

Keep Washoe Wild!

North Valleys: Silver Lake to Winnemucca Valley

For more information: Susan Juetten at wildwashoe@gmail.com
www.keepwashoewild.org www.washoecounty.us/comdev/open_space

Highlights:

- Wildlife in this region include sage grouse, pronghorn, mule deer, falcons and other raptors, including the state-listed ferruginous hawk, and passerine birds.
- Swan Lake, an Audubon Society Important Bird Area, is a critical stop for migrating water birds on the Pacific Flyway.
- Springs and springbrooks abound in and around Winnemucca Valley and provide for a large variety of wildlife: "...many unique fishes are endemic to spring and springbrook habitats, as well as a number of [possibly unique] spring-dwelling plants, gastropods and aquatic insects...since the characteristics of spring systems can vary greatly in terms of thermal flow and water chemistry." *



Photo by Kurt Kuznicki.



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Issues and Opportunities in the North Valleys:

When considering the open space in the valleys north of Reno and to understand future impacts, extend your vision northward 35 miles to Dry Valley, Bedell Flat and Winnemucca Valley, formerly free of most human development other than scattered large ranches, now the proposed sites for more than 10,000 new homes spread over approximately 7,000 acres.

- New development proposed for Winnemucca and Dry Valleys will impact wildlife habitat on a grand scale, disrupt current limited transportation routes; Many construction disruptions, including dust and noise, as well as the above permanent disruptions, are projected to last for at least 10 years.
- Recreational activities "... can cause disturbances to wildlife behavior, movements and reproductive success, as well as the introduction of invasive species such as cheatgrass..."*
- Water is over-allocated in several north valleys. The Fish Springs Ranch and Intermountain Water Supply pipelines, almost complete, will supply approximately

8,000 af/yr and 2,500 af/yr from Honey Lake Valley, Dry Valley and Bedell Flat to residents of Lemmon Valley, Antelope Valley and Stead.

- Impacts of the pipelines, according to the BLM, could include drawdown, reducing or eliminating some wetland habitats and impacts to approximately 70 non-wetland drainages. Vegetation disturbance may lead to increased noxious weeds and permanent disturbance of existing plant communities.
- Breeding and foraging habitat for sage grouse are being reduced by the construction and some of the permanent facilities of the pipelines. Other species dependent on the plant communities affected by the pipelines may experience permanent dislocation if the plant communities do not regenerate after construction.**
- Washoe County has already identified some public land in the north valleys for disposal. With the North Valleys identified as areas for population growth by Washoe County, Reno and Sparks, it's vital to identify specific threatened areas and vital water sources before the disposal process begins in earnest.
- Wildfire is a fact of life in these valleys and the surrounding ridges and peaks. With drought and an increasing population, more fires are likely, causing further stresses on the ecology of the valleys.

*Open Space and Natural Resource Plan Inventory and Assessment, July 2007 draft

**BLM EIS, North Valleys Rights-of Way Projects, October 2005

For an interesting read about life on the ranches in this area, see the book *Twenty Miles from a Match* by Sara Olds.

Washoe County Commission District 5, Bonnie Weber, Commissioner

Keep Washoe Wild

A Project of Friends of Nevada Wilderness, Scenic Nevada, and the Toiyabe
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