

Whistling swans. U.S.F.W.S. photo.

PRAIRIES AND WOODLANDS. . .

Upland areas surrounding the marshes and lakes are living examples of the ecological concept known as "edge." The interspersed or "mixture" of wooded coulees, mixed-grass prairie, and fields of tame grasses and legumes makes them desirable to many species.

Remnants of the once vast mixed-grass prairie are found on hillsides and plains above the river. Current management techniques such as prescribed fire and controlled grazing are used to preserve the character of native prairie. This results in good cover for mallards and other upland nesting ducks and in the maintenance of grassland species such as the sharp-tailed grouse and the short-eared owl. Several species of interest to summer birdwatchers, such as the Baird's sparrow, Sprague's Pipet, and the chestnut-collared longspur also occur on upland areas. In addition to the native grasslands, a portion of the uplands are maintained in a mixture of grasses and legumes which are ideal nesting habitat for waterfowl and winter cover and food for grouse, songbirds, and whitetail deer.

The whitetail deer on the refuge favor the wooded coulees which provide secluded fawning areas and protection from stinging winter winds. Other woodland wildlife include songbirds and raptors such as Swainson's and red-tailed hawks.

Aerial view of lower Des Lacs Lake and southern portion of refuge, photo by John Winship. U.S.F.W.S. photo.



Whitetail deer fawn, photo by James Frates. U.S.F.W.S. photo.

**DES
LACS**
national
wildlife
refuge



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Department of the Interior



RF6-62570-1



July, 1979



Indian camp, photo courtesy of the State Historical Society.

“A dark line of trees marked our approach to a running stream, the River of Lakes . . . The conical skin lodges were now plainly in sight, not more than five miles off, and Indians galloped out from the camp to meet us and escort us in. Buffalos, they said, were plenty.”

Henry Bolker 1858

**WILDLIFE AND MAN
ON THE RIVER OF LAKES . . .**

Beaver, muskrat, mink, and other fur bearing animals lured French trappers to North Dakota. They found the region so flat that the river which drained it spread out in a series of marshes and lakes. The trappers called the river “Des Lacs” or “The Lakes”.

The French trappers were not the first humans to discover the values of Des Lacs. Plains Indians sought shelter in the timbered coulees and fashioned stone tepee rings and religious effigies which have survived to this day.

Great herds of buffalo, pronghorns, and elk grazed the rich grasslands surrounding Des Lacs River. Grizzly bears and wolves scared up clouds of ducks from small wetlands, for this region was one of the finest waterfowl breeding grounds in North America.

But the white man brought striking changes to the region. Intensive ranching, farming, and coal-mining altered the face of the land and wildlife declined. Alarmed by the tremendous decrease in waterfowl numbers during the Dust Bowl days of the 1930's, President Franklin Roosevelt set aside a portion of the Des Lacs valley in 1935 as the Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge.

MARSHES AND LAKES . . .

Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge encompasses 18,800 acres along the Des Lacs River from the Canadian border to a point eight miles south of Kenmare, North Dakota. This river valley contains marshes restored by dikes and three natural lakes. Bays at the mouths of coulees are havens for waterfowl and marshbirds native to the region.

The marshes are prime areas for many species of ducks as well as western grebes whose distinctive courtship antics are a prime attraction for spring visitors. During the summer months, white pelicans feed on small fish found in the lakes and marshes. The Le Conte's sparrow, a rare prize for birdwatchers, lives in the tall vegetation of marsh edges and wet meadows.

During the fall migration, Des Lacs serves as an important resting and feeding area for thousands of ducks and shorebirds. In recent years, the refuge has become a major rest stop for lesser snow geese and whistling swans. Although the refuge is closed to public use during the fall migration, excellent opportunities exist for viewing bird concentrations from public roads along the refuge boundary.



Le Conte's sparrow.

Left to right: mallard drake and hen. Giant Canada geese and brood. Whitetail deer. All U.S.F.W.S. photos.





Beaver, photo by James Frates. U.S.F.W.S. photo.

AN INVITATION TO DES LACS . . .
 Outdoor enthusiasts will find unique opportunities to observe and photograph native birds and mammals in natural surroundings. Visitors are welcome to stop at refuge headquarters, located one-half mile west of Kenmare on Ward County Road #1, for information concerning various refuge activities. Overnight camping is not permitted, but accommodations are available in Kenmare. Visitors should check with the refuge for current information and regulations on other types of outdoor activities and on local road and weather conditions. Inquiries should be addressed to the Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge, P.O. Box 578, Kenmare, North Dakota, 58746. Telephone (701) 385-4046.



Female Gadwall. U.S.F.W.S. photo.

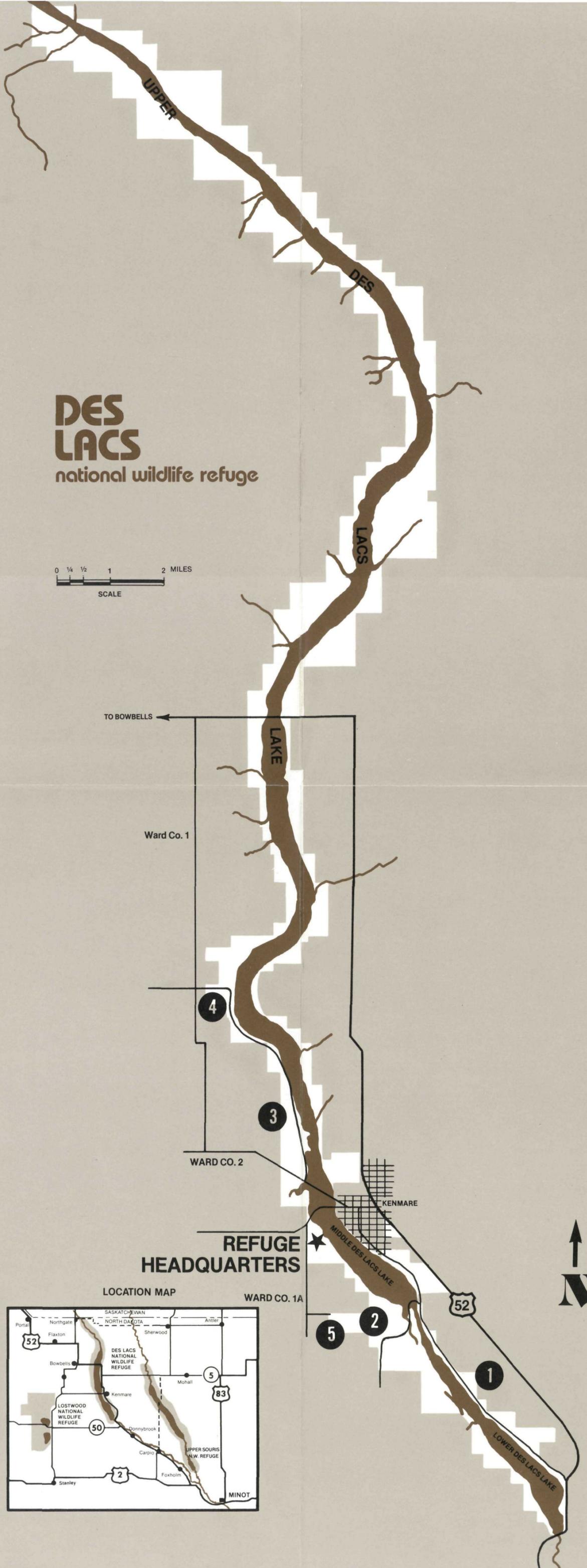
FOR YOUR OUTDOOR ENJOYMENT . . .

1. Good opportunities exist for viewing wildlife in marshes and lakes along the seven-mile "Old Lake Road", which parallels the refuge south of Kenmare. (The road may be impassable during winter or when wet.)
2. A spur of the Old Lake Road, the "Brickyard Hill Road," crosses the refuge and winds its way to the bluff tops of the west side of the river valley, offering a birds-eye view of the Des Lacs Valley.
3. The dirt road leading north from Ward County #2 for five miles winds along the Upper Des Lacs Lake through woodlands and coulee bottom habitat to a refuge Public Use Area. (The road may be impassable during winter or when wet.)
4. This Public Use Area offers opportunities for picnicking and birdwatching in a beautiful lakeside setting. Restrooms and picnic tables are available. The area may also be reached via Ward County Road #1. Use is restricted to daylight hours only.
5. The Taskers Coulee Picnic Area lies in a heavily wooded coulee south of the refuge headquarters and can be reached via Ward County Road #1A. Restrooms, drinking water, a shelter, picnic tables, grills, and playground equipment are available. The area is open May through September. Overnight camping is not permitted.

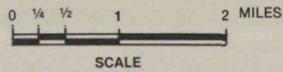
A photography blind located near a sharp-tailed grouse dancing ground provides excellent opportunities to observe and photograph sharp-tails during their spring dancing activities.

Visitors are advised to contact the refuge for additional information concerning current road and weather conditions.

Environmental education, photo by Don Lindberg. U.S.F.W.S. photo.



DES LACS
 national wildlife refuge



TO BOWBELLS ←

Ward Co. 1

WARD CO. 2

REFUGE HEADQUARTERS

KENMARE

MIDDLE DES LACS LAKE

WARD CO. 1A

LOCATION MAP

