

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Minidoka

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Minidoka serves as an oasis that attracts wildlife from miles around.



*Great blue heron
(left)*

*Western grebe
(below)*



About the Refuge



Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge is located on the Snake River Plain in south-central Idaho, 12 miles northeast of Rupert. It includes about 80 miles of shoreline around Lake Walcott, from Minidoka Dam upstream about 25 miles.

About half of the refuge's 20,699 acres is open water and wetlands. In this arid landscape, these resources serve as an oasis drawing numerous wildlife species from miles around. Many species use the bulrush and cattail habitat that lines the lake's small bays. Others use the willows, cottonwoods and other trees growing near shorelines. The rest of the refuge is low, rolling uplands covered by sagebrush, grasses and isolated juniper patches amongst scattered outcrops of basalt.

The climate is semi-arid with about 11 inches of precipitation a year, much of it falling as snow during the winter. Summers are hot and dry with highly variable rain during thunderstorms. Winters are generally moderate but windy. The elevation is about 4200 feet.

A Conservation President

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt created several refuges by Executive Order, including Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge. He stated the purpose of these refuges as "preserves and breeding grounds for native birds." Four subsequent Executive Orders by Presidents Taft, Hoover and F. D. Roosevelt increased the size of Minidoka and added "other wildlife" to the refuge's purpose.

Lake Walcott and Minidoka Dam

Construction of the Minidoka Dam and power plant on the Snake River began in 1904 to provide water for irrigation and hydroelectric power. The reservoir created behind the dam became known as Lake Walcott. In this dry region, the lake and surrounding uplands quickly attracted a large number and variety of wildlife, setting the stage for this area's establishment as a refuge.

Management Today



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages the refuge. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation operates the dam and power plant and controls water levels in the reservoir. The Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation manages Walcott State Park, a 30 acre park near the dam that offers campgrounds, picnic areas and a boat ramp. The park is a fee area and refuge headquarters are within the park.

Great horned owls



Flyway Links

Minidoka is one link in a chain of many Federal and State refuges in the Pacific Flyway that provide habitat for a variety of species during migration each year. Waterfowl are the most abundant migratory wildlife using the refuge.

Two male redheads in courtship display



© Chuck Trost

Molting Areas and Waterfowl

Unlike most birds which molt wing and tail feathers one at a time, waterfowl lose their wing and tail feathers all at once and remain flightless for a month while the feathers grow back.

The refuge's secluded bays free of disturbance, with lush beds of vegetation, can attract 100,000 molting ducks and geese from July through September. During spring and fall migrations, over 500 tundra swans use the refuge.

Tundra swans



© Günther Matschke

A Haven for Waterbirds

Open water, marshes and mudflats provide habitat for an assortment of waterbirds. Western and Clark's grebes, American coots and killdeer are commonly seen. Careful observers may also see common loons and shorebirds, such as willets, American avocets and Wilson's phalaropes.

Colony-Nesting Habitat

Some birds depend on mutual defense and isolation to protect their nests from predators. Rather than nesting alone, they nest in dense colonies on small, isolated islands or in groves of tall trees. Often, several species nest together in one colony. By acting together, they can repel most predators.



Killdeer

Colony nesters on the refuge include western and Clark's grebes, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, snowy egret, black-crowned night-heron, American white pelican, California gull and an occasional great egret or cattle egret. Portions of the refuge are closed to public access during the nest season to protect the colonies from disturbance.



Young double-crested cormorant (above)

Black-crowned night-heron (right)



© Gary C. Will

Important Bird Area



© Gunther Matschke

Belted kingfisher

The variety of habitats at Minidoka supports a diversity of birds not found in most areas of Idaho. Over 230 species have been seen on the refuge. Because of the colonies and concentrations of waterfowl, the refuge has been designated an Important Bird Area of Global Importance by the American Bird Conservancy. Some non-migratory species such as sharp-tailed and sage grouse, ring-necked pheasant, gray partridge, and some songbirds are present all year long. Other species only occur during summer or migration.

Bald Eagles



© Gunther Matschke

Adult and immature

Bald Eagles can be seen regularly during the fall and winter. Whether perched in a tree, foraging for fish below the dam, or sitting on the ice feeding on waterfowl, they are always a majestic sight. Look for them in large trees around the park during the winter. It takes 4 to 5 years before bald eagles get their white heads, so look carefully to distinguish young bald eagles from golden eagles.

Mammals



© Donn E. Larsen

Porcupine (above)

A wide variety of mammals occur on the refuge. Mule deer are commonly seen near the headquarters. Pronghorns can be found in small numbers in the wide open sagebrush. Smaller mammals often seen are beaver, cottontail, jackrabbit, muskrat, porcupine, raccoon, striped skunk, mink, coyote and several species of bats. River otters can be seen on occasion. Rare species include cougar, bobcat, elk, and moose.

River otter (right)



© Gary C. Will

Wildlife Viewing Tips

Plan your visit according to the season and time of day. Wildlife are more active in mornings and evenings than during midday.

Your car is an excellent observation and photographic blind. Staying in your car will avoid frightening wildlife, providing you with better and longer viewing opportunities.

Human voices and sudden movements scare wildlife. When hiking minimize talking and move slowly.

You will see more wildlife if you leave pets at home. They will scare wildlife before you get a chance to see it.

Use binoculars and spotting scopes to bring animals "closer" to you without disturbing them.

Binoculars, camera, identification guides, insect repellent, sun screen, water and food will make your experience more rewarding.



American avocet

Beaver



Snowy egret



Pelicans in flight

Please be considerate; an exciting viewing opportunity for you could be a life or death situation for wildlife. Don't make trails to nests, cut vegetation near nests so you can get a clear picture, or pick up baby animals.

Rattlesnakes are part of the native wildlife at Minidoka. Be mindful when walking in deep vegetation.

Raccoon



Coyote



Sagebrush



Pronghorn antelope

Critical Plant Species

Sagebrush is a unique plant community composed of plant species superbly adapted to this region's hot dry summers with snowy winters. On first glance, sagebrush communities look uninspiring, but few experiences can equal a spring morning walk in the sage after a nighttime rain. The smell of the sage, the bird songs and blooming flowers almost overwhelm the senses.

Sagebrush is a critical plant species for many animals, such as sage grouse, sage sparrow, Brewer's sparrow and sage thrasher. Without large expanses of sagebrush, these species will continue to decline. Pronghorns and mule deer rely on sagebrush for winter food and cover all year long.

Wildfire

Prior to arrival of settlers, wildfires were a natural part of the sagebrush ecosystem and occurred about every 50 to 100 years. Now fires are becoming more frequent and native vegetation cannot recover between them. Some plants resprout after fire, but sagebrush must grow from seed.

Weedy species that have little wildlife value, such as cheat grass, increase with frequent fires. This fosters even more wildfires and more rapid loss of native sage habitat.

Sagebrush habitat is declining everywhere, putting a strain on wildlife. Over half of the refuge's uplands have burned in the last ten years. Less than two percent of the sagebrush habitat in the Snake River Plain remains in good condition.

Spring showers bring out the wonderful scent of sage.

© Gunther Matschke

Fire Tips



© Gunther Matschke

Burrowing owls nest in the sagebrush rangelands.

Red-tailed hawk

Open fires are not allowed on the refuge. Fires are allowed in designated sites in Walcott State Park.

Do not park in dry grass. The catalytic converter on your car could ignite a fire.

Stay out of the back country on hot, windy summer days. You could be caught by a fast-moving fire.

Report fires to the refuge office or to the BLM Fire Dispatch Center in Shoshone (1-800-974-2373).



Bee plant, a splash of color in the sagebrush



© Gunther Matschke

USFWS photo by Mike Johnson

Geology

Southeastern Idaho is one of the more geologically interesting areas in the country.

Yellowstone Hot Spot



Fleabane growing in basalt rock

The black volcanic rock you see everywhere is basalt, the legacy of the Yellowstone Hot Spot, a geologic phenomenon deep under the earth's crust. It causes extremely large and violent eruptions of rhyolite every few millions years, interspersed with the type of activity you see at Yellowstone National Park today.

The Hot Spot remains stationary while the earth's crust moves over it. As the crust moves away, the ground subsides and the explosive volcanism is replaced by oozing basalt flows. The Hot Spot was once under southwestern Idaho and the scar of the earth's path over the Hot Spot is visible today as the Snake River Plain.

Geologically speaking, the basalt eruptions are still going on. The last one was about 3,000 years ago at Craters of the Moon National Monument north of the refuge.

Basin and Range

Starting about 17 million years ago, the entire Intermountain West has been stretching apart, creating a series of narrow mountain ranges interspersed with narrow valleys. Geologically, this area is known as the Basin and Range Province. The spreading stopped

Great Rift

drainage to the sea and formed the land-locked Lake Bonneville, now known as Great Salt Lake. You can see this Basin and Range topography in the mountains and valleys north and south of the refuge.

Northeast of the refuge is a unique feature known as the Great Rift where crustal spreading created cracks in the basalt flows several hundred feet deep. The Great Rift is part of Craters of the Moon National Monument.

Bonneville Flood

About 14,500 years ago, Lake Bonneville overflowed a natural earthen dam at Red Rock Pass near Preston, Idaho. The lake covered some 25,000 square miles including most of Utah, eastern Nevada and part of southern Idaho. The flood dropped the lake level by some 350 feet. Geologists have estimated that the flow was almost 60 times that of the Amazon River and lasted for about 2 months.

You can see signs of the flood throughout the Great Basin: from old shorelines on mountain sides around Great Salt Lake, to boulder deposits and scablands all along the Snake River, to dry waterfalls and canyons just upstream from the refuge, to wider river valleys near Pocatello and to the waterfalls and deep canyons in the Snake River near Twin Falls, Idaho. Near the refuge, the water spread over the plain and the river was miles wide.

Canyons created by the Bonneville Flood between Minidoka NWR and American Falls / USFWS



A Matter of History

Indians and Emigrants

Most emigrants considered the Snake River corridor an inhospitable place, hot and dry. To them it was a place to get through, not a place to settle. To Native Americans it was home and an area that they treasured.

Oregon Trail

The North Alternate Branch of the Oregon Trail ran across the north side of the refuge. Although some stretches of the trail are now under water, ruts from the wagons can still be seen in many places.

The main trail ran south of the Snake River and branched into the California and Oregon Trails in the Raft River Valley about one mile south of the refuge. Look for the white Oregon Trail markers.

Gold

From the late 1800s to the early 1900s, most of the river from Raft River downstream to Milner Dam was sluiced and dredged by miners seeking placer gold. There was a gold mill below the dam just below the rapids.

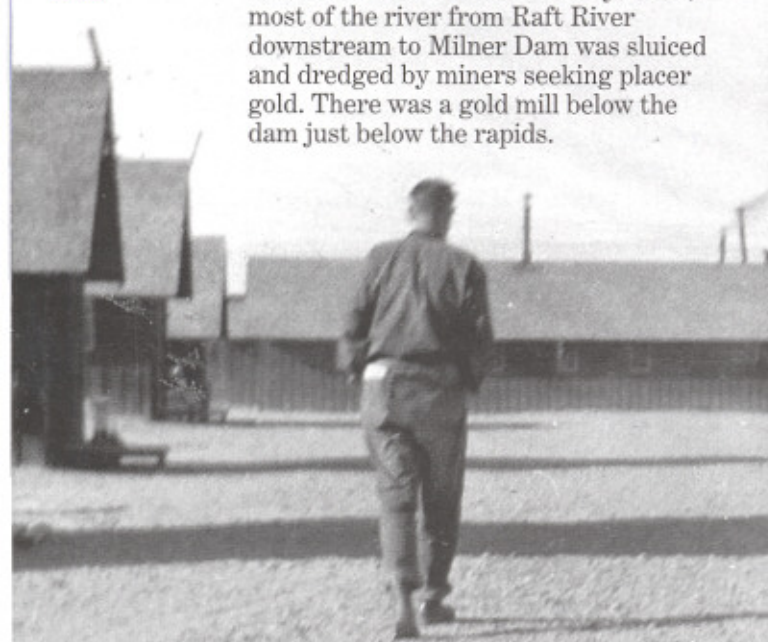
The islands you see below Minidoka Dam today are spoil banks from the dredging. When the water is low, the remnants of an old dredge can still be seen below Montgomery Bridge.

Minidoka Dam

The Minidoka Dam and Powerhouse are on the National Register of Historic Sites. During construction of the dam, there was a small village in what is now Walcott State Park and another across the river.

Camp Minidoka BR-27

From 1935-42 there was a CCC camp just west of the refuge office. The office and the stone walls in the park are all that remains of the camp that once had 18 buildings and held 200 men.



Camp Minidoka BR-27, the CCC camp was located on the flat area west of the refuge headquarters from 1935 to 1942.



The old Minidoka Power House in 1909.

Historic photos courtesy of Minidoka County Historical Museum.

Activities

Visitors are welcome at Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge year-round. However, public uses may be limited at times in certain places to protect wildlife.

Wildlife Observation, Photography



The refuge provides good opportunities to view wildlife. Vehicle travel is limited, but access roads provide vantage points over the reservoir. Some are suitable only for high clearance vehicles. Four-wheel drive is necessary on unimproved roads during wet/snowy weather.

Look for a variety of songbirds in Walcott State Park and at the Tule Island access near the Cold Water Interchange. The spillway area below the dam and the Snake River are good viewing areas. A bird checklist is available at refuge headquarters or on the internet at:

<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov>

Hiking



There is a short paved trail in the park and a longer gravel trail at the east side of the boat ramp. Foot access is allowed anytime throughout the refuge.

Boating



Boating is permitted only in the boat fishing areas designated on the map and only during specified dates when boat fishing is permitted.

Camping



Day use only is allowed on the refuge. Walcott State Park has picnic, RV and tent camping sites.

Vehicles and Parking



Motorized vehicles, including four wheelers, are permitted only on signed roads. Snow machines are prohibited. No off-road travel is allowed. Vehicles may be parked along the roadside in a manner that does not obstruct traffic. Please take care not to park in dry grass; catalytic converters can start fires, burning wildlife habitat and your vehicle. From October to January, vehicles within the refuge hunting areas must be in designated parking areas.

Pets



Pets are allowed if on a leash or under close control.

Weapons



Unloaded weapons that are dismantled or cased may be transported by vehicle on refuge roads. Use of weapons is permitted only in the designated hunting areas and only during authorized hunting seasons.

Personal Property

Personal property, including boats and decoys, must be removed from the refuge at the end of each day.

Prohibited Activities



Swimming, open fires and fireworks are not allowed at any time. If you are responsible for starting a wildfire, you may be charged with fire-fighting costs and damages. Other restrictions may apply in Walcott State Park. Collecting natural objects such as plants, animals, minerals, antlers, feathers and objects of antiquity (including Native American artifacts, such as arrowheads) is prohibited. It is unlawful to release any plant or animal on the refuge.

Area Services

Motels, restaurants, gasoline, and other supplies are available in Rupert (12 miles) or Burley (18 miles). Camping, picnicking and a boat ramp can be found in Walcott State Park near Minidoka Dam. For information about the refuge and points of interest in the area contact:

Lake Walcott State Park
(208) 436-1258
www.idahoparks.org

Mini-Cassia Chamber of Commerce
(208) 679-4793
www.minicassiachamber.org

Minidoka NWR Manager
(208) 436-3589
www.fws.gov/pacific/refuges/field/ID_minidoka.htm



© Gauthier Matschke

Yellow-headed blackbird

Hunting

Limited sport hunting is permitted on portions of the refuge in accordance with Idaho and Federal hunting regulations and with refuge regulations as stated in this brochure.

Species

Ducks, geese, coots, mergansers, snipe, pheasants, gray partridge, grouse, and cottontails may be hunted. All other species are protected and may not be killed on the refuge.

Seasons and Bag Limits

Dates, hunting hours and bag limits for species listed above correspond to Idaho regulations, EXCEPT that upland game birds and rabbits may be hunted on the refuge only if the Idaho seasons for those species are open concurrently with the waterfowl season. The refuge is closed to all hunting when the Idaho waterfowl season is closed.

License and Permits

All hunters must carry a valid Idaho hunting license and all required Idaho and Federal Stamps, validations or permits.

Ammunition

Approved nontoxic shot is required for hunting all species.

Retrieving

Hunters or their dogs may retrieve downed game only within designated hunting areas. Hunters are not allowed to enter areas closed to hunting on the refuge to retrieve game. Ethics dictate that hunters should not shoot at game that cannot be retrieved. Birds are considered to be within the refuge until they cross over the refuge boundary.



Canada geese

Hunting Blinds

Portable blinds or temporary blinds may be used. Blinds will be available on a first-come first-served basis. Portable blinds must be removed at the end of the day. Rock piles above the high water mark may not be used for blind construction. Digging pit blinds, and use of live or standing vegetation is prohibited.

Alcoholic Beverages

The use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.

Parking

In refuge hunting areas, vehicles must be parked in designated parking areas.

Hunting Areas

Hunting is permitted only in the two areas designated on the map as open to hunting. The following special regulations apply to these areas.

West Hunting Area (Lake Walcott)

Access to this hunting area is permitted only via the Bird Island Road (see map). Hunting and retrieving are allowed only in upland areas and over water within 100 yards of the shoreline. No hunting is allowed on the islands in Lake Walcott. Boats may be used to retrieve downed birds.

East Hunting Area (Tule Island)

Boat travel is permitted in this area during the waterfowl season only. Boat access from downstream (Gifford Springs area) is prohibited. Boat access is upstream from Massacre Rocks State Park, or car-top boats can be launched at the hunting area. Hunting access is via the frontage road at the Coldwater Interchange of Interstate 86.

Oregon Trail locator sign



USFWS photo

Trout fishing is popular throughout the year in Lake Walcott and below Minidoka Dam.

Licenses

All anglers 14 years of age and older must have a valid Idaho fishing license.

Seasons and Limits

Dates, creel limits, legal species and other regulations correspond to Idaho Regulations, except for the special regulations listed below. Anglers should consult the Idaho Department of Fish and Game publication General Fishing Seasons and Regulations for more detailed information.

Bank Fishing

Fishing from shore is permitted year-round in accordance with Idaho Regulations.

Ice Fishing

Ice fishing is allowed in accordance with Idaho Regulations. Motor vehicles are prohibited on the ice.

Boat Fishing

Fishing from boats is permitted only in areas designated as open to boat fishing (see map). Special regulations apply for each area listed below.

Lake Walcott

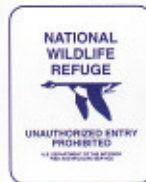
Fishing from boats is permitted from April 1 through September 30. The east boundary of the boating area is delineated with a row of buoys near Bird Island. The south boundary is delineated by a row of buoys near Minidoka Dam. Fishing is permitted only within the buoyed areas. Float tubes are allowed anywhere on Lake Walcott except beyond the southern buoy line.

Gifford Springs & Smith Springs

Fishing from boats is permitted when the Idaho fishing season is open. Boating lanes are delineated by signs on the riverbank. Boating is permitted only within these lanes.

Refuge signs grant or restrict certain activities to allow recreational opportunity for visitors while protecting wildlife and their habitats. Please respect the following signs.

Boundary Sign



This sign delineates the refuge boundary. The public may enter the area only as permitted by refuge regulations as specified in this brochure.

Public Hunting Area



Used alone or beneath a boundary sign. The area behind this sign may be hunted as permitted by refuge regulations.

Area Closed



The area behind this sign is closed to all hunting, retrieving, or entry.

No Vehicles



No vehicles are permitted beyond this sign. Only foot travel is permitted.

USFWS photo by Steve Boufford



Minidoka National Wildlife Refuge

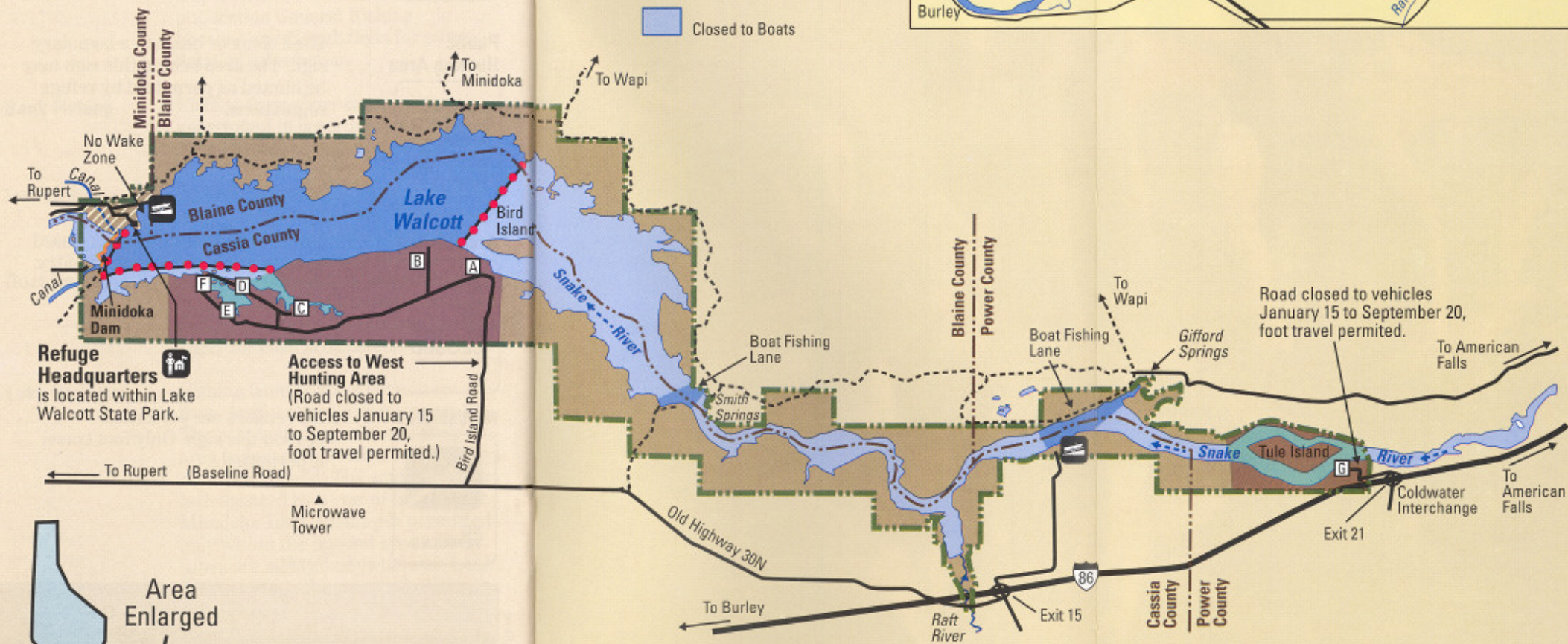


This blue goose, designed by J.N. Ding Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.



- Boat Ramp
- Improved Roads
- Unimproved Road (not recommended for sedans)
- Buoy Line
- Hunter Parking Area

- Refuge Boundary
- Public Hunting Land Area
- Public Hunting Water Area
- Boat Fishing Area
- Lake Walcott State Park
- Closed to Boats



Refuge Bird Checklist
<http://www.npwr.usgs.gov>

Idaho Relay Service
TTY 1 800/377 3529
Voice 1 800/377 1363

Visitors with disabilities may be reasonably accommodated upon request and/or receive an alternative format publication.

Minidoka NWR Refuge Manager
961 E. Minidoka Dam
Rupert, ID 83350
(208) 436-3589

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

For Refuge information
1 800/344 WILD



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*American
white pelicans*
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