

A Brief History of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge

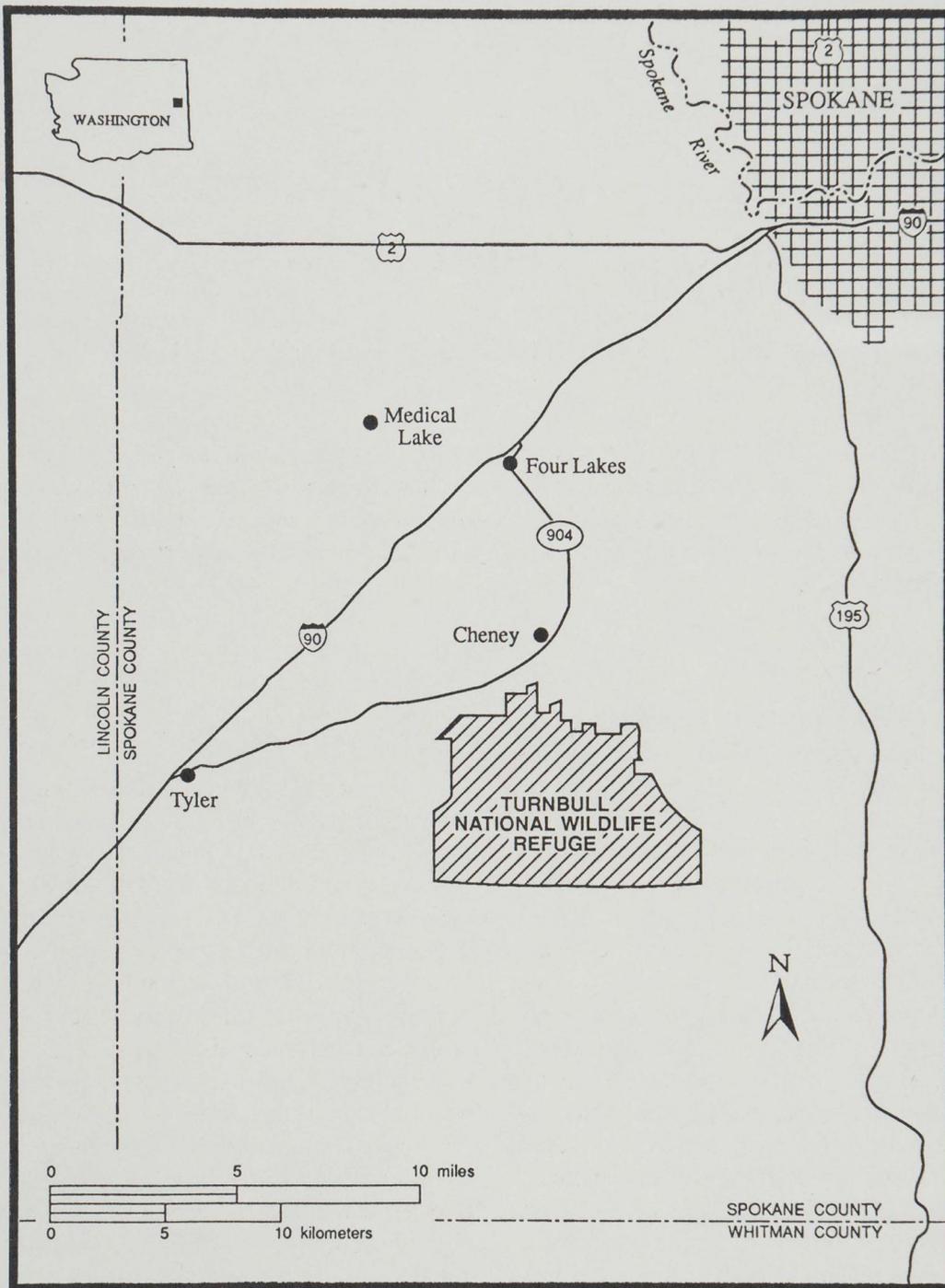
By Craig Holstine and Robin Bruce

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THE TURNBULL NATIONAL Wildlife Refuge, 15,500 acres of wetlands and sparsely-wooded grasslands, is located in southwestern Spokane County, Washington. At the time of their acquisition by the federal government in 1937, nearly all lands now comprising the Refuge were privately-owned farms. Today evidence of man's historic activities is not readily visible, reflecting the concerted efforts of successive Refuge managers to dispose of "surplus structures," abandon unneeded roads, and generally erase all vestiges of human occupation to reclaim a habitat for wildlife. Yet the land has a story to be told, for though the early travelers and settlers are gone, their tracks cannot be erased from historical records. Those documents provide a portrait of life in an era now past on land that has escaped modern development.

AN EARLY TRAVEL ACCOUNT

In August 1812 a party of traders with the Pacific Fur Company was enroute up the Colville Trail that joined the Snake River and Colville country. One of the men, Ross Cox, became separated from the group somewhere north of the Palouse River. Left without food, firearm, or horse, the young inexperienced adventurer wandered fifteen days in the wilderness before rejoining his companions near Spokane House at the confluence of the Spokane and Little Spokane rivers. Cox's precise route through the unmapped wilderness will never be known, but his account of the harrowing ordeal seems to indicate that he followed a course considerably east of the main trail, placing him in the vicinity of the Refuge. Cox's recollections are noteworthy,



Map of Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge and environs by Pam McKenney, Archaeological and Historical Services, Eastern Washington University.

providing perhaps the earliest written descriptions of the wetlands, long before settlement and the arrival of civilization.

“I saw plenty of wild geese, ducks, cranes, curlews, and sparrows... The rattlesnakes were very numerous...”

Within a day of the start of his solitary journey, Cox was clearly to the east of the route taken by his fellow traders, who followed the Colville Road: “The direction I took the second morning separated us farther; for they went north, and I nearly due east...”¹ On his fourth day of wandering:

My course was nearly north-east, and lay through a country more diversified by wood and water. I saw plenty of wild geese, ducks, cranes, curlews, and sparrows, also some hawks and cormorants and at a distance about fifteen or twenty small deer. The wood consisted of pine, birch, cedar, wild cherries, hawthorn, sweet-willow, honeysuckle, and sumach. The rattlesnakes were very numerous this day, with horned lizards, and grasshoppers;... I suffered severely during the day from hunger, and was obliged to chew grass occasionally, which allayed it a little. Late in the evening I arrived at a

*lake upwards of two miles long, and a mile broad, the shores of which were high and well wooded with large pine, spruce, and birch.*²

The editor of Cox’s journal speculates that the lake he described could have been Downs Lake east of the present town of Sprague, which would have put Cox within ten miles of the Refuge.³ It is also possible that he was further north-east, perhaps at Williams Lake or another body of water even closer to the Refuge.

Cox was no zoologist, but his account provides the impression that the amount of wildlife in the area was considerably greater than in modern times. Few deer were seen in the wetlands until they began to reappear in the early 1950s.⁴ Cox’s rather fantastic account of his narrow escape from an aggressive bear seems all the more exotic since virtually no evidence of bears has been seen in the vicinity since the lands were settled. At least some of the bird species observed by Cox, such as cranes, are now rarely seen on the Refuge. It is difficult to tell where Cox observed the “numerous” rattlesnakes, but today they are virtually nonexistent in the area.

After making a futile attempt to find his comrades’ tracks south of the above mentioned lake, the desperate wanderer again proceeded eastward:

I now resolved to try the east, and after eating my simple breakfast, proceeded in that direction, and on crossing the two small streams, had to penetrate a country full of “dark woods and rankling wilds,”

through which, owing to the immense quantities of underwood, my progress was slow. [He then returned to the lake]....

I anticipated the rising of the sun on the morning of the 23rd, and having been unsuccessful the two preceding days, determined to shape my course due north....

During the day I skirted the wood.... The country to the westward was chiefly plains covered with parched grass, and occasionally enlivened by savannahs of refreshing green, full of wild flowers and aromatic herbs.⁵

“I now resolved...
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and rankling wilds,’
...my progress was
slow...”

By his accounts from that day on, Cox was apparently west of the Refuge and the wetlands dotted with small lakes and ponds. “The country through which I dragged my tired limbs on the 24th was thinly wooded. My course was north and north-east. I suffered much from want of water, having got during the day only two tepid and nauseous draughts from stagnant pools, which the long drought had nearly dried up,” Cox continued. On succeeding days, he proceeded “nearly north-northeast” and on a “northerly course, occasionally diverging a little to the east.” Although his editor speculates

that Cox eventually arrived in the Reardan vicinity, it appears from the narrative that the wandering fur trader could have been further eastward and may have been the first white man to record his travels through the Turnbull Lakes vicinity.⁶

EARLY TRAVEL ROUTES

Travel through the wetlands was always difficult. In the early nineteenth century, fur traders avoided the area when traversing the channeled scablands from northeast Washington to the Snake River. Instead they stayed on the main Indian trail that crossed the Spokane country approximately between the present-day towns of Reardan and Sprague. Connecting the Walla Walla and Snake River areas with the Colville country, that route came to be known as the Colville Road or Trail. Until the 1880s, the road was a major artery of travel in eastern Washington Territory.

All of the major travel routes of the nineteenth century in eastern Washington bypassed Turnbull Lakes. The Colville Road crossed several miles to the west, and the Kentuck Trail and Old Territorial Road passed to the east.⁷ The Mullan Road, on the other hand, did cross the grasslands at the southeast corner of the present Refuge. There, in the vicinity of Stubblefield Lake, the terrain is higher and drier than the wetlands to the northwest, making travel feasible in all seasons.

Immediately following the close of the Indian Wars of the 1850s, the U.S. Army constructed a 624-mile long road between Fort Walla Walla and Fort Benton at the

head of navigation on the upper Missouri River in Montana. The road was to provide a direct route for the movement of troops from the Great Plains to the Columbia Plateau, but instead was used by miners and settlers in the days before railroads crossed the continent. Lt. John Mullan directed its construction from 1859 through 1862, and it was by his name that the road came to be known.

“It is claimed that a road can be built between these points for one hundred dollars per mile, but we doubt it...”

Mullan and his crew had laid out the route of the road as far as Chapman Lake, 2 miles south of the Refuge. At a point below the foot of the lake, the crew turned east and built the road around the south end of Coeur d’Alene Lake. Persistent flooding of the St. Joe River in that vicinity forced Mullan to reconstruct the road around the north end of the lake. To reach what is now the city of Coeur d’Alene, Lt. Mullan built a second road northward from the point near Chapman Lake at which the original road turned east. The new road ran northeast from Chapman Lake through what later became the Grogan farm, across the Refuge west of Stubblefield Lake, and continued

northeast past Philleo Lake to Hangman Creek, and on to the future sites of Spokane and Coeur d’Alene.⁸ A mile long segment of the road is visible today on the Refuge.

Through the mountains to the east, the Mullan Road was infamous for being washed out and rough going. Crossing the open grasslands near Stubblefield Lake, the portion that crosses the Refuge was probably one of the better stretches of the route. Travelers generally found little to note in accounts kept while crossing what is now Refuge land. A representative example is an entry in *The Diary of Charles Rumley from St. Louis to Portland, 1862*:

*Saturday Oct. 4, 1862: Started at 6 o’clk [from Hangman Creek northeast of Spangle] passed Williamson Lake (dry) went 2 miles further found water [vicinity of Philleo Lake] & camped at 9 1/2 o’clk for breakfast made 8 miles good road & grass.... Very cold, rain all the morning, unpleasant. Roads fair over prairie. Very hard rain all day everything wet & cold.*⁹

Maintaining the Mullan Road was more difficult and costly than constructing it. Over the two decades after Mullan finished his work and before the coming of the Northern Pacific Railroad, the road remained a constant source of irritation to travelers, especially local residents who used it most often. The *Spokane Times* editorialized:

Many years ago this road was opened at a considerable expense to the Government, since which time it has had small sums spent upon it—just enough to keep

*it in a passable condition a portion of the time. It never has been a good road for general travel, and possibly never will be, as the ravages of wind, rain and snow storms are at least equal to the amount of work put on the road every year.*¹⁰

While segments of the Mullan Road passing through the rugged Coeur d'Alene and Bitterroot mountains no doubt suffered the worst ravages of nature and neglect, at least some portions of the road along which settlement later occurred appear to have been maintained as principal routes of localized travel. Such may have been the case with the road across the Refuge for a time before better roads were built and Mullan's route was finally abandoned.¹¹

The wetlands around Turnbull Lakes remained a barrier to travel into the 1880s. When the issue of where to locate the county seat of Spokane County was debated, citizens of Spangle voiced loud objection to Cheney (then called Depot Springs) because of the difficulty posed by the lakes and swamps in traveling between the two towns:

We, the people of Spangle, were willing to meet the people of Four Lakes half way and locate the county seat at Marshall, on Lake Creek, but it now seems that they are endeavoring to carry it to Depot Springs, a point impossible for us to reach, as we cannot get a road to it. In fact, the country between these points is so bad that we cannot get to the springs even on horseback in the spring of the year, on account of lakes and sloughs.

It is claimed that a road can be built between these points for one hundred dollars

*per mile, but we doubt it, as the country is difficult to build a road over, and work on it would be more expensive than we can bear.*¹²

Another letter from "a voter of Spokane Co." offered a similar opinion: "I have traversed a good portion of the so-called road, which, at certain times of the year, it is impossible to travel with a team, owing to lakes, bogs and rocks."¹³

By early October of that year, at least some citizens of both communities were cooperating in building a good road across the swamps.¹⁴

When the issue of where to locate the county seat of Spokane County was debated, citizens of Spangle voiced loud objection to Cheney...

The road, which crossed the northern edge of the Refuge, had been completed by late that month, not long before election day. The editor of a Cheney newspaper inspected it and reported his findings:

We found that safe substantial bridges had been constructed across the low, marshy spots, rocks had been removed and their places filled with dirt. Teams

*are every day passing over this road, and many heavy loads have already passed over it.... [Some improvements] will make this as good a wagon road as can be found in Spokane county.*¹⁵

With the new road, the settlers of the wetlands (and there were as yet very few) gained connections to nearby outposts of civilization. A mail and passenger stage coach service between Cheney and Spangle began in 1880, making round trips on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The next year, A.J. Thompson began carrying mail between Cheney and Farmington (in Whitman County on the Idaho state line), via Spangle: "He has stocked the line with a sufficient number of good horses, and will run comfortable hacks for the accommodation of passengers and baggage." By September 1882, the Northwestern Stage Line was running stages between Lewiston, Idaho, and Cheney (via Spangle), using "good coaches, excellent horses and careful, skillful drivers." In addition, E.B. Dunning ran stages three times a week between Cheney and Colfax that year. Travelers paid \$6 to ride Baker and Cooper's Colfax and Cheney Stage Line, and were allowed 100 pounds of baggage for the trip, which was guaranteed to "run through in 8 hours."¹⁶

THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD

No advancement in transportation was more important to the Turnbull Lakes area than the coming of the railroad. As was the case throughout the West, settlement accelerated from a trickle to a flood as emigrants arrived to claim or purchase vacant lands for farming or speculation.

By 1881 the Northern Pacific had laid track from Portland to Spokane, and by 1883 had completed the transcontinental line, providing connections with the Mid West and East Coast. Hardly coincidental was the sudden increase in settlement of Refuge lands after 1883.

Settlement came to what is now the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge relatively late in the history of the Pacific Northwest.

Connections with points near and far became more convenient for residents of the Turnbull Lakes area when the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway constructed a line through the western portion of what is now the Refuge. A joint venture of the Northern Pacific and Great Northern, the SP&S was built to provide a more direct outlet to Portland for the rapidly increasing Spokane traffic of produce and passengers. The new railway located a depot (now razed) at South Cheney a few feet northeast of the Cheney-Plaza Highway overpass over the old SP&S (now Burlington Northern) roadbed a mile south of Cheney. Situated just north of the Refuge boundary, the depot provided wetlands residents with a rail stop somewhat closer than the NP,

which ran through Cheney.¹⁷

Crews began grading the SP&S line southwestward from Cheney in 1908. Construction required extensive blasting through basalt rock; old timers claim that the blasting was responsible for lowering the water table in the wetlands.¹⁸ Track was later laid northeastward from the South Cheney depot to connect with the NP line at Marshall, thus bypassing Cheney. By December 1908 the rails reached Pasco, and connection was made with the tracks built along the north bank of the Columbia from Vancouver.

Sometime during the grading and track laying phases, crews of Italian laborers erected the rock ovens along the right-of-way within the present Refuge. According to one account, the workers baked bread in the ovens, which have been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.¹⁹ Another oven of strikingly similar construction is located on the Seth-Thacher Place. The property is not near the railroad, leaving one to speculate that perhaps an enterprising settler may have copied the technique used by the Italian laborers.

SETTLEMENT

Approximately thirty-two sections, situated within two townships, are included within the present Refuge boundaries. Sixteen sections were originally withdrawn from the public domain by the U.S. government and granted in 1894 to the Northern Pacific Railway Company (NP). Three sections were withdrawn and vested to the state of Washington in 1889, on the day President Benjamin Harrison signed the Proclamation of State-

hood. Nearly all of those lands were eventually sold to private owners. Settlers acquired the remaining lands through Homestead Patents, Cash Entry Patents, or Forest Exchange Patents.

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Settlement came to what is now the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge relatively late in the history of the Pacific Northwest. Daniel F. Percival became the first settler to own land when he bought 120 acres in 1877. Following Percival's purchase, no legal acquisitions occurred in the area until 1883 when William W. Cossalman homesteaded 160 acres on the northwest edge of the present Refuge. This marked the beginning of a steady increase in settlement throughout the mid 1880s, culminating in a flurry of activity in 1891. Settlement diminished during the mid 1890s, probably in response to the Depression of 1893, which was particularly hard on farmers. Noticeable increases in land transactions occurred in the years 1902 and 1905. The heightened settlement activity may have in part been due to the NP's offering property previously unavailable for



In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, settlers drained and cultivated most of the area's wetlands, which have since been restored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service.

Photo by Harvey S. Rice

public sale. (The NP had been disposing of its holdings since receiving the generous grant from the federal government in 1894, and even before then in anticipation of the windfall gift of land).

Settlement slowed considerably after 1905, although parcels from the public domain were still being claimed as late as 1910. The last Refuge land to be disbursed was property originally granted to the State in 1889. Beginning in 1914, the State began selling those lands, with the last sale occurring in 1936.

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Despite the obstacle to early settlement posed by the wetlands, the area nevertheless attracted settlers. The attraction may in part have been due to the efforts of land speculators, a class which included both the NP and the local press. In fledgling communities settlers meant money to real estate promoters and businessmen throughout the West. Cheney was no exception. Its newspapermen were eager to promote the virtues of the surrounding countryside, even to the point of exaggeration, as evidenced by the following article entitled "Swamps" in an 1881 edition of the *Northwest Tribune*:

A country is frequently condemned because it has swamps in it.... Yet swamps are a good thing for those who own them if they will only utilize them. Nine cases out of ten, this can be done, by digging trenches and confining the water in channels, so as to let the water pass off. And you have the richest and most productive spots in the country; nature has always provided means for making soils.... Let those who yearn after the luxuries of unproductive gravel beds have them, they are entirely welcome to their choice, give us the swamps, (or more properly speaking meadows) and remember that the people that sneer and despise their garden spots are either those who do not know their value, or else they are enemies of their neighbors, for having something good which they have not.²⁰

Those hardy settlers who took up the challenge of converting the wetlands to "garden spots" were to learn bitter lessons about soil fertility and, presumably, truth in advertising.

SUBSISTENCE FARMING

When settlers first arrived in the wetlands, they found the area aptly named. The lakes were deeper and marshes more extensive than those since recreated through environmental engineering. Before being drained, the sloughs in the southwest portion of the Refuge were filled to capacity by melting snow and rains. Much of the land was under water almost continuously, and the exposed dry

ground was rocky, with a thin layer of soil.²¹ The area did not hold promise of agricultural abundance.

The vast majority of residents on Refuge lands became subsistence farmers. By the summer of 1880, some were selling oats and hay to crews grading the NP line into the nearby village that was to become Cheney. Settlers may also have cut timber for railroad ties as the tracks approached the town in the spring of 1881.²² Others supplemented meager incomes by selling meat from wild animals hunted in the wooded wetlands.

In the days before the railroad arrived, money could be made in the freighting business. At least one Turnbull area rancher did just that: Isaac J. Ballinger reportedly hauled the first load of freight into Cheney.²³ Jacob Bettinger built one of the first mercantile stores in the town, and continued to operate the business after selling his extensive dairy farm on the Refuge.

When he sold his Rock Creek ranch in 1888, Bettinger appears to have been one of the more prosperous farmers in the area, selling at auction 110 head of dairy cattle, 7 horses, and "a large quantity" of hogs. In later years others accumulated sizable dairy herds, but most farmers kept from five to a dozen cows, some fewer. Most Turnbull settlers made modest profits selling milk to creameries. Residents such as James G. and Cleveland Smith operated daily routes using wagons (sleighs in winter) to haul their neighbors' milk to Cheney; from there it went via the Washington Water Power electric railroad to Spokane. By 1910 the area led the county in milk production, with 800 gallons per day shipped from Cheney to

creameries in Spokane. Dairyemen netted 13.5 cents per gallon, which at that time was regarded as a poor price.²⁴

After the WWP railroad ceased operation in 1922, some Refuge residents remained in the dairy business. Boone and Myrtha Mill, for instance, started a door-to-door milk route in Cheney.²⁵ But for others, closure of the electric line surely diminished their incomes derived from the dairy business.

The lowlands containing the best soil were perpetually under water, leading most settlers to dig ditches in attempts to drain their acreage. Drainage became virtually synonymous with settlement, and enhanced property values. "For sale, a fine tule ranch, drained, seven miles southwest of Cheney, comprising 240 acres first-class deeded land," said an advertisement in the *Cheney Sentinel*.²⁶

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One of the earliest drainage efforts was organized by H.F. Grant, teacher at the Lakeview School. He encouraged farmers in a cooperative effort to drain lands in the vicinity of Turnbull Lake so that more students could attend the school, which also served as a community center.²⁷ In 1903 fourteen landowners

formed an official drainage district and existing ditches were deepened and widened.

Legal disputes brought by owners of property flooded by draining delayed further developments until farmers formed the Reorganized Drainage District No. 1 in 1913. A crew of Italian laborers started work the next summer, completing four miles of new ditch at a cost of \$13,000. Within a few years, 885.94 acre within the District had been drained of the 2,720 total acres.²⁸ Simultaneously farmers were draining other wetlands on the Refuge not within District No. 1.

Unfortunately for the luckless Turnbull settlers, about ninety percent of the drained land proved unfit for growing crops on a long-term basis. Farmers planted timothy and redtop grasses for hay, which grew well during the initial years of cultivation. The peat soil lost its fertility rapidly, and the lowered water table resulting from draining off standing ponds left crops susceptible to drought.

By the 1920s, the automobile had replaced horses as the primary mode of transportation, resulting in a decline in hay prices. Changing technology and the agricultural depression that preceded the Great Depression combined to worsen the plight of those scratching a living from poor lands. After years of experiencing meager crop production and declining profits, many farmers were forced to abandon their lands, leaving banks with legal title to property of marginal value. Yet some hung on, subsisting by keeping a few dairy cows, grazing horses and cattle, and cutting timber for cordwood.²⁹

HUNTING

The area now comprising the Refuge was extensively utilized for hunting early in the white settlement era. Some of the area's earliest settlers may have taken more of their livelihood from hunting and trapping game than from farming or ranching. Cyrus Turnbull, the Refuge's namesake, was one such settler and hunter. Many of the early residents hunted to supplement their diet or simply for sport.

Hunting was not the easiest of tasks for farmers ill prepared for such adventures, however, as one Refuge resident later recalled: "Most of the early pioneers had a hard time killing many geese. They didn't know how, didn't have good guns, nor much money to buy ammunition with, and not much time to waste unless they could get some meat."³⁰

With the coming of the railroad in 1880-1881 came a ready market for skillful hunters. Cattle ranching was not yet supplying the needs of the rapidly growing town of Cheney when the editor of the local newspaper wrote an article entitled "Our Nimrods" thanking local providers of wild meat:

*For the last few days the hunters of Cheney have kept the market well supplied with fresh venison that was captured near town. This week four or five nice deer were brought in. The editor of the Tribune extends his thanks for liberal remembrances of the "boys," and should he ever catch anything will not forget them.*³¹

About 1882 James F. Campbell, who settled on the southeast shore of Camp-

bell Lake in 1878, helped two other men hollow out a sixteen foot dugout canoe from a pine log. The canoe was used on Turnbull slough by early settlers and Indians for hunting, fishing, and gathering waterfowl eggs. Campbell's son Fred later recalled hunting with his father on Turnbull Lake:

It was in the spring of 1889, I believe, and any how it was after a winter of deep snow. My father took a notion to go goose hunting on Turnbull Lake. I was around seven years old and he took me along to carry the rifle....

My father took his shoes off, placed me on his back, and waded across. We then went West down the lake and seen a small band of geese setting out in a clear open place in the lake. He took the rifle, slipped up behind a big, rough rock about thirty feet across and twelve feet high, and climbed on top of it where he could lay down and get a good rest. The geese was about 150 yards away. He was a good shot and killed one of them. He pulled off his clothes and tried to wade after it, but the water was too deep...

The next day he went down and told Ed Chambers about it. They hunted up the old log canoe and went out to where the goose should have gone down, but some otter, mink, or hoot owl had got it.³²

PIONEER LIFE ON THE TURNBULL LAKES

Despite their close proximity to a transcontinental railroad, and later to a regional rail line, settlers on what became the Turnbull Refuge lived a relatively isolated existence. Roads were unpaved,

poorly maintained, and, due to the extensive wetlands, virtually impassable much of the time. Not a single farm ever received electrical or telephone service. When the government acquired the lands in the mid- 1930s, the hardy descendants of the pioneers who first settled the area were still living out the final phase of the frontier era.

“Revival meetings” in which “many have turned from the paths of wickedness unto righteousness” were reported.

Like people in rural areas throughout the country, those on what would become the Refuge relied upon one another for their entertainment. Cheney newspapers reported “social gatherings” in private homes to celebrate birthdays, leaving to study at the Normal School (now Eastern Washington University in Cheney), and the like. Taffey pulling, dancing, and “light games” seem to have predominated at such events. Curiously, no churches were ever built on the Refuge lands, but “revival meetings” in which “many have turned from the paths of wickedness unto righteousness” were reported.³³

Dances were the most popular form of community entertainment, attracting the greatest crowds. Music was provided by local musicians, such as Boone Mill and

Rossom Sperry who played fiddles for country dances held in the Harmony School (located on Harmony Road just west of the Refuge), at the Pine Creek Dairy barn (at Refuge Headquarters).³⁴

Rural schoolhouses were often the focus of community social activities, such as dances. Two schools stood on Refuge lands: Lakeview just south of Turnbull Slough, and Sixmile on the Cheney-Plaza Highway 6 miles south of Cheney.

At the Lakeview School, teacher Minnie A. Grier organized what was described simply as "an entertainment" at which her students performed for an admiring audience of local residents.³⁵

Cyrus Turnbull was a restless frontiersman with intense blue eyes, flaming red hair, and a temper to match.

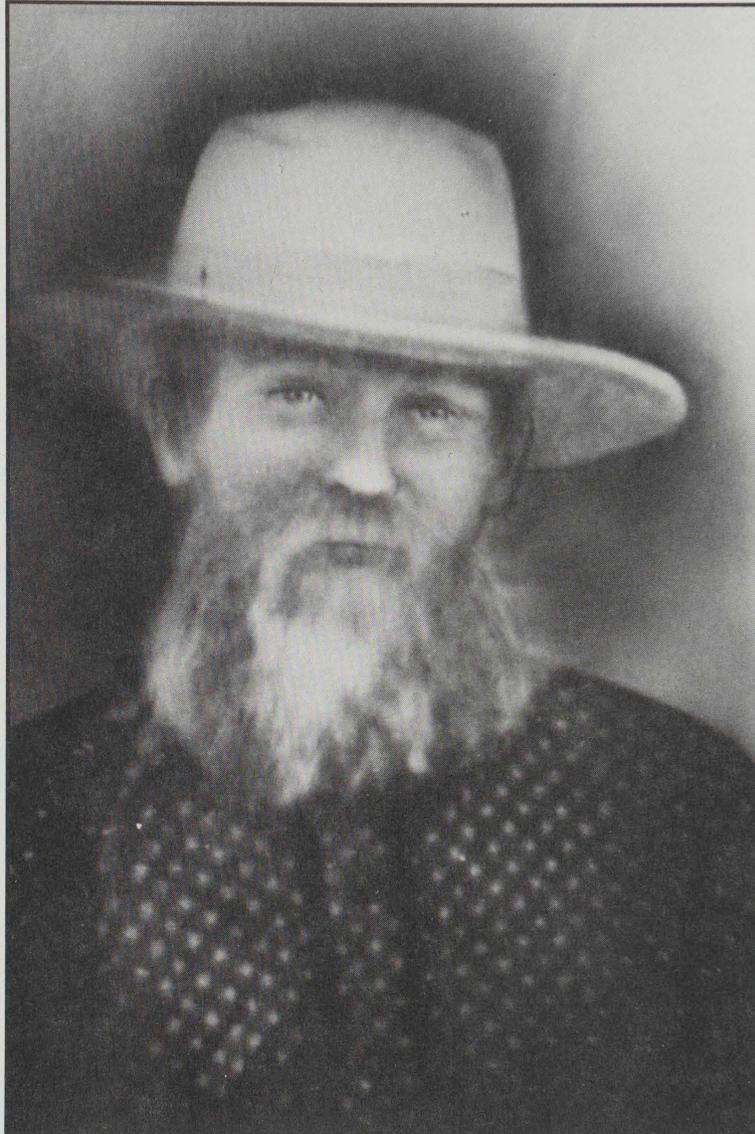
In addition to the Lakeview and Six-mile facilities, there were at least five country schools within 2 miles of the present Refuge boundaries, not including schools in the town of Cheney.³⁶ The considerable number of rural schools is, of course, a reflection of both the primitive transportation network of the day and the significant number of people living in farming areas now sparsely populated. Obtaining and keeping qualified teachers at all the schools was a difficult chore, at least in the early years of settlement.

"We expect to start a six months' term of school as soon as the services of a teacher can be secured," reported an 1890 social column from the *Cheney Sentinel* of 1890.³⁷ They hoped to hold a nine-month term the following year.

Early settlers on the Turnbull area were no strangers to organization for political or community action purposes. Numerous farmers joined the local chapter No. 24 of the Pioneer Alliance, which appears to have been affiliated with the Populist movement that gained national prominence in the 1890s. I. J. Ballinger, a settler near the western edge of the Refuge, served as treasurer of the group, which had thirty-nine "substantial farmers enrolled, with one more ready to take the obligation, and many seeking admission."³⁸ (Not all thirty-nine were living in the Turnbull Lakes, but rather most members were no doubt farming in the Lance Hills area just west of the present Refuge). When farmers in the Turnbull Lakes formed their drainage district just after the turn of the century, they cooperated in a manner reflecting a shared sense of purpose and, perhaps, sense of community lacking in their neighbors outside the wetlands.

CYRUS TURNBULL

Several individuals were noteworthy for deeds not directly associated with their settlement on the Refuge. Ironically, the Refuge's namesake, Cyrus Turnbull, neither lived in the vicinity for long nor ever owned property there. So how did the name Turnbull come to be fixed on the swamps and grasslands of the southwestern corner of the county?



Cyrus Turnbull, for whom the National Wildlife Refuge is named. The hardy pioneer and his family lived briefly along Turnbull Lakes in the 1880s; ironically, they did not homestead nor purchase land in the area of the refuge that now bears their name.

Photo Courtesy of James Turnbull, Sagle, Idaho

The association appears to have begun in 1880 when Cyrus Turnbull, a restless frontiersman with intense blue eyes, flaming red hair, and a temper to match, settled with his young wife in a cabin near the upper end of the slough that now bears his name.

He was thirty years old, she only fifteen.

Cyrus Turnbull was born in 1849 in what is today Polk County, Iowa, some 17 miles from Des Moines. His grandfather had immigrated to the United States from Scotland. In 1864 Thomas Turnbull, Cyrus' father, loaded his wife and eight children into three wagons and headed west.

Fifteen-year-old Cyrus drove cattle behind the wagons, one of which carried his ailing, bed-ridden mother, Polly Deaton Turnbull. They followed the Oregon Trail through southern Idaho, northeast Oregon, and finally down the Columbia River.

At Portland they turned south up the Willamette River, first settling in the Rogue River country of southern Oregon.

Within a year they moved further south into the Mt. Shasta vicinity of northern California, where Polly Turnbull died in 1873.³⁹

While enroute to California, the Turnbolls met the Nathan Williams family, an encounter which marked the beginning of a long and close association. Shortly after the families met, the Williamses

journeyed north to Washington Territory while the Turnbolls went south to California. Later three Turnbull boys, Nathan, Thomas, and Cyrus, went to Washington, and all three subsequently married Williams sisters: Nathan married Rose, Thomas wed Phoebe, and Cyrus married Mary Jane. Turnbull family descendants contend that the brothers migrated to Washington specifically to find the Williams sisters.⁴⁰

In 1879 Cyrus followed his brother Nathan to Washington Territory. He went first to Yakima, rode the range herding cattle for a time, and eventually drifted eastward to Farmington on the Idaho line.

While visiting his brother, Cyrus met Mary Jane Williams, a sister of Nathan's wife. Cyrus and Mary Jane were married in 1880 at Four Lakes, a few miles north of Cheney. He was by then thirty years old, she only fifteen.

Cyrus built a cabin at the north end of Turnbull Lake in either the fall of 1880 or shortly after his son was born the following spring. Three other children were born to the Turnbolls before they left for north Idaho. The couple was to have five more children after moving to north Idaho in 1886.

In the 1885 Auditor's Census of Spokane County, Cyrus Turnbull listed his occupation as "farmer." It seems probable that he, like many others, combined stock raising and grain and hay production in ways characteristic of farming in the wetlands. But family lore and accounts left by his oldest son Oliver, however, indicate that hunting commanded the greatest share of his energy and interest while he lived on the Refuge. "Cyrus made a livelihood largely by hunting

ducks and geese for a time, establishing a home south of Cheney," Oliver recalled.⁴¹

Cyrus hunted for the Northern Pacific Railway crews when they were in the Cheney area, and later when he went to north Idaho. A family legend holds that Cyrus constructed a rather elaborate system of open pens on Turnbull Lake devised to trap and hold wild waterfowl. Oliver Turnbull's childhood memories of his father's hunting activities on Turnbull Lake remained vividly etched in his mind throughout his life:

Although I was only five years old when we moved away [to Idaho Territory] I can remember rather distinctly his [Cyrus'] tamed wild geese, which he used as decoys. Although my father followed the frontiers from boyhood, hunting geese in California and elsewhere, he told me he had never seen a wild goose light in trees until he came to the vicinity of Cheney. He told me that in this place, he had never found the nest of a wild goose, except upon an island or in a tree. I distinctly remember seeing a goose's nest about forty feet high in a pine snag.⁴²

In 1886 Cyrus pulled up stakes and moved his family to Sagle, Idaho, where he devoted the rest of his life to farming, logging, and raising his large family. He was remembered in his later years as a tall, heavy-set man with long white whiskers. One of his contemporaries remembered how, "he told me that he had only shaved once in his life, and that he had gotten some sores around his mouth, and determined that if that was what shaving did to a person, he just wouldn't do it any more."⁴³

Cyrus lived to be eighty-five years old. He died in 1934, almost fifty years after he left the wetlands that would bear his name. The Sandpoint News Bulletin memorialized him as "one of Bonner county's well known pioneers."⁴⁴

DANIEL F. PERCIVAL

Daniel F. Percival holds the dual distinction of being not only the first pioneer to claim land on the Refuge, but is also the Refuge's most illustrious early settler. In 1872 when Percival, then thirty-three years old, settled on Rock Creek (now called Pine Creek), his celebrated past presaged a distinguished career yet to come.

Seventy members of the party were killed by Indians on the Bozeman Trail.

Percival was born in 1839 in Bangor, Maine where his parents operated a lumber business. In 1864, at the age of twenty-three, he enlisted in the Union Army. He was present at the fall of Richmond, and reportedly witnessed General Lee's surrender at Appomattox. After the war, Percival became a merchant in St. Joe, Missouri.

In 1866 he joined a company of adventurers and headed west by ox team. Seventy members of the party were killed by Indians on the Bozeman Trail before the

group reached Bozeman, Montana, in September. After operating a business there for two years, Percival went south to California. He spent two years in San Diego before moving north in 1870 to Portland, where he worked in the lumber industry.⁴⁵

In 1872 Daniel Percival settled on Pine Creek near the present Refuge Headquarters. The next year he married Elizabeth Blythe, and the couple made their home on the Turnbull-area farm. In 1878 he was granted a patent for 120 acres, for which he paid the government \$300. Percival was for many years "a prosperous farmer of the Rock [Pine] Creek Country." By 1912 Percival's land had passed to the ownership of the Pine Creek Dairy. The dairy maintained possession until the Refuge was established in 1937.⁴⁶

Besides being a competent farmer, Daniel Percival was a highly-regarded public servant. He served as Commissioner for Stevens County (which then included present-day Spokane County) in 1874 and 1875. During his tenure (1876-1880) in the Territorial Assembly, Percival introduced the bill which created Spokane County in 1879. He was also reportedly the key figure in the establishment of the Normal School (now Eastern Washington University) in Cheney. Percival served as the first mayor of the town, and was elected to the office for five consecutive terms. While serving in that capacity, he developed the water works and helped equip the city with electric lights. In addition, Percival served for eight years as President of the Board of Trustees for the Eastern Washington Insane Asylum (now Eastern State Hospital) in Medical

Lake.⁴⁷

In 1881 Percival established a brokerage and real estate business in Cheney. Eight years later, Percival organized the First National Bank of Cheney, and served as its president.

At the turn of the century, a history of the county summarized Percival's career: "His life has been one of great adventure and signal success." An early settler near Cheney who knew Percival characterized him as "a far-seeing man of courageous convictions and ideas."⁴⁸

ISAAC J. BALLINGER

Isaac J. Ballinger was one of the earliest settlers on the refuge. He also served as mayor and councilman of the city of Cheney. He was also reportedly the first man to haul freight into the new townsite. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1848, Ballinger was ten years old when he moved with his parents to Illinois. In 1865 he left that state for Montana, where he worked for two years as a miner. He also participated in surveying a route for the Northern Pacific Railroad.⁴⁹

After a brief stay in Salt Lake City, Ballinger worked in mining and smelting in Eureka, Nevada, until 1879. While in that state he married Elizabeth Wesig, a native of Germany. They had four sons: George I., Edwin F., Raymond, and Victor. When Ballinger arrived at the future townsite of Cheney, buildings had not yet been erected. He took up farming, freighting, and stock raising from a "fine ranch" in the Lance Hills District.⁵⁰

Ballinger served in several civic and political positions following his settlement near Cheney. He was for a time Deputy



Isaac Ballinger house, March 1955, prior to its removal from the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Sheriff of Spokane County under Sheriff James Glispin. In 1898 he was elected to the Cheney City Council, and the next year became the town's mayor. Ballinger was also active in cooperative efforts to drain lands on what would later become the Refuge. He was one of three representatives chosen by farmers to legally represent their interests in widening and deepening ditches draining an area covering over 2,000 acres.⁵¹

ENGINEERING A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Establishment of the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge came about as the result of both local and federal actions. In an experimental attempt to attract more waterfowl to the area, the Spokane County Sportsmen's Association dammed one of the old drainage ditches on the Joseph N. Cossalman place in the northwestern corner of what would later become the Refuge.

The rejuvenated swamp became a popular nesting area and produced several hundred ducklings in the spring of 1934. By then Clarence D. Martin, a Cheney native son raised in the Refuge vicinity, had been elected governor of the state. He convinced the new commissioners of game that the Turnbull Lakes would make excellent waterfowl habitat if the lands could be publicly acquired and managed.⁵²

Passage of the Migratory Bird Conservation Act provided the impetus for creation of federal wildlife refuges around the country in the 1930s. On July 30, 1937, after much lobbying by local officials,

President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 7681, "Establishing the Turnbull Migratory Waterfowl Refuge." In reserving 12,774 acres "as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife," the proclamation required the government to either acquire title to or lease specific tracts of land in four townships.⁵³

"The property and location are such that you should have here one of the finest and most successful game refuges in the nation."

Negotiations for land purchases actually began as early as November 1934. By April 1938 only "a few remaining parcels" were not in government hands. Rex Putman, purchasing agent for the U.S. Biological Survey based in Denver, arrived in Cheney to secure the last tracts. "The property and location is such that you should have here one of the finest and most successful game refuges in the nation," he told the local press. He assuaged some local concerns by noting that, unlike other refuges, "This refuge will use only surplus water," that is water not needed by nearby farmers and ranchers. By November 1938 acquisitions were virtually completed; condemnation actions continued into early 1941 when several



The federal government has dug ditches and erected water control structures to restore and enhance wetlands on the Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge. Shown here in September 1955 is the excavation of a ditch between West Blackhorse Lake and Wheeler Pond, which is now dry due to drought.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

disputed claims were settled in the U.S. District Court in Spokane.⁵⁴

John D. Connors was appointed first Turnbull Refuge Manager in 1938. A resident of Opportunity in the Spokane Valley, Connors was at the time serving as Assistant Superintendent of Predatory Animal and Rodent Control in another federal agency. He was then already planning the system of dams and dikes needed to return the area to its former wetland condition. In November of that year Connors and his family moved into the house on the Ford place.⁵⁵ Engineering of the landscape for purposes of wildlife management had begun, and has continued unabated to this day.

The newly-established wildlife refuge provided the community with badly-needed jobs.

During the Great Depression, federal funds poured into the region in a variety of work programs designed to ease chronic unemployment. Works and Progress Administration (WPA) grants financed improvements to Cheney's water system and construction of a new library on the Eastern Washington State College campus.⁵⁶ The newly-established wildlife refuge nearby also provided the community with badly-needed jobs.

WPA employees began removing fences and farm buildings on the Refuge. By

July 1940, WPA men had erected buildings at the new headquarters and a ninety-nine foot tall fire tower overlooking Turnbull Sloughs. In addition, workers constructed numerous water control structures. These included the upper Turnbull Slough dam and the stone structure at the end of lower Turnbull Slough, and the tunnel under the SP&S Railroad grade connecting Long and Cossalman lakes.

Beginning in January 1941, the Refuge received support from the federal Soil and Moisture program which funded completion of numerous water control structures. By the mid 1940s, twenty-two such structures had been installed, completely controlling and redirecting drainage on the Refuge.⁵⁷

Road building also occupied Refuge employees during the early years of development. New roads were needed to provide access primarily for fire patrol and suppression, and other purposes.

In 1943 Charles Proctor supervised construction of what is today known as the "Auto Tour Route" on which visitors drive among Thirty Acre, Kepple and Blackhorse lakes in the relatively small area of the Refuge open to the public. Although the road now serves the visiting public, it was originally built for fire patrol and to enhance management opportunities for wildlife habitat.

Proctor also supervised WPA construction of the road running north and east of Refuge headquarters. Now maintained as a hiking trail, the route was originally built to provide direct access to the headquarters from the Cheney-Spangle Highway, but was never used as such. Proctor's crews graded roads, including those south of Reeves Lake (presently a hiking

trail), between Kepple and Blackhorse lakes. Proctor hauled crews of ten WPA men to the Refuge from Cheney each day until funds for the road-building program ran out in the mid-1940s.⁵⁸

REMOVAL OF FARM BUILDINGS

Workers began removing buildings from farmsteads soon after their arrival on the Refuge. By January 1940, they had razed between 105 and 109 buildings and 88 miles of barbed wire fences.⁵⁹

The worst wildfire ever to burn on the Refuge began in July of 1960 along the Union Pacific Railroad tracks.

Yet numerous structures remained, some for many years thereafter. A few were occupied under permits issued by the USFWS to farmers who had been living on the Refuge when the government acquired their lands. Examples included Raymond Ballanger and Fred Campbell, who were still in "their" farms, under USFWS permit, in 1942.⁶⁰ Other farm buildings were put to various uses, some by the USFWS. A few structures were used to house government trappers, university student interns, and the like.

Despite the early removal of over 100 buildings, the job of demolishing unwanted farm structures went unfinished for years. In 1946, Refuge Manager Ralph C. Winslow stated that "the aesthetic value of the refuge is high, but greatly marred by a few scattered, unoccupied, unpainted old buildings which greatly detract from its beauty. These old buildings located at headquarters and also scattered over the refuge should be razed, sold, or otherwise removed since they serve no purpose and greatly detract from the neat appearance of the refuge."⁶¹

Building disposal took place in essentially one of three ways: by selling on bid, salvage for Refuge use, or simple demolition. "The razing of the old farm buildings, recently sold under bids, is now under way," stated a 1948 report, "All of the old buildings were dismantled and materials salvaged, or removed in fact from the refuge, and the premises were left in a neat, orderly condition."⁶²

Removal, salvage, adaptive reuse, and demolition continued through the 1950s. In 1955, the Refuge reported: "Most of the buildings not sold on formal bid last fall have now been sold through informal bids as authorized by the Regional Office. Buildings now remaining will be salvaged for refuge use while others will be razed to improve appearance."⁶³ While the old Siefert rock dairy barn at the Headquarters was undergoing "rehabilitation" that year (it had been remodeled by the USFWS in 1950), a new manager's house was built at a cost of \$18,000. Manager Wilber A. Rogers moved into the dwelling in 1955.⁶⁴

The Refuge continued renting two houses on government land into the late

1950s. One of the dwellings, known as No. 8, was occupied by an employee of the U.S. Branch of Predator Control until early 1963. "Some of the buildings are scheduled for disposal at this time," said the Refuge report.⁶⁵

The worst wildfire ever to burn on the Refuge began in July of 1960 along the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. It quickly spread eastward onto the Refuge and consumed several buildings on the Van Brunt Place. Only the bunkhouse there survived the flames, but it was later removed.⁶⁶

Finally, in 1968, the USFWS closed the "Second Headquarters" at the old Findley Place. Charles Proctor, a Turnbull NWR employee who had lived in the old Findley house since 1943, moved to Cheney. The buildings were moved, with the grand old frame barn going a few miles south to the Bell farm just south of the Refuge where it still stands. It was the last major removal of buildings reflecting the early history of the area.

CONCLUSION

Of the approximately 15,500 acres which comprise Turnbull National Wildlife Refuge today, less than one-sixth of the area—or roughly 2,200 acres—is open to the public. That acreage, known as the "Public Use Area," lies immediately east of the Cheney-Plaza highway on Smith Road. Refuge Headquarters is located in the heart of the public area. Visitors are invited to "explore" here where the principal recreational activities are "wildlife observation, nature study and photography."⁶⁷

It is an invitation which the public has

eagerly accepted. At present 20,000-25,000 visitors flock to this small portion of the Refuge annually. As is true in the remaining restricted part of the Refuge, the hand of man's "historic activity" rests lightly indeed. Material remains are few and far between—an abandoned country road, a time-worn "rock crib" that once anchored a fence line, an occasional lilac bush, and a few building foundations and scattered debris.

Today, the pristine appearance of the landscape provides the sightseer with a misleading notion.

These remains, however, are nevertheless reminders of the intensity and longevity of settlement activity that occurred continuously from the time of initial white settlement in 1877 until the establishment of the Refuge in 1937. From these few artifacts, it is unlikely the average visitor would suspect that nearly every acre presently comprising the Refuge was once part of a privately-owned farm, or that most of these farms were subsequently passed in ownership from one family to another. Yet farms that once prospered here dramatically shaped and permanently altered this wetlands environment.

Today, the pristine appearance of the



Restored wetlands are now home to numerous plant and animal species.

Photo by Harvey S. Rice.

landscape provides the sightseer to the Visitor Use Area with a misleading notion. Surely here, one may think, is a place little changed from the days when early adventurers first passed through the unusual habitat. The ponds and marshes of the wetlands, teeming with wildlife; the upland forests of ponderosa pine; the damp zones of quaking aspen, willow, and hawthorn; the prairie grasslands; the meadows, rippling with reed canary grass—all suggest a venerability and sense of timelessness one rarely associates with the dynamic change engendered by settlement and technological development.

Though the evidence of man's former presence is today but faintly expressed in the natural ambience of this wildlife refuge, the influence of his "historic activities" on its destiny has been both lasting and deep. Change, produced almost entirely by intense human activity, has been the most salient feature of the Refuge's history.

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