mixed Conifer Forest

Location: Bonner Co., 30 miles north of Priest River

Spring: N/A **Summer:** *** **Fall:** ** **Winter:** N/A

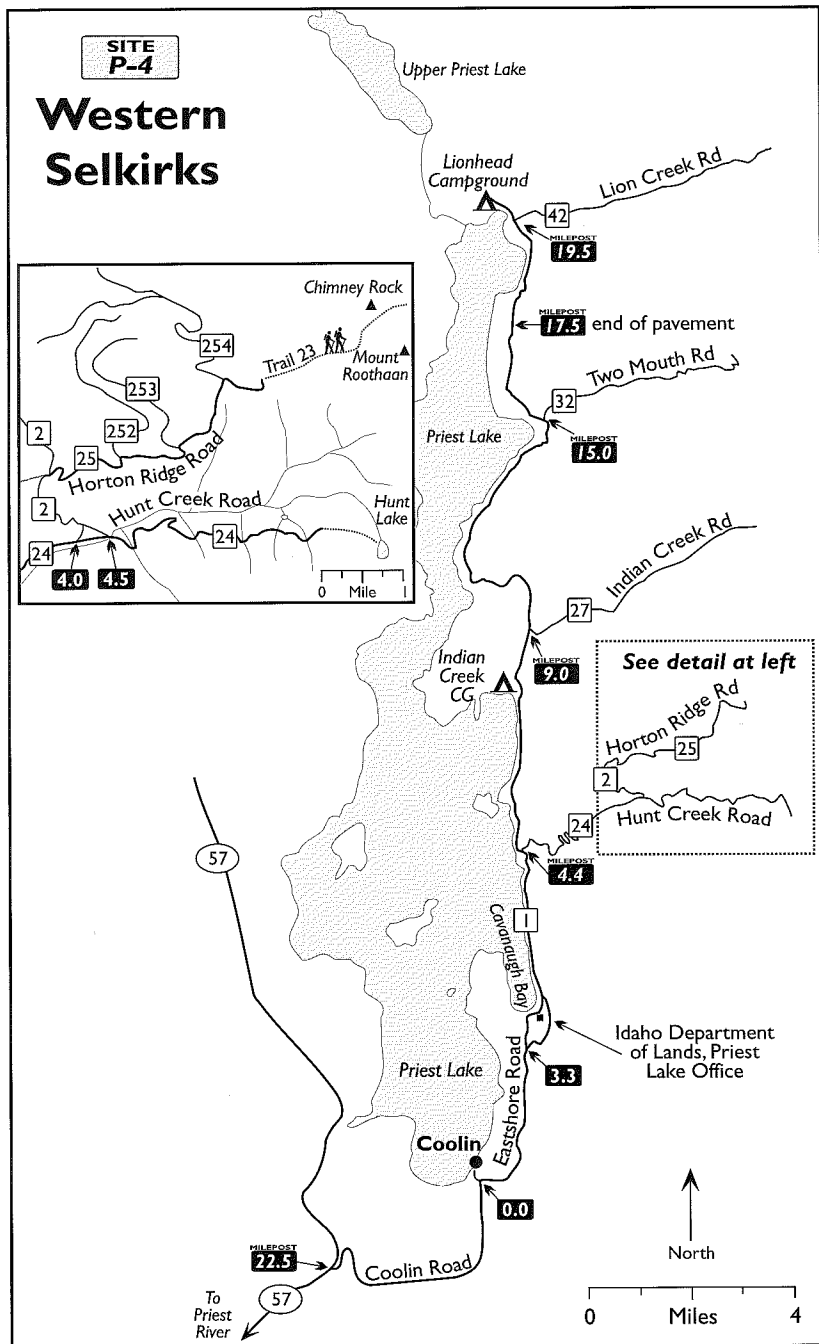
The Priest Lake area is very popular with fishermen, but it's largely unexplored by birders. What exciting finds occur on or around Priest Lake is anyone's guess. For finding boreal species, however, your best bet is to leave the lake behind and head up the western slope of the Selkirk Mountains.

DIRECTIONS:

From the junction of US 2 and ID 57 in Priest River (US 2 milepost 5.9), follow ID 57 (a.k.a. Westside Road) north. At milepost 22.5, turn right (east) on Coolin Road. The junction of ID 57 and Coolin Road is commonly called Dickensheet Junction on maps, although nothing on the ground identifies it that way. Follow Coolin Road northeast to Coolin in 5.4 miles.

In Coolin turn right (east) onto Eastshore Road (a.k.a. Road 1), zero your mileage, and follow the sign for "Priest Lake State Park" and "Cavanaugh Bay." At mile 3.3 turn left (north) and follow the paved road about one mile to the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) Priest Lake Area Office. Stop and buy a \$3 map and check on recent road closures and conditions. Continue straight to the stop-sign and turn left (north) onto Eastshore Road. Follow it as it parallels the east shore of Priest Lake for about 20 miles. Eastshore Road is paved to milepost 17.5.

There are several roads that head east from Eastshore Road into the Selkirks. All of these roads cross public land (IDL). Roads are maintained for logging, not for recreation. They are numbered but without detail. Road



numbers increase heading both north and east. An IDL map and an orienting compass can be helpful. A high-clearance vehicle is a must, and except for the drier portions of August and September, 4-wheel-drive is warranted. The best roads for birding are Hunt Creek (Road 24) at milepost 4.4, Horton Ridge (Road 25) accessed from Hunt Creek, Indian Creek (Road 27) at milepost 9, Two Mouth Road (Road 32) at milepost 15, and Lion Creek Road (Road 42) at milepost 19.5.

An explorer's attitude can be vital for birding this area. There is no one place to investigate, and even if there were, logging, road-building, and bird movements constantly change the situation, anyway.

BIRDING:

All roads mentioned above are good for Spruce and Blue Grouse, Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers, and Clark's Nutcrackers, as well as for the more common mixed conifer forest species such as Swainson's, Hermit, and Varied Thrushes, Black-headed Grosbeaks, and Fox Sparrows. Other interesting species possible include Northern Goshawk, Barred Owl, Boreal Chickadee, Pine Grosbeak, and White-winged Crossbill.

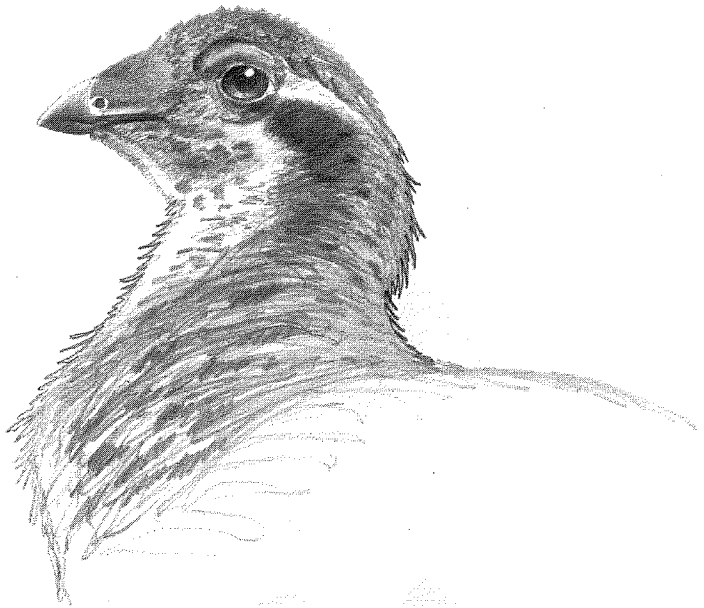
My favorite route is Hunt Creek Road (a.k.a. Road 24). From milepost 4.4 on Eastshore Road, zero your mileage and head uphill. Stay right at the Ys at miles 2.1 and 4.0. There's another Y at mile 4.5 marked with a sign discussing reforestation of burned land. Go left (east) along the north bank, rather than take the rough, rocky road along the south bank. Hunt Creek Road ends at a trailhead in another 4 miles.

Another great spot is Mt. Roothaan, which is at the end of the Horton Ridge Road (a.k.a. Road 25). Access to Horton Ridge Road from Eastshore Road is now blocked, so start by heading up Hunt Creek Road, staying right at all Ys. If you happen to see Road 2 veering off to the left at about mile 4, go for it (see map). Otherwise, continue to the aforementioned Y at mile 4.5 marked with the reforestation sign. Make a U-turn and backtrack 100 feet across the culvert (Hunt Creek) and head up the gravel road to the right (Road 2). In a mile this brings you to Horton Ridge Road. Turn right (east) onto Horton Ridge; almost immediately Road 2 heads off to the left. As of this writing, there are three roads (252, 253, 254) heading off from Horton Ridge Road, each about a mile apart and each heading off to the left. Horton Ridge Road is the most reliable spot for Spruce Grouse in this entire area. The last 0.5 mile of road is very rough. From the trailhead at road's end, it's about a 3-mile hike to Chimney Rock. This beautiful alpine area is the only place in the Idaho Panhandle where American Pipits are known to nest. White-tailed Ptarmigans have been reported in the meadows on the east side of Chimney Rock. To get to this area you must go between Roothaan and Chimney Rock. Stay just to the north base of Roothaan and go east over the saddle, which requires rock scrambling, but not technical rock climbing.

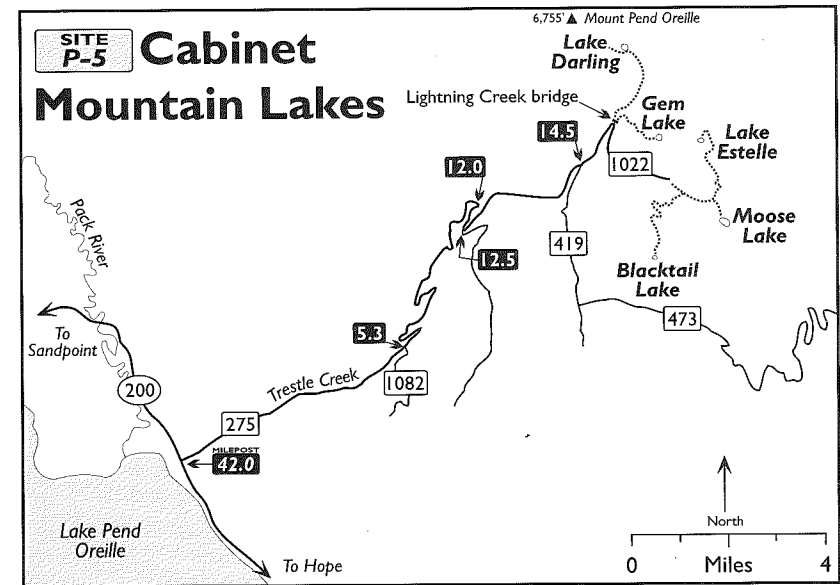
OTHER:

Developed campgrounds (pit toilets, water, picnic tables, boat launch) are available at Indian Creek and Lionhead along the east shore of Priest Lake. Both parks are open during winter for snow camping. Indian Creek also has a trailer dump and a park store open in season (weekends in May and full-time June to September). Priest Lake SP Headquarters (208/443-2200) are at Indian Creek. Camping reservations are recommended.

Fuel, food, and lodging are available in Priest River. Other services are available in Sandpoint, Idaho, or Spokane, Washington. The IDL Priest Lake Area Office is open 8 am to 5 pm weekdays (208/443-2516). *100 Hikes in the Inland Northwest* (see p. 321) can be very useful.



Blue Grouse
Mike Denny



CABINET MOUNTAIN LAKES

Author: Earl Chapin

Site P-5 — Map P-5

Highlights: Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill

Major Habitats: Mixed Conifer Forest, Wetland

Location: Bonner Co., 20 miles northeast of Sandpoint

Spring: N/A **Summer:** ** **Fall:** ** **Winter:** N/A

The Cabinet Mountains mark the boundary between Idaho and Montana. The rugged, remote wilderness guarded by these peaks has low bird diversity and density, but it is one of Idaho's best places to look for "boreal" species. The most enjoyable aspect however, is the opportunity to take long hikes through beautiful high-elevation forest and alpine tundra on your way to crystal-clear mountain lakes.

DIRECTIONS:

From downtown Sandpoint take US 95/US 2 north about 2 miles to the junction with ID 200. Continue straight (east) on ID 200 about 13 miles. At milepost 42, turn left (northeast), zero your mileage, and follow graveled FR 275 up Trestle Creek for 16 miles. (At mile 4.7 there is a pit toilet.) Stay left at the Y at mile 5.3. At mile 12 is a T; go right (south; not toward Lunch Peak). At about mile 12.5 stay left at the Y. You'll reach the junction of FR 275 and FR 419 near mile 14.5. Turn left (north; not Clark Fork), and go up

the Lightning Creek drainage toward "end of road." You'll reach the trailhead area by Lightning Creek Bridge at mile 15.5. All land here is public (FS).

Just before the bridge is the 2-mile-long, "easy" Trail 52 to Lake Darling. On the north side of the creek, about 200 yards beyond the bridge, is the 1-mile-long "moderate" Trail 554 to Gem Lake. You can drive about 2 miles farther along FR 1022 to the trailhead for Moose Creek Trail 237, Lake Estelle Trail 36, and Blacktail Lake Trail 24. The trails for Lake Estelle and Blacktail Lake branch off Trail 237. It's an "easy" 3-mile hike to Lake Estelle, an "easy" 1.5-mile hike to Moose Lake, and a "moderate" 3-mile hike to Blacktail Lake.

BIRDING:

On your drive up Trestle Creek, watch the roadsides for Spruce Grouse, and keep an eye out for Three-toed or Black-backed Woodpeckers flying across the road. The best birding, however, is along the lakes themselves. Regular summer species include Red-tailed Hawk, Vaux's and Black (rare) Swifts, Red-naped Sapsucker, Downy, Hairy, Three-toed, Black-backed, and Pileated Woodpeckers, Olive-sided and Hammond's Flycatchers, Gray and Steller's Jays, Clark's Nutcracker, Common Raven, Black-capped, Mountain, and Chestnut-backed Chickadees, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Mountain Bluebird, Swainson's, Hermit, and Varied Thrushes, Cassin's and Warbling Vireos, Townsend's, Yellow-rumped, MacGillivray's, and Wilson's Warblers, Western Tanager, Pine Grosbeak, Cassin's Finch, Red and White-winged Crossbills, and Pine Siskin. In fall, American Pipits and Lapland Longspurs have been found in the short grass around the lakes. Expect to see Moose on nearly every trip to Gem, Moose, Darling, and Blacktail Lakes.

OTHER:

There is good trout fishing at all the lakes. A FS map can be very helpful, and can be purchased at the FS office (208/263-5111) in Sandpoint. The book *100 Hikes in the Inland Northwest* (see p. 321) can be useful, as well. See also Sandpoint to Beyond Hope Route, the next site.

SANDPOINT TO BEYOND HOPE ROUTE

Authors: Earl Chapin, Kas Dumroese

Site P-6 — Map P-6

Highlights: Waterfowl, Shorebirds, Bobolinks

Major Habitats: Wetland, Meadow

Location: Bonner Co., Sandpoint

Spring: **** **Summer:** *** **Fall:** **** **Winter:** ****

Sandpoint's city beach is one of Idaho's most dependable birding hotspots. The beach's sand is a precious commodity, since the rest of Lake Pend Oreille's (pond-o-RAY) long shoreline is mostly mud or rock. Many Idahoans believe that Pend Oreille is the prettiest lake in the entire state. Its huge size and bountiful fishes attract hundreds of diving birds, particularly loons, grebes, and bay ducks. Although beautiful vistas are found around the entire lake, the best birding is usually along the northeast shore. This 35-mile-long route starts in Sandpoint and ends near Clark Fork.

DIRECTIONS:

This route begins in Sandpoint, at the intersection of US 95 North and US 2 East. From here, go north about 1 block, then turn right (east) on Bridge Street and follow it 0.1 mile to the city beach (go through the underpass).

BIRDING:

The city beach is always worth a visit. Check the jetty to the north of the beach, as well. In winter and spring large rafts of diving ducks, including Greater Scaup, can be seen. Rare species have included Pacific Loon, Little Blue Heron, Black, Surf, and White-winged Scoters, Oldsquaw, American Golden-Plover, Snowy Plover, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Short-billed Dowitcher, Little, Mew, Iceland, Glaucous, and Sabine's Gulls, and Common, Arctic, and Least Terns. Many of these were first state records, which emphasizes the importance of this tiny, productive vagrant trap. A few Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings are seen every October to November.

Backtrack to US 95/US 2 and turn right (north), following it through downtown Sandpoint, then turn right (north) following US 95 toward Canada. In about 1.5 miles, continue straight (east) on ID 200 toward Hope.

At milepost 35, ID 200 reaches Oden Bay. Turn right (south) at the Sportsman Access and go under the railroad bridge, then turn left (east) onto Sunnyside Road, zero your mileage, and follow Sunnyside as it parallels the water. The wet fields along the first three miles of Sunnyside attract Franklin's, Bonaparte's, and Ring-billed Gulls in spring. In summer, this is a good place to find a variety of seedeaters, especially finches and sparrows. In