

HAGERMAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Author: Jack Trotter

Site SW-25 — Maps SW-25/SW-26 and SW-25

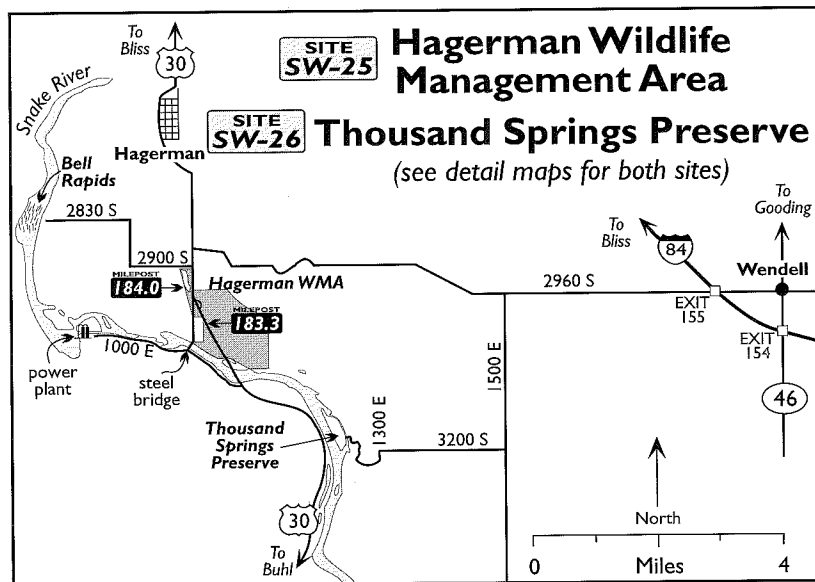
Highlights: Waterfowl

Major Habitats: Wetland, Farmland

Location: Gooding Co., 10 miles west of Wendell

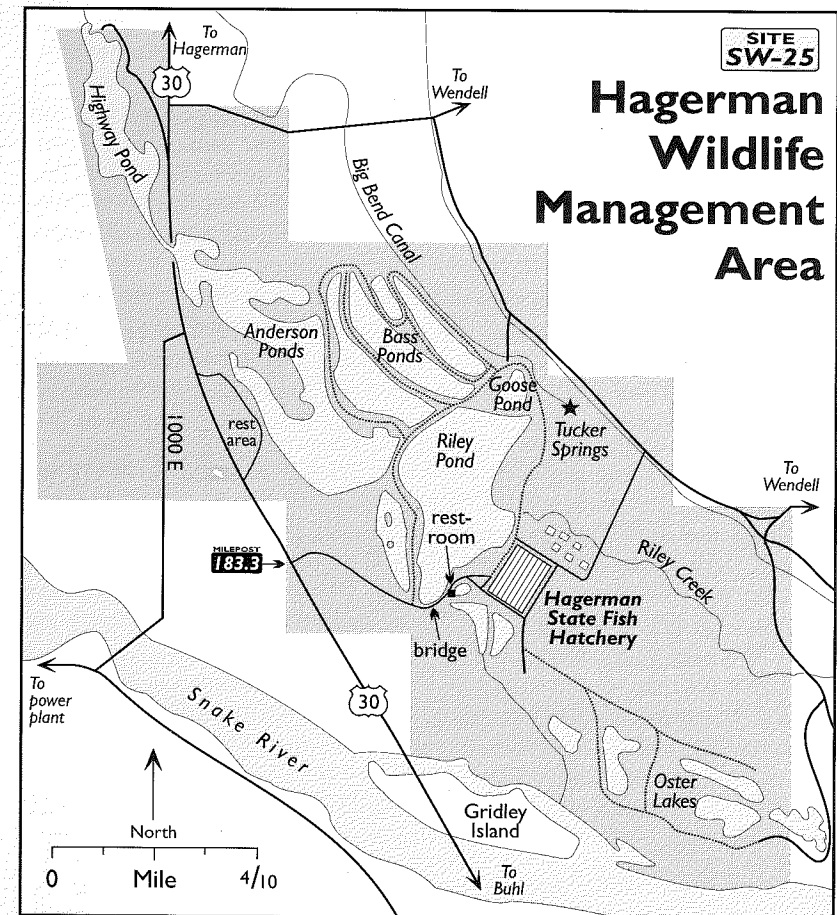
Spring: ** **Summer:** ** **Fall:** *** **Winter:** ****

Hagerman WMA and the entire Hagerman Valley can be productive birding anytime. During winter it can be truly incredible. Over 100,000 ducks loaf in the marshes here. The surrounding fields, pastures, tree groves, and riparian habitat add to the great diversity of birdlife.



DIRECTIONS:

To bird your way from I-84, zero your mileage at Exit 155 (Hagerman/Wendell) and follow Hagerman Highway (a.k.a. 2960 S) west toward Hagerman. Species to watch for include White-faced Ibis, California Quail, Chukar, Gray Partridge, Long-billed Curlew, and Barn Owl in the farmland and rimrock habitats. In about 9 miles turn left (south) at the T intersection onto US 30. After 0.2 mile turn right (west) on 2900 S (signed "Sportsman Access Bell Rapids"). In 1.0 mile bear right (north) at the Buckeye Ranch sign. In another 0.6 mile take the left (west) turn onto 2830. Stay straight in 0.5



mile at the intersection of 2830 S and 850 E. The road ends at the Snake River's Bell Rapids boat dock in another mile.

BIRDING:

In summer look around Bell Rapids for Cinnamon Teal, Northern Harriers, Black-necked Stilts, American Avocets, and Common Snipe. In winter and migration you might find Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes, Lesser and Greater Scaup, Oldsquaws (rare), and Bald Eagles.

After investigating Bell Rapids, return to US 30 and continue south another 0.5 mile. At US 30 milepost 184, park on the right (west). Look in the large pond (West Pond) on the west side of the road for various waterfowl. Search the surrounding trees for Great Horned Owls, Western Screech-Owls, Yellow-breasted Chats, Bullock's Orioles, Lazuli Buntings, and more. The

wonderful slough on the east side of the highway is full of Marsh Wrens, and it is also good for Virginia Rails and Soras...but highway noise is sometimes a problem.

Continue south on US 30 for another 0.2 mile. At milepost 183.8 turn right (west) on 1000 E and head south toward Upper Salmon Falls Power Plant. After crossing the bridge, turn right (west) and head downstream, sorting through the diving ducks. At mile 2.1 bear right (west) toward Power Plant Substation A in 0.4 mile. Park at the road end and scan for migrating or wintering loons, grebes, and waterfowl.

After returning to US 30, continue south. Be sure to stop at the rest area at milepost 183.6. You can have fabulous birding here. A portion of the WMA's extensive marsh complex borders the rest area's levee. During summer walk this dike to get close views of Pied-billed Grebes, Double-crested Cormorants, Virginia Rails, Common Yellowthroats, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. Be sure to listen for Warbling and Plumbeous Vireos, and look for vagrants such as Northern Mockingbirds. In winter look for rare Swamp, White-throated, and Harris's Sparrows among the White-crowned Sparrows, and sort through the incredible concentrations of Mallards and Wood Ducks for Eurasian Wigeons. Be sure to watch for American Bitterns, Great Egrets, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Trumpeter Swans, Ross's Geese, scoters, Ospreys, Golden and Bald Eagles, gulls, and Caspian, Forster's, and Black Terns throughout the WMA.

About 0.3 mile south of the rest area, turn left (east) at US 30 milepost 183.3 onto graveled State Fish Hatchery Road and follow it 0.4 mile toward the state fish hatchery. Park on the left (north) just before the bridge. You have a good view of open water here and can walk north on the network of levees for more birding. Idaho's first Tufted Duck wintered here in 1996/1997 amid thousands of Ring-necked Ducks and Lesser Scaup. There's another good viewpoint for this pond just across the bridge. Additional exploration can be very worthwhile. About 0.2 mile east of the bridge is a small rest area (restroom and picnic area) which is a favored Black-crowned Night-Heron roost site. Continue driving around the fish hatchery raceways and walk more of the trail maze for Great Horned Owls, Belted Kingfishers, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Spotted Towhees, and American Goldfinches. The trails near Oster Lakes (see WMA brochure) are especially recommended.

OTHER:

Hagerman offers fuel, food, accommodations, and an RV park. Contact the WMA (208/324-4359) for additional maps and information. See also Thousand Springs Preserve, the next site.

THOUSAND SPRINGS PRESERVE

Author: Chris O'Brien

Site SW-26 — Maps SW-25/SW-26 and SW-26

Highlights: Clark's Grebe, Waterfowl

Major Habitats: Shrub-steppe, Deciduous Forest

Location: Gooding Co., 22 miles northwest of Twin Falls

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

Thousand Springs Preserve, owned and operated by The Nature Conservancy, covers 425 acres along 2.5 miles of the Snake River. The preserve is characterized by spectacular waterfalls and transparent spring creeks. It's a lovely place to bird, especially in winter when mist rises off the creeks and giant icicles edge the waterfalls.

DIRECTIONS:

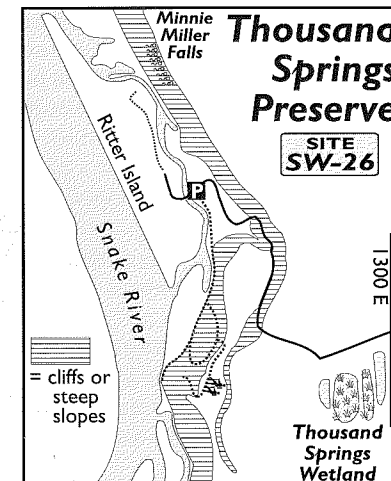
From I-84 Exit 155 follow Hagerman Highway (a.k.a. 2960 S) west. After 3.5 miles turn left (south) on 1500 E and go 2.5 miles. Turn right (west) on 3200 S and drive 2 miles to the T intersection. Turn left (south) on 1300 E for 0.2 mile, then right (west) on Thousand Springs Grade, a mile-long dirt road that descends into the Snake River Canyon and ends in a public park owned by Idaho Power Company. Park here.

The preserve contains mainland and island portions, both accessed from the Idaho Power Company parking lot. The mainland portion (Lower Road, Columbine, and Split Rock trails) is open every day. The island portion (Ritter Island) is open Friday through Monday, Memorial Day to Labor Day. During other times Ritter Island is open only when staff is available; call ahead.

BIRDING:

MAINLAND PORTION

From the parking lot scan Ritter Creek to the west for waterbirds, then hike south along Lower Road Trail (a.k.a. River Road Trail). Check the dirt bank for nesting Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Pass round the "No Vehicle Access" gate, then continue through a small grove of River Birch. Within 100 yards a massive waterfall crashes down on your left (east) and Ritter Creek is again visible to your right (west). Look here for Great and Snowy Egrets, assorted waterfowl,



Belted Kingfishers, and American Dippers. Continue past the second walk-around gate, scanning the cliff to your left (east) for nesting Red-tailed Hawks, Cliff Swallows, and Canyon Wrens, among the resident Rock Doves. Rails, Marsh Wrens, and Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds nest in the sumac and bulrush to your right (west).

Continue south another 100 yards to the half-mile-long Columbine Trail, which is narrow and steep but very pleasant. The trail loops up the sagebrush-covered hillside to your left (east), then enters a surprisingly cool juniper grove fed by underground springs (look for wild columbine by the little bridge) and back down to Lower Road. Great Horned and Barn Owls often roost in the junipers. In winter you may find a Northern Goshawk. From the top of Columbine Trail, the quarter-mile-long Split Rock Trail leads to the cliff top and a stunning vista. Keep your eyes peeled for White-throated Swifts, Rock Wrens, and Lazuli Buntings. From the top of Split Rock look south across the wildlife area, checking creeks below for Great Blue Herons, Black-crowned Night-Herons, Wood Ducks, Mallards, Gadwalls, and Green-winged Teal. Northern Harriers often sky-dance in the fields below you, while Golden Eagles do the same above.

Return to Lower Road Trail and continue south another 0.25 mile to a bend, with the Snake River directly to your right (west). Check again for waterfowl, as well as for Western and Clark's Grebes and American White Pelicans. In fall you may see an occasional Common Loon or Tundra Swan. A few steps farther and you'll encounter a gate which closes off the south part of the reserve.

RITTER ISLAND

If the gates on the bridge are open, you can explore 70-acre Ritter Island. Once across the bridge, stop at the information booth and look for the occasional wintering Mountain and Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches in the conifers. Follow the driveway through the historic Minnie Miller Guernsey Farm. Look for nesting American Kestrels in the orchard and check flower beds for visiting hummingbirds. (Please be unobtrusive; staff members live in some of the houses.) Continue through the farmstead on the 0.5-mile trail to Minnie Miller Falls overlook, which is the best place from which to see Wood Ducks (if you sneak). It's also a good spot to look for Great Blue Herons, Belted Kingfishers, Common Ravens, and Song Sparrows.

Russian-olive trees near the Minnie Miller Falls overlook are worth checking for wintering songbirds; accipiters know this, too! During winter it may be productive to hike around the island to look for ducks in the creek and the river. Be careful not to disturb the duck-hunters who often congregate along the river's edge. You will likely put up occasional flocks of Dark-eyed Juncos and White-crowned Sparrows. Watch for Bald Eagles, too, since several of them hunt this area from December to March. At trail's end stop in the huge old dairy barn; a Western Screech-Owl can often be found roosting in the hayloft.

CANOEING

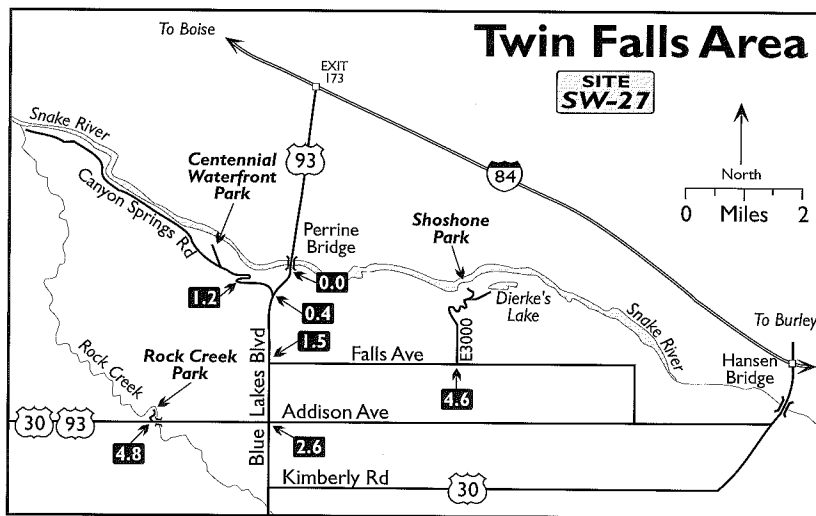
The best way to see the preserve is by canoe. Put in at the Idaho Power Company parking lot's boat ramp and float south down Ritter Creek, then paddle upstream on the Snake River. Virginia Rails and Soras may be spotted in bulrush marshes, and you'll hear many Marsh Wrens. Two miles upstream from the mouth of Ritter Creek is an island heronry (Great Blue Herons, Black-crowned Night-Herons, and Cattle, Snowy, and Great Egrets) which is full of birds year round. Nesting activity is most vigorous during April to June. Please watch from the east bank; *don't approach the island during the nesting season*. Two miles beyond the heronry you will arrive at Blue Heart Springs, which is well worth the trip. You'll see all kinds of herons, raptors, and gulls, and possibly Caspian and Forster's Terns.

THOUSAND SPRINGS WETLAND

As you drive back up the grade to leave the preserve, pull in at the Thousand Springs Wetland sign just before the dirt road reaches the paved county road. When there is water in the ponds (April into October), they are well worth checking for White-faced Ibises, Long-billed Dowitchers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Long-billed Curlews, Willets, Marbled Godwits, and Wilson's Phalarope. Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets nest here. When the water level is up, look also for ducks. You may walk from the wetland sign along the berm between the sediment basin and filter strip; *please stay away from the rock house (by the deep pond), which is a private residence*.

OTHER:

The nearest fuel is in Wendell or Hagerman. Motels and restaurants are in all surrounding communities. The Idaho Power Company park has picnic tables and restrooms, as well as a boat ramp. Several private campgrounds are nearby. For more information, contact the preserve (208/536-6797). See also the Hagerman WMA, the previous site.



TWIN FALLS AREA

Author: Jack Trotter

Site SW-27 — Map SW-27

Highlights: Rock and Canyon Wrens, Yellow-breasted Chat

Major Habitats: Deciduous Forest, Cliffs

Location: Twin Falls Co., Twin Falls

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

Birding Twin Falls means visiting three beautiful parks. In spring and early summer this trip might yield 50 to 60 species, while in winter 30 to 50 species are more likely.

DIRECTIONS:

From I-84 Exit 173 follow US 93 south toward Twin Falls. At the south end of Perrine Bridge (the one over the Snake River Canyon), zero your mileage and continue south on US 93 (a.k.a. Blue Lakes Boulevard).

BIRDING:

CENTENNIAL WATERFRONT PARK and CANYON SPRINGS ROAD

At mile 0.4 turn right (west) on Canyon Springs Road and follow it into the Snake River Canyon. At the first deep curve (mile 1.2), carefully park and enjoy the waterfall to the west. The power poles or trees on the canyon rim overhead often entice resting Turkey Vultures and Golden Eagles, and the area can be alive with Bullock's Orioles. As you drive farther, you'll see

swallow nest-holes in the dirt bank on the right (south). Look here for Bank, Cliff, Northern Rough-winged, Violet-green, and Barn Swallows and listen for Rock and Canyon Wrens. At mile 1.4 park at the switchback and take the uneven trail bearing right (upstream). This shrubby area can be vibrant with spring birdsong! Watch for MacGillivray's and Yellow Warblers, Yellow-breasted Chats, and White-crowned, Song, Lark, and Vesper Sparrows.

After your hike, drive the new road into Centennial Park (the right fork). You'll reach the lower parking lot at mile 1.8. California Quail might be present in the brushy orchard just west of the boat launch. Bald Eagles have nested across the river. The rock bluff overlooking the boat area is good for winter waterfowl-viewing and deserves frequent visits.

ROCK CREEK PARK

From the south end of Perrine Bridge, follow Blue Lakes Boulevard south to mile 2.6, then turn right (west) on Addison Avenue (a.k.a. US 30 and US 93). At mile 4.8 turn right (north) into Rock Creek Park. At the bottom of the short hill (mile 5) is a wet rock wall on the left (west). This area draws migrating warblers in the spring, in addition to the more common Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Cedar Waxwings, American Robins, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Warblers, House Finches, and American Goldfinches. Check the cliff face and nearby areas for Western Kingbirds, Rock Wrens, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Western Meadowlarks. Through the open area you'll find mature trees and pavilions. In the mature trees look for Mourning Doves and Bullock's Orioles. As you walk toward the creek, watch for Mallards, Belted Kingfishers, and Barn and Northern Rough-winged Swallows.

One of the best areas is the path leading downstream (north) which begins at the parking area after you cross Rock Creek. Watch the mature trees and rock bluffs for Western Screech-Owls, Willow Flycatchers, House Wrens, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Western Tanagers.

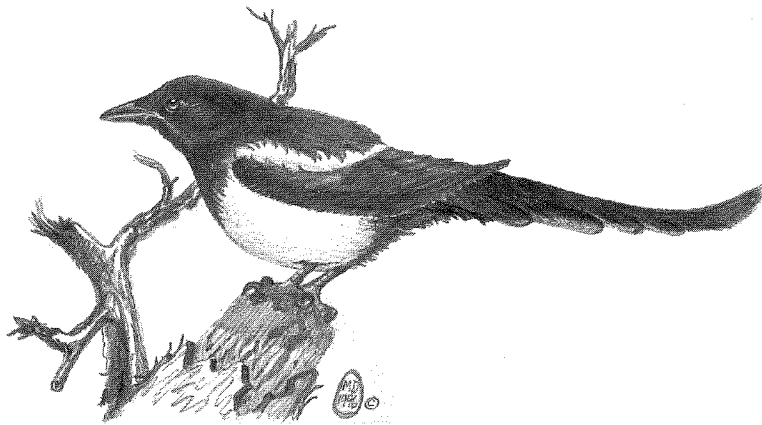
SHOSHONE PARK and DIERKE'S LAKE

From the south end of Perrine Bridge, follow Blue Lakes Blvd. south to mile 1.5, then turn left (east) on Falls Avenue. At mile 4.6 turn left (north) on E 3000 (signed for Shoshone Falls). Hawks, swallows, and Rock and Canyon Wrens can often be seen on your way to Shoshone Park. Be sure to pick your pull-over spots carefully, and watch out for Sunday race-drivers! Just past the ticket booth (fee), the road forks at mile 6.1. The right fork leads to Dierke's Lake in 0.3 mile. The left fork descends to Shoshone Park. The picnic area and trail around Dierke's Lake offer the best habitat. The complete trail loop has uneven rocky parts requiring some climbing, but the effort is often worthwhile. Birds along this trail are similar to those at Rock Creek Park, except that here one occasionally finds gulls, terns, Bald and Golden Eagles, Downy Woodpeckers, and Townsend's Solitaires. Owls seen or heard here have included Great Horned, Western Screech-, and Northern Saw-whet (rare).

The pond in Shoshone Park may have Pied-billed Grebes. The park's mature trees offer the best spot for Western Kingbirds, "Solitary" and Warbling Vireos, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Warblers, Lazuli Buntings, and Bullock's Orioles. Just behind the snackbar, a poorly formed trail runs west (downriver); it can yield a few more shy species.

OTHER:

Twin Falls is a full-service community. For more information, call the Chamber of Commerce (208/733-3974).



Black-billed Magpie
Mike Denny

NIAGARA SPRINGS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Author: Chuck Trost

Site SW-28 — Map SW-28

Highlights: Waterfowl, Raptors, Canyon Wren

Major Habitats: Shrub-steppe, Deciduous Forest, Wetland

Location: Gooding Co., 7 miles south of Wendell

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

With three miles of river frontage protected from development, Niagara Springs WMA provides access to a relatively pristine section of the Snake River. Besides being a good birding spot, this area is also visually impressive—the Snake River Canyon here is 0.5 mile wide and 500 feet deep!

DIRECTIONS:

To reach Niagara Springs WMA from Wendell, take I-84 Exit 157, zero your mileage, and drive south on Rex Leland Highway (a.k.a. Orchard Valley Road, a.k.a. 1950 E). You'll see the rim of the Snake River Canyon at about mile 6. At mile 6.7 follow the road through the sharp left (east) turn and descend into the gorge. Turn into the WMA's main entrance on the right (south) at mile 7.2 to explore the WMA's west side, or continue east another 0.8 mile to the WMA's east entrance.

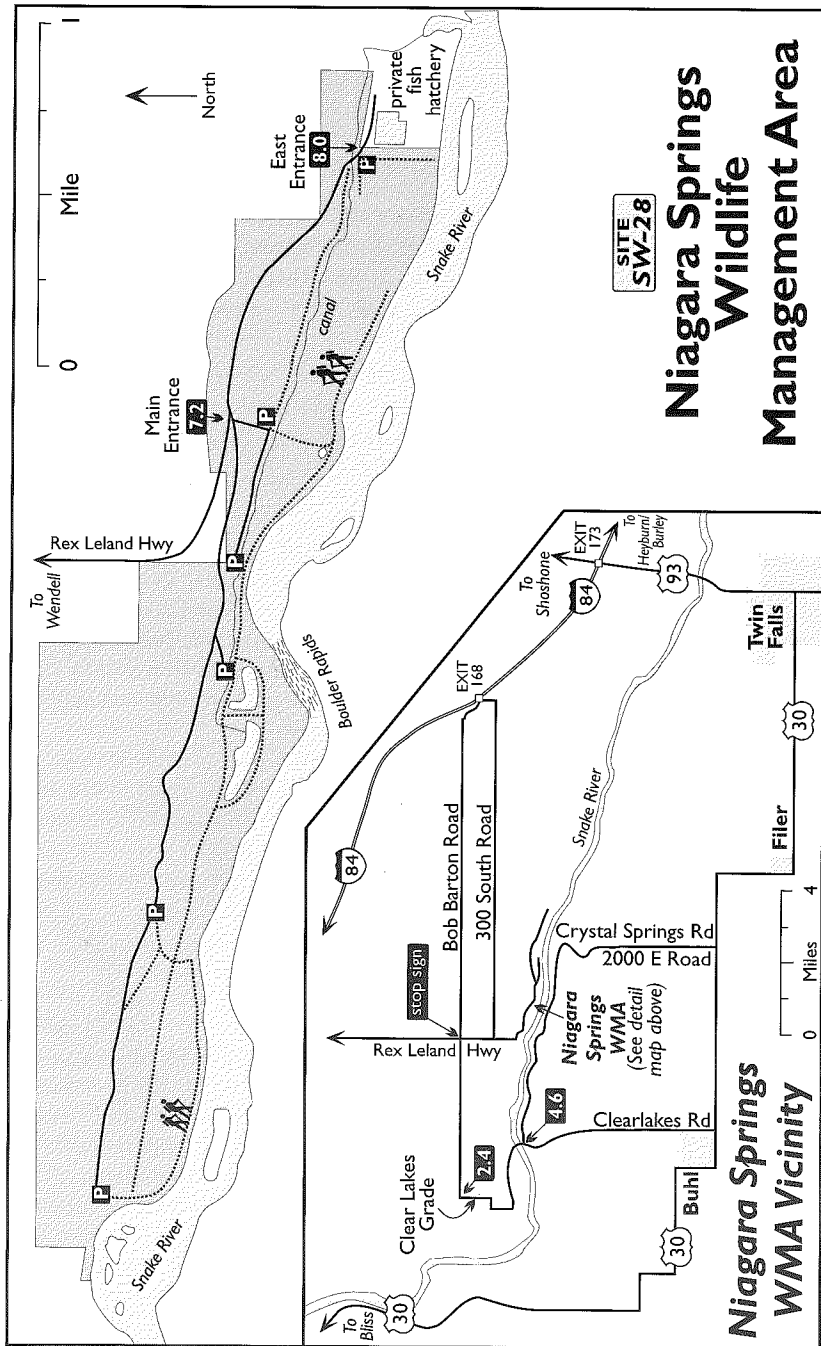
The main entrance road creates a short loop on an unimproved road. *Be careful not to get stuck in the sand.* There's a (usually) gated road at the west parking lot. From here you can bird either along the river or along the talus slope.

The WMA's east entrance parking lot borders a private fish hatchery. There are several paths that lead down to the river.

IDFG keeps all gates locked except during the fall hunting-season. All roads and paths, however, are open to public hiking year round.

BIRDING:

The best birding is from September to June. Because of its low elevation, the canyon stays relatively warm during winter, attracting Black-crowned Night-Herons and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Gray-crowned Rosy-Finches (watch for Blacks, too) also winter here, roosting in Cliff Swallow nests on the basalt cliffs. Russian-olive patches are good for wintering Cedar Waxwings, American Robins, White-crowned Sparrows, and Evening Grosbeaks, attracting Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks and Northern Shrikes. The abundant Black-billed Magpies don't give the raptors much peace, though! Watch carefully for an occasional Harris's, White-throated, or even Golden-crowned Sparrow in the flocks of White-crowned Sparrows.



In spring and summer check the two ponds about a mile west of the main entrance for waterfowl, Marsh Wrens, and Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds. Golden Eagles, Red-tailed Hawks, and Prairie Falcons are commonly seen in the WMA during this time of year.

Outside of the nesting season, check scattered nest boxes for Western Screech-Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls. Throughout the year listen for Canyon Wrens giving their lovely slurring whistle from the talus slopes, and watch for Chukars and Rock Wrens. A few California Quail coveys live in the area (most likely in Russian-olives lining the canal).

The best way to bird the river is from the access road along the south bank. To get there, leave the WMA and backtrack up the hill 2.2 miles to the four-way stop-sign. Re-zero your mileage and take a left (west) on Bob Barton Road (see map). At mile 2.4 bear left (south) on Clear Lakes Grade and follow it across the Snake River. As soon as you reach the south bank (mile 4.6), take a left (east) toward Magic Valley Fish Hatchery. This road overlooks the river along most of its length before climbing out of the canyon at mile 10.6. Along the way watch for wintering species such as Double-crested Cormorant, Canada Goose, American Wigeon, and Mallard, as well as Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Redhead, and Common and Barrow's Goldeneyes.

OTHER:

Wendell offers fuel, food, and lodging. Other services are available in Jerome, Buhl, and Twin Falls. About 0.5 mile east of the WMA's east entrance is Niagara Springs SP, which has a campground, picnic area, and restrooms. For more information and a bird checklist, contact IDFG (208/324-4359) in Jerome.

The geological history here is worthy of a visit in itself. The WMA's basalt was formed from lava originating near Flat Top Butte about 3,500,000 years ago. The Snake River has cut a deep trough through this rock mass, with considerable help from the famous Bonneville Flood, which began near far-off Oxford Slough.

