

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Minnesota Valley

*National Wildlife Refuge*



### A Vision to Action

A sense of lost opportunities haunts the old overlook. Vandals, wind, and weather have crumbled the limestone blocks in its fortress-like walls. As you near the edge, Grass Lake comes into view below a prairie covered hillside; it's a wetland gem set in a developed landscape.

This overlook is one of two inspired by Theodore Wirth's 1934 *Metropolitan Park Plan*. Governor Floyd Olson used the plan to propose a 42,000-acre forest park and recreational area between Fort Snelling and Shakopee. World War II, however, halted initial efforts to protect the Lower Minnesota River Valley, and lack of money stifled other plans that Wirth drafted in the 1960s for parkland in Carver and Scott Counties.



*View of  
Grass Lake*  
Chuck Carver



By the early 1970s, pressures to develop the floodplain intensified. Soon, environmental activism coalesced into political organization and finally culminated in the passage of the *Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Act of 1976*. This Act called for preserving the area's natural resources, developing recreational opportunities, and establishing a Wildlife Interpretation and Education Center.

## Visitor Center

The Visitor Center serves as a gateway to the refuge. Here, colorful hands-on exhibits interpret the Valley's diverse habitats and wildlife. A twelve-minute, multi-image slide show whisks you into the homes and lives of resident wildlife as you enjoy the comfortable 125-seat auditorium.

Brochures containing general refuge information, hunting and fishing regulations, and species lists are available at the **Information Desk**. While there, pick up a *Calendar of Events* to learn more about the wonderful assortment of programs offered by our wildlife interpreters. Teachers will find a special catalogue of environmental education curriculum units and workshop opportunities. An observation platform at the edge of the bluff outside the Visitor Center provides a spectacular panoramic view of Long Meadow Lake. Old farm

roads will provide seasonal trail access to this part of the Long Meadow Lake Unit. Nearer the Visitor Center, the Hillside Trail features a *Songbird Trail Pack* that has an audio cassette to interpret wildlife habitat along a half-mile loop.

## Getting There

The Visitor Center is located at 3815 E. 80th St. in Bloomington across from the Airport Hilton Hotel. From I-494, exit onto 34th Ave. and drive south. Turn left on E. 80th St. and drive 1/4 mile to the entrance on the right.

## Critter Connections

*Almost everyone loves animals!* This leaflet features compelling photos of birds and mammals that are highly visible on one of the eight refuge units or affect its character most. As you explore these pages, you will see how and why the Service works to manage wildlife habitats in living landscapes.



*Minnesota Valley NWR Visitor Center*

George Heinrich

## Long Meadow Lake Unit

Floodplain forest, lakes, ponds, marshes, bluffs, spring-fed streams, and historic sites comprise this 2,400-acre unit. Six miles of improved and five miles of dirt trails provide access.

In the South, people call them the 'Golden Swamp Warbler.' A vibrant yellow-orange flash in forested wetlands. **Prothonotary Warblers** are one of only a few warblers that build their nests in tree cavities. They prefer locations over water where threats of predation are less. They feed their young insects and spiders which they find on tree trunks and floating logs.



*Birders* C. Andersen

Prothonotary Warblers are wood warblers, neotropical migrants, and one of 33 species of warblers that use the refuge. Nearly all continue northward during migration. The Prothonotary has expanded its range in recent years and is near the northern limit of it here.

By managing the refuge as part of an historic natural landscape, refuge staff work to provide habitat for Prothonotary Warblers and some 260 other bird species. Among local birders, the Long Meadow Lake Unit's **Bass Ponds** and **Old Cedar Avenue** trailheads are justly famous for quality bird-watching opportunities.

### Getting There

Bass Ponds trailhead is at the end of E. 86th St., approximately 2 miles from the Visitor Center. From I-494, exit onto 24th Ave. Drive south past the Mall of America and turn left on E. 86th St. Follow the road on the left to parking area.



### *Bass Ponds Trailhead*



### *Prothonotary Warbler*

Tom Kerr, USFWS

### *Old Cedar Avenue Trailhead*

Old Cedar Avenue trailhead is just north of the Old Cedar Avenue bridge. From HWY. 77 (Cedar Ave.), exit onto Old Shakopee Rd. Drive west on Old Shakopee Rd. and turn left at Old Cedar Ave. The trailhead is at the bottom of the hill near the old bridge.

### *Russel A. Sorensen Landing*

Russell A. Sorensen Landing is at the end of Lyndale Ave. on the north side of the Minnesota River. From I-35W, exit onto 106th St. and drive east. Turn right at Lyndale Ave. Parking area and boat ramp are at the end of the road.

## Black Dog Preserve

Black Dog Preserve stretches on both sides of the Northern States Power (NSP) Plant to I-35W on the west and HWY 77 on the east. This 1,400-acre unit has two miles of trail leading past different kinds of wetlands and patches of tall grass prairie. These plant communities provide a spectrum of colors from spring through fall.



*American Woodcock*  
©Scott Sharkey

Chunky, tweezer-beaked upland ghosts fascinate visitors each spring in the Black Dog Preserve. Toward sunset, previously almost invisible **American Woodcocks** fly north over the railroad tracks to flattened grassy spots in the prairie.

Within minutes, insect-like “peents” come from the prairie. Then, one of the birds leaps from his singing site and begins a series of spectacular courtship flights to impress a mate.

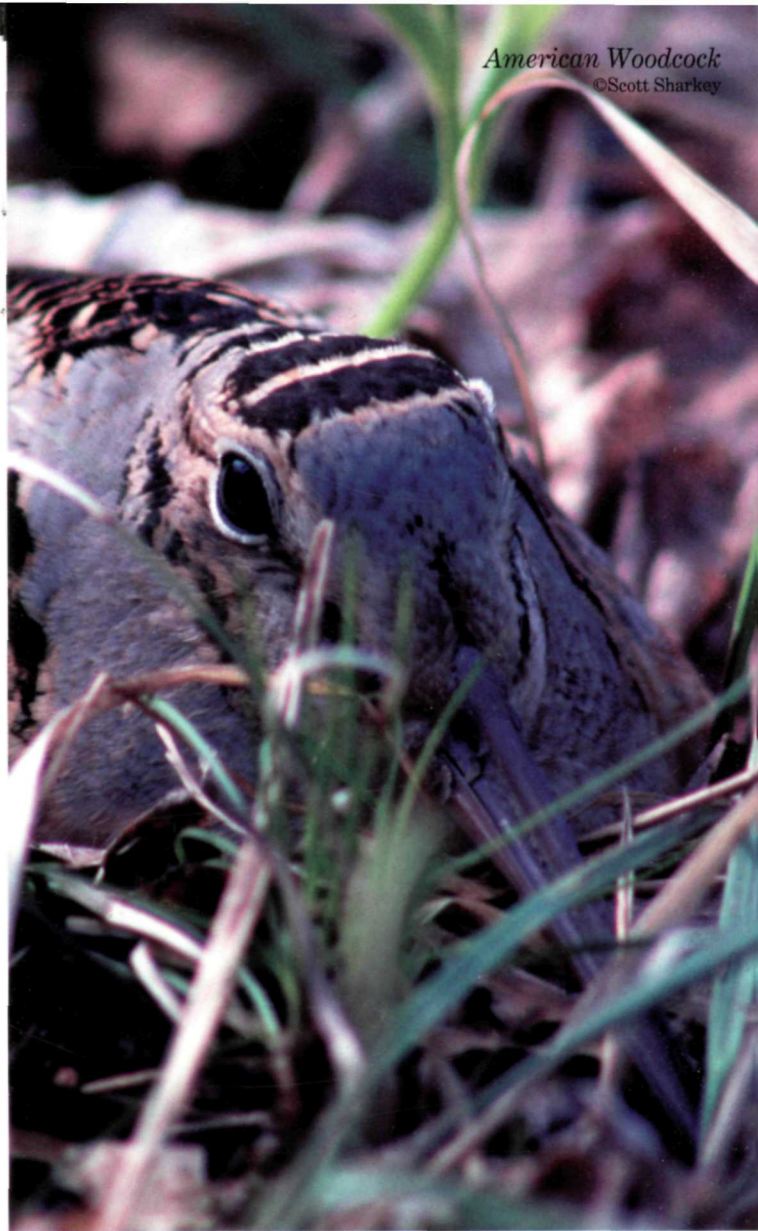
Here the Service conducts prescribed burns to clear the Preserve of seedling trees and brush. The resulting open habitat is preferred by male woodcocks for their singing fields. We limit tours to give these birds the space they need to thrive.



### Getting There

Black Dog Park trailhead is southwest of the NSP powerplant in Burnsville. From HWY 13, drive north and west on River Hills Dr. to Radisson Dr. Turn right on Radisson and follow it down the hill to the entrance of Black Dog Park. The trailhead is in the northeast corner of the park. Climb the pedestrian bridge over the railroad tracks into the preserve.

*Black Dog Park Trailhead*



*American Woodcock*  
©Scott Sharkey

*Cliff Fen Park*

Cliff Fen Park is on Cliff Road about one mile east of I-35W. The trailhead is north of the soccer fields by the information signs.

*Black Dog Overlook*

Black Dog Overlook is on Black Dog Road in Burnsville. From I-35W, exit Black Dog Road, first exit south of the Minnesota River. Follow the road approximately 1-1/2 miles east to parking area on the right.

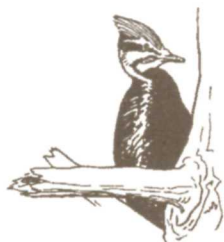
This historic river crossing will provide access to the *Minnesota Valley State Trail* when it is routed downriver. A half-mile spur trail through bottomland hardwood forest connects the trailhead and new bridge in this 400-acre unit. Before bridges, barge-like ferries were used to get people and livestock from one side of the river to the other. Bloomington Ferry was one of the most important spots to cross. The old Ferry Keeper's home is privately owned and dates to the 1850s.



Hammering away like a carpenter constructing one of the new town-homes being built nearby, the **Pileated Woodpecker** hungrily searches for carpenter ants.

He works fast! A few taps quickly expose a tunnel, and then the bird uncoils a long, sticky, barbed tongue to probe for ants. When found, large pieces of wood will explode from deep, rectangular holes! Pileated Woodpeckers also excavate roosting cavities that later become homes for squirrels and wood ducks.

These shy and seldom seen citizens of dense bottomland forests are uncommon on the refuge. But Pileated Woodpecker numbers may increase as more and more marginal farmland is converted to bottomland forest. Two centuries from now, Pileated Woodpeckers may help build wildlife homes in a floodplain forest that hasn't even begun growing yet!



### Getting There

Located at the Old Bloomington Ferry Bridge. From Old Shakopee Rd., turn south onto Bloomington Ferry Rd. at the Dred Scott Playfields. Continue on the Bloomington Ferry Rd. for 1/2 mile. Turn right on Bloomington Ferry Circle. Drive down the hill to the parking area.



*Pileated Woodpecker*  
© Scott Sharkey

*Pileated Woodpecker*  
©Scott Sharkey

## Wilkie Unit

Five miles of dirt trails and abandoned farm roads provide access for hikers, cross-county skiers and others to marshes and a bottomland hardwood forest that supports a Great Blue Heron nesting colony. This 2,100-acre unit is flanked on the west by *Valley Fair Amusement Park* and on the east by the *Continental Grain* terminal. The heron nesting colony is closed seasonally.



**Great Blue Herons** are colonial nesting birds and the focal species of the Wilkie Unit. Their colony has over 600 nests, many visible in the tops of tall cottonwoods, silver maples, willows, and other trees in the floodplain forest. Large trees can hold as many as 18 nests measuring 18" to 36" across. Great Blue Herons stalk the shallow areas alone, moving in slow motion, until striking in a blur to spear fish, frogs, or anything else they can swallow whole and headfirst.

Great Blue Heron colonies are especially vulnerable to disturbance when they return to their nesting areas in early spring. The nesting area on this unit is closed to the public from March 1 - August 31. It is monitored periodically to better understand heron behavior and habitat preferences.



### Getting There

Located a half mile west of HWY 169 and County Rd. 101 junction. From HWY 169, exit County Rd. 101 west toward Shakopee. Turn right at the first stop light. Parking area and trailhead around the bend.



*Great Blue Heron*  
© Scott Sharkey

*Great Blue Heron*

Dave Menke, USFWS

## Louisville Swamp Unit

This 2,600-acre unit has a unique mix of ecological and cultural features: old fields, prairie remnants, oak savanna, floodplain forest, and stone farmsteads. Thirteen miles of trails are a favorite of hikers and cross-county skiers.

Their handiwork makes **Beavers** the most visible animal on the Louisville Swamp Unit. They've impacted the landscape of this area dramatically by damming and holding water long enough to kill hundreds of acres of trees.

Refuge staff have a grudging admiration for these workaholic rodents because they create more aquatic habitats nationally than any legislated wetlands restoration program! Unfortunately, their ideas for wetlands management run counter to those of surrounding landowners whose property is flooded. And on the refuge their dams flood roads and trails. Beavers can plug water control structures with tons of sticks and mud in just a few days!

The Service tries to manage beaver populations by trapping them in selected areas. But beavers quickly repopulate the valley in the spring and, since fur prices are so low, it's hard finding enough trappers to really make a difference. In this test of wills between people and wildlife, beavers are winning.



### Getting There

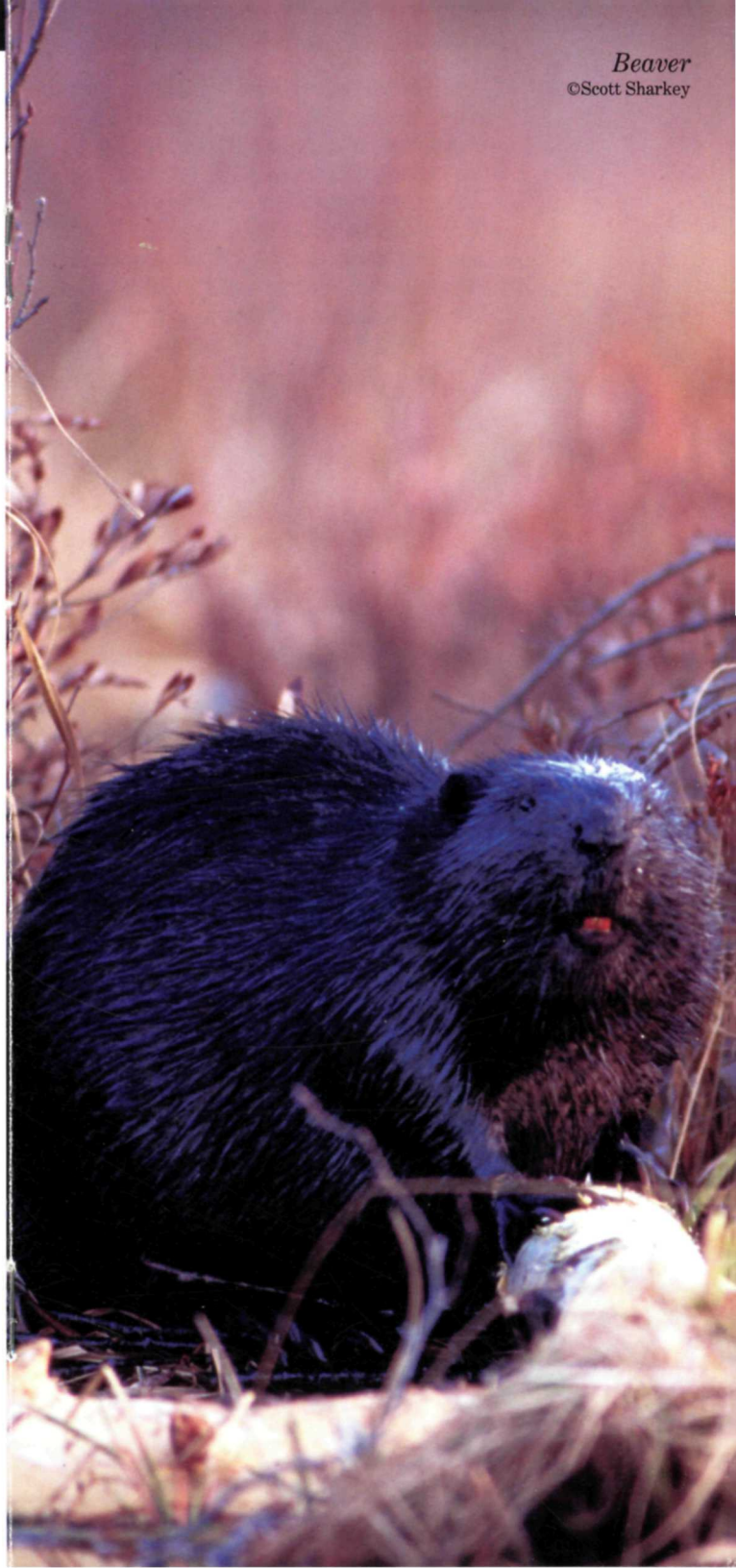
Located about 4 1/2 miles south of Shakopee. From HWY 169, exit on 145th St. W. Follow the road past the main entrance to the Renaissance Festival. The parking area is on the left.



*Beaver*

Bernie Angus, USFWS

*Beaver*  
©Scott Sharkey





This newest refuge unit, purchased in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, features 1,480 acres of environmental diversity. It includes prairie restoration areas in old upland farm fields, oak savannas, goat prairies clinging to steep bluffs, bottomland forests, and one of Minnesota's largest private wetland restorations. Three miles of dirt trails provide access to this unit.



This unit was a century farm - in the same family for 100 years! More than sixty years ago, the Gehl family raised thousands of turkeys on this area. When **Wild Turkeys** were first stocked on the farm in 1986, wildlife managers made sure that all domestic birds had disappeared in the vicinity. This was done to prevent the interbreeding of wild and domestic turkeys, because this genetically weakens the birds and reduces their ability to survive in the wild.

Flocks of thirty to forty birds have been seen on the Rapids Lake Unit. At present, there are probably more wild turkeys in this area than at any time in the past.

The Service is working to preserve extremely rare oak savanna on this unit. Oaks produce acorns which are consumed by turkeys, squirrels, deer, and many other species.

### Getting There

Rapids Lake has two access points. Both are located off County Rd. 45, near Carver. From HWY 212, exit onto County Rd. 40. Drive through the town of Carver. Approximately 2 miles south of town, turn left onto County Rd. 45. The first access point is 3/4 mile down the road on the left side. The second access point is about 2 miles further. Continue 1-1/4 miles south on County Rd. 45 and turn left on Carver Highlands Dr. (opposite County Rd. 50). The access point is 1/2 mile straight down the road.



*White-tailed  
Deer*

Dave Menke, USFWS



## Chaska Unit

Much of the 600-acre Chaska Unit between the Carver and Chaska ballparks is privately owned. No public facilities currently exist.

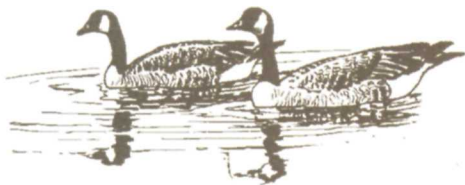


*Canada Geese*  
©Scott Sharkey

**Giant Canada Geese** are one of the first birds to set up housekeeping each spring along the shores of Chaska Lake. Up to 25 adults and goslings can be seen nesting and foraging throughout the day. The young grow fast to become 14-15 pound adults.

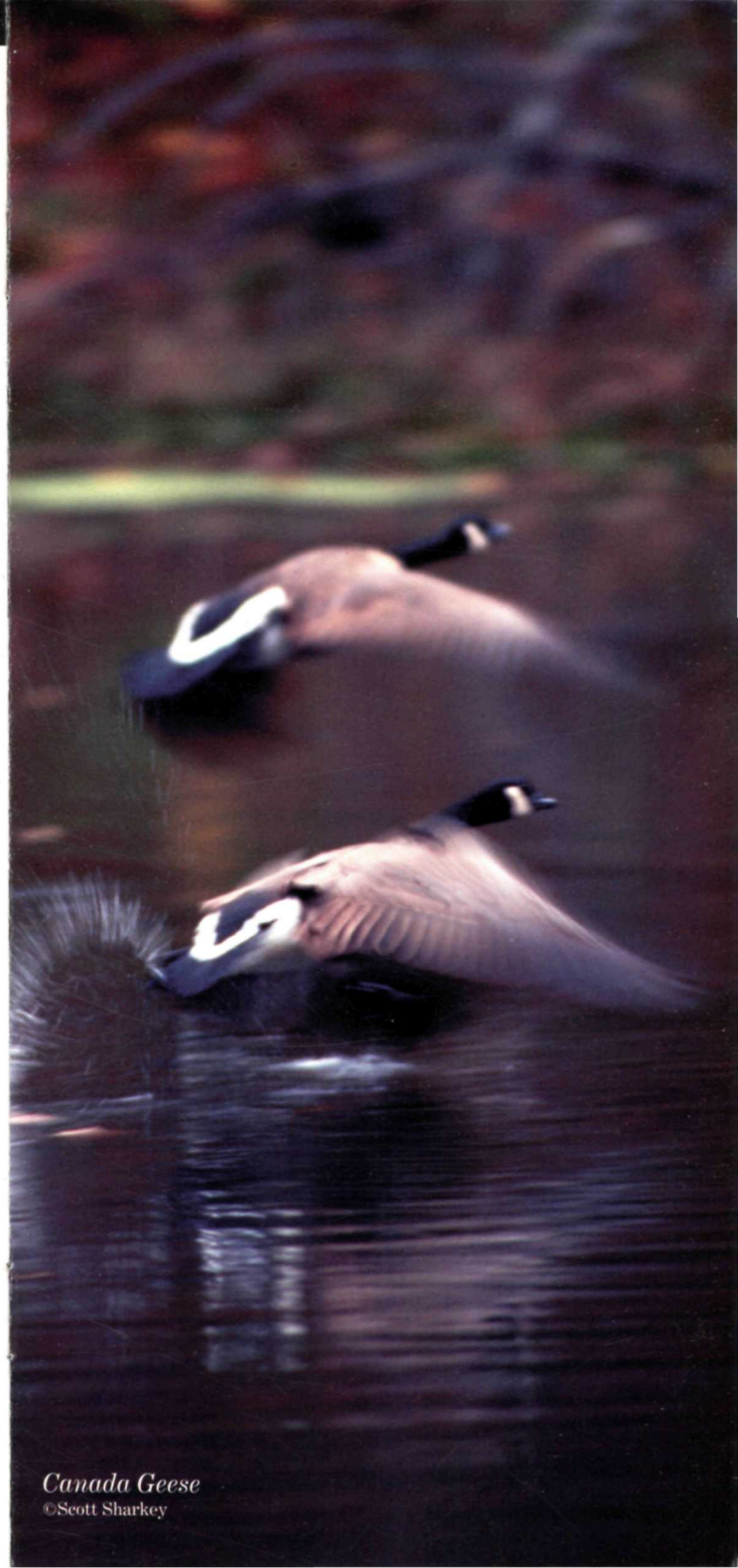
Habitat destruction and unregulated hunting decimated this race. By the 1920s, Giant Canada Geese were thought to be extinct. But in January of 1962, a flock was discovered at Silver Lake in Rochester, Minnesota. Since then, summer populations in the seven-county metro area have expanded from 450 birds in 1968 to about 24,000 today. They've taken over golf courses and parks and have become a threat to aircraft at the Twin Cities International Airport. To ensure public safety, Giant Canada Geese around the airport are removed.

Once flood-prone farmland around Chaska Lake is acquired for the Refuge, the land will be allowed to revert to forest. Then these geese will share the Chaska Unit with forest species who need it more.



### Getting There

Much of this unit is privately owned. Trailheads will not be developed until the land is purchased or easements are acquired. Please do not trespass on private land.



*Canada Geese*  
©Scott Sharkey

This 2,450-acre unit stretches from the old HWY 169 bridge in Shakopee up the Flying Cloud Bluff into Eden Prairie. Much of it is still privately owned and being farmed. It also has a century-old hunting club around a high-quality marsh.

Majestic birds, **Great Egrets** nest high in the trees along with Great Blue Herons on the refuge. Though not as numerous as herons during nesting, they hold their own during migration. You can see as many Great Egrets as herons in the spring and fall on many wetlands, especially those of the Upgrala Unit. Their endless pursuit for food often finds them standing erect like statues. Looking down at their feet, they stir up fish, frogs, and invertebrates from the bottom. A quick stab, a gulp, and their prey is history.



*Bullfrog*  
J.Jave, USFWS

Egrets are doing well, considering the slaughter that occurred in the late 1800s when they were killed for the beautiful feathers they develop while nesting.

The Service manages wetlands for the benefit of egrets, other wading birds, and waterfowl by lowering water levels to encourage plant growth. This also helps concentrate their food. Wetlands management helps clean the Lower Minnesota River because wetlands filter impurities from water before they enter the river.

### Getting There

Much of this unit is privately owned. Trailheads will not be developed until the land is purchased or easements are acquired. Please do not trespass on private land.



*“This is eminently the river of Minnesota... It flows through a very fertile country, destined to be famous for its wheat; but it is a remarkably winding stream... Ditch it straight, and it would not only be very swift, but soon run out.”*

*Henry D. Thoreau*

*Native Grasses at Sunrise*

©Scott Sharkey

## **Beyond the Boundaries**

Thoreau was right, but people didn't listen. They ditched the wetlands instead.



Wetlands are crown jewels of the Minnesota landscape which have been abused. Blue-winged teal, egrets, wood ducks, and salamanders are just a few of the animals that make wetlands their homes. Wetlands benefit people too, by providing flood control, improved water quality, and replenished ground water.



Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is the center of operations for private lands activities. The Service focuses on forming partnerships to restore wetlands on private property within a 13-county area surrounding the Lower Minnesota River Valley.



Biologists revitalize drained wetlands by working with landowners to restore wetland basins. Backhoes and bulldozers are used to repair a wetland's plumbing. These machines help break drainage tiles, build dikes to plug ditches, and install structures to maintain water levels in the basins. With time and water, wetlands plants and wildlife return to restore a viable part of your heritage.

Photo credits above:

*Blue-winged Teal*

Bernie Angus, USFWS

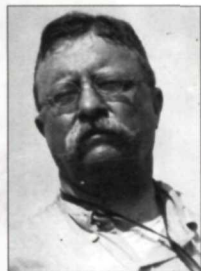
*Partners for Wildlife*

USFWS

*Repairing Wetlands*

USFWS

*The past gives roots to our vision - our promises - for the future.*



*President Theodore Roosevelt*  
USFWS

### **Our National Wildlife Refuges**

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt ordered that a small shell-and-mangrove covered island in Florida's Indian River be forever protected as a "preserve and breeding grounds for native birds." Paul Kroegel, a sometime boat builder, cook and orange grower, was hired to watch over this 3-acre sanctuary. His mission was clear: *protect the island's pelicans from poachers and plume hunters.*

With this simple promise of wildlife protection, the **National Wildlife Refuge System** was born.

Nearly a century later, the Refuge System has grown to over 92 million acres in size. It now includes over 500 refuges, at least one in every state, and over 3000 Waterfowl Production Areas. This growth was nurtured by many hands; concerned citizens, conservation groups, and the states have all played a vital role.

Refuges are places where the music of wildlife has been rehearsed to perfection, where nature's colors are most vibrant, where time is measured in seasons, and where the dance of the crane takes center stage.

National Wildlife Refuges are gifts to ourselves and to generations unborn...simple gifts whose treasures are unwrapped every time someone lifts binoculars to the flash of feathered color, every time a child overturns a rock, and every time a hunter sets out the decoys or an angler casts the waters.

Minnesota Valley's mission today is much as it was when President Roosevelt established the Pelican Island Bird Preservation. While the job now takes more than one man and one boat, we remember the promise made when the century was new - *preserve wildlife and habitat for people today, and for generations to come.*



*Warden Paul Kroegel*  
USFWS



*Pelican Island*  
USFWS

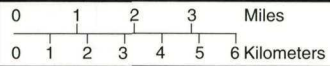


*Hunting the River Valley*  
USFWS

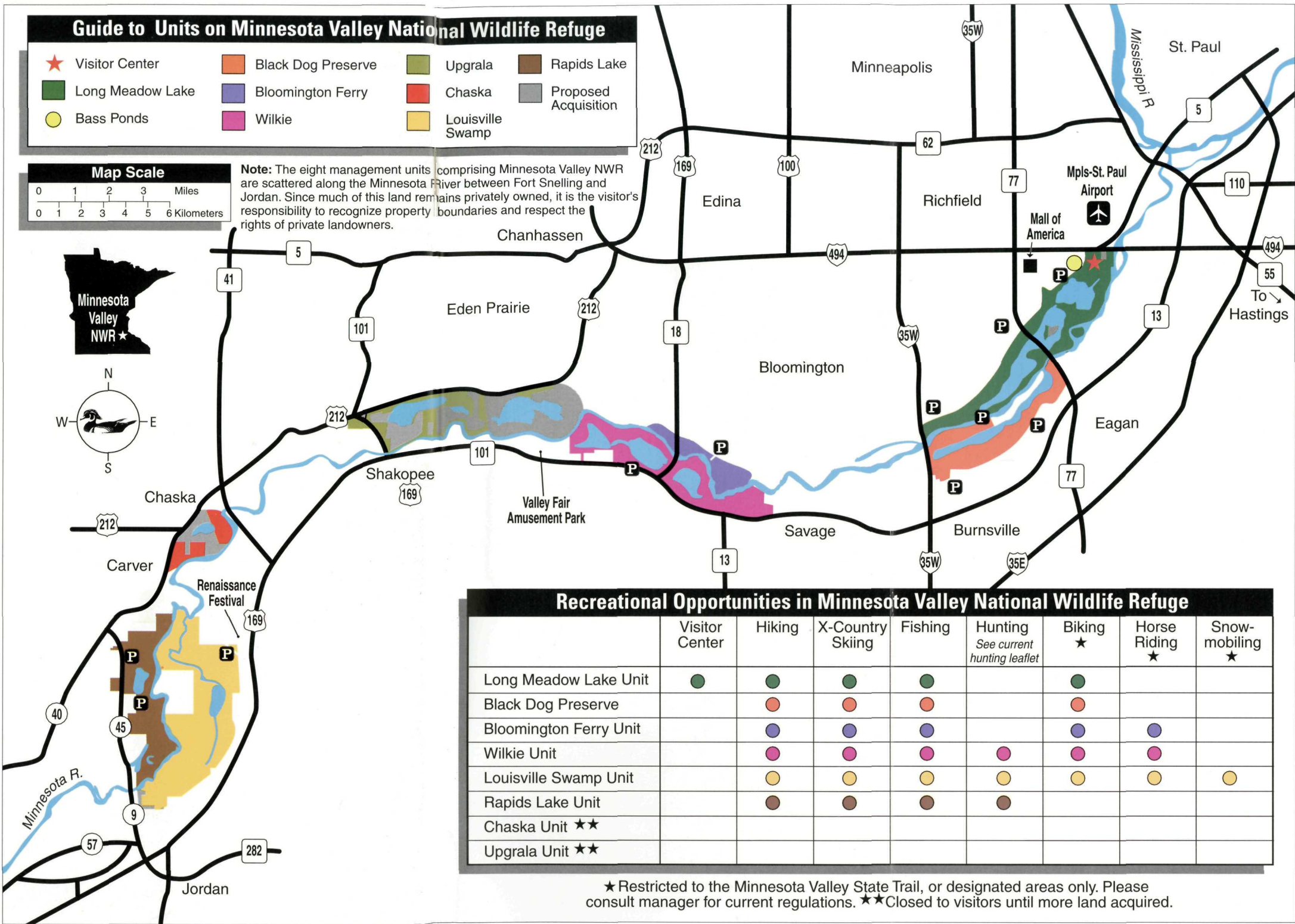
# Guide to Units on Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

- ★ Visitor Center
- Long Meadow Lake
- Bass Ponds
- Black Dog Preserve
- Bloomington Ferry
- Wilkie
- Upgrala
- Chaska
- Louisville Swamp
- Rapids Lake
- Proposed Acquisition

## Map Scale



**Note:** The eight management units comprising Minnesota Valley NWR are scattered along the Minnesota River between Fort Snelling and Jordan. Since much of this land remains privately owned, it is the visitor's responsibility to recognize property boundaries and respect the rights of private landowners.



## Recreational Opportunities in Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge

	Visitor Center	Hiking	X-Country Skiing	Fishing	Hunting <i>See current hunting leaflet</i>	Biking ★	Horse Riding ★	Snow-mobiling ★
Long Meadow Lake Unit	●	●	●	●		●		
Black Dog Preserve		●	●	●		●		
Bloomington Ferry Unit		●	●	●		●	●	
Wilkie Unit		●	●	●	●	●	●	
Louisville Swamp Unit		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Rapids Lake Unit		●	●	●	●			
Chaska Unit ★★								
Upgrala Unit ★★								

★ Restricted to the Minnesota Valley State Trail, or designated areas only. Please consult manager for current regulations. ★★ Closed to visitors until more land acquired.

**Please Remember!**

*For your safety and to protect and preserve the refuge, observe the following rules:*



- Fishing on the river and in backwater lakes is permitted, but consult Minnesota Department of Health guidelines before eating any fish. Call: (651) 215-0950 for a copy.



- Hunting and trapping are permitted on designated areas of the refuge. You may collect berries, cherries, plums, and mushrooms. Please share with the wildlife and other visitors. Limit yourself to two quarts of fruits per family daily and a gallon of mushrooms per family each day. Do not harvest nuts or watercress and remember that all plants and animals are otherwise protected.



- There are nine public boat launches along the Minnesota River between Ft. Snelling State Park & Belle Plaine. Be alert for barges below Shakopee. Boats and canoes are not to be used within refuge boundaries unless specifically authorized. Boat motors are prohibited within the refuge.



- All pets must be restrained by a leash except when used for hunting.



- Bikers, snowmobilers, and equestrians must use designated trails. All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are not permitted on the refuge.



- The possession of metal detectors on the refuge is illegal. They are subject to seizure. Artifacts and cultural sites are protected.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge  
3815 East 80th Street  
Bloomington, MN 55425-1600  
612/854 5900 (V/TTY)

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Minnesota Valley

*National Wildlife Refuge*



Wood Duck  
Tom Kerr, USFWS