HABITAT MANAGEMENT PLAN

Swan Creek
Wildlife Management Area

MARCH 2025

PREPARED BY:
UTAH DIVISION OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES – NORTHERN REGION

UTAH DNR WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Swan Creek Wildlife Management Area

Habitat Management Plan

RDCC Project Number and Submission Date:

Habitat Council Review Date:

RAC Review Date:

Director's Approval: _____ **Date:** _____

Director

Swan Creek Wildlife Management Area
Habitat Management Plan

Executive Summary

PRIMARY PURPOSE OF SWAN CREEK WMA

The primary purposes of the Swan Creek WMA are to preserve and protect big game winter range and wintering animals, reduce big game depredation on surrounding private property, maintain instream flows and water quality for Bear Lake cutthroat trout (BLCT) that ascend Swan Creek from Bear Lake to spawn, and provide opportunities for hunting and fishing.

WILDLIFE SPECIES

The Swan Creek WMA is home to a variety of game and nongame wildlife species. Mule deer, elk, and moose are commonly seen in early fall, winter, and spring. The WMA also has the habitat to support a diversity of upland game birds that include greater sage-grouse, dusky grouse, ruffed grouse and turkeys. The BLCT, a popular sport fish in the region, are present in Swan Creek.

HABITAT CONDITIONS AND CHALLENGES

Overall, the habitat is intact and diverse within the boundaries of the WMA with minimal issues. The current issues/challenges include; recreational pressure, some weeds, and limited access to water for wildlife in the summer. Additionally, the area is currently experiencing development challenges on the northern, eastern, and southern borders of the WMA along the wildland-urban interface as lots are developed with vacation cabins and more people visit the Bear Lake area. Such development brings increased access issues and potential fire risk.

ACCESS MANAGEMENT

The intent of the WMA Access plan is to establish and enforce the annual winter access closure period to all public uses from December 1- May 1. In addition, the WMA is closed year round to

motorized vehicle access to protect wintering wildlife and wildlife habitats. Mountain biking activities are confined to the existing roads and trails. Unauthorized user-created roads and trails are not permitted and will be closed and rehabilitated. The parking lot/trailhead area will be maintained to accommodate visitor day use.

MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

Typical WMA maintenance activities include: fence repair, parking lot maintenance, road grading, sign replacement, trash pick-up, monitoring the WMA for illegal travel, and invasive and noxious weed control. These maintenance activities will be conducted on an “as needed” basis.

HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS

Since housing communities are situated adjacent to this WMA, it is important to work cooperatively with land management agencies and private landowners to plan and implement projects that will improve wildlife habitat and range conditions in general while also mitigating fire risk. Improvement projects will focus on sagebrush-steppe habitats that provide crucial winter ranges for deer and elk.

Due to the presence of Bear Lake cutthroat trout (BLCT) within the drainage, several enhancement activities are recommended. These include: monitoring Swan Creek at intervals to obtain population estimates of BLCT; monitoring riparian areas for any unpermitted activities (bridges, vegetation removal); and evaluate the Swan Creek canal to determine if there is significant fish loss and, if so, develop recommendations to reduce this fish loss.

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Habitat Management Plan for Swan Creek Wildlife Management Area

January 2025

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

This Habitat Management Plan (HMP) has been developed to guide management on lands owned and managed by the Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) located northwest of Garden City and West of Bear Lake in Rich County Utah.

PURPOSE OF DIVISION OWNERSHIP

Generally, the objectives of DWR wildlife management areas are to conserve and protect wildlife populations and habitats, and to provide hunting, angling, and wildlife viewing access when possible. The Swan Creek WMA (SCWMA) was acquired primarily to protect crucial wintering range habitat for mule deer, elk, and moose in the Cache Wildlife Management Unit. The purpose of the WMA becomes more important as much of the surrounding habitat is developed. Bear Lake cutthroat trout (BLCT) spawn in Swan Creek and the DWR has a fish trap downstream of the WMA used to collect eggs from spawning fish. By owning the WMA and water rights, the DWR can ensure the BLCT will have a place to spawn. The spring area also creates valuable riparian habitat for migrating neo-tropical songbirds.

HISTORIC USES

The WMA is near a historic mountain man rendezvous location. Irrigation canals were created in 1877 and 1886 to carry water from Swan Creek to Garden City. There is a cabin on the old Utah Power & Light parcel. This property served as the Swan Creek Electric Company facilities prior to being acquired by Utah Power & Light. Livestock

grazing most likely occurred on the property in the past. The area was and still is a popular hunting destination.

PUBLIC RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

The major public recreation opportunities on the property primarily include hunting for upland game and big game. Additional uses include fishing, horseback riding, and sight-seeing. The SCWMA, on occasion, can experience high public use due to its close proximity to the Bear Lake Shoreline Trails, the town of Garden City, and residential development on the south, north and east sides of the WMA. In addition, privatization and development of the West Bear Lake area has helped concentrate public users on the SCWMA. The increase of year long use of the WMA has caused disturbances to wintering wildlife which contribute to big game animals moving onto adjacent agriculture and residential lands, consequently causing depredation problems. The winter closure period on the SCWMA was established to reduce or eliminate these disturbances.

Activities on the WMA will be considered according to the DWR Administrative Lands Rule (R657-28). In general, activities that do not promote or protect the goals and objectives of the unit will be prohibited, specifically those that disturb or harass wildlife, or degrade important habitats.

The SCWMA is closed to all public access during the winter months (Dec. 1 - May 1) to protect wintering wildlife and wildlife habitats. These dates may be adjusted if necessary for biological or management reasons. The property is also closed year long to all public motorized vehicle use. During the months the WMA is open, the outer gate on the property boundary will be open to allow vehicles to drive 100 yards into the WMA to the interior gates and upper parking lot, where people can park to access the main portions of the WMA.

Camping is permitted on this WMA for 10 consecutive days in a 30 day period (R657-28-4), or as posted. DWR may adjust camping dates and designated areas as needed to mitigate impacts to wildlife habitats.

KEY WILDLIFE SPECIES

BIG GAME

Mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) can be found on the WMA year round but typically are seen in higher prevalence late fall throughout the winter as they migrate from higher elevations to lower more suitable winter range.

Rocky Mountain elk (*Cervus canadensis*) are typically found on the WMA late fall throughout winter as it is primarily used as winter range. They migrate from the higher elevation US Forest Service property that borders the WMA to the west.

Moose (*Alces alces*) occur on the WMA year round but typically are seen in higher prevalence late fall throughout the winter as they migrate from higher elevations to lower more suitable winter range.

UPLAND GAME

The Swan Creek WMA has an abundant and diverse community of upland game species that includes greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*), ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) and wild turkeys (Meleagris gallopavo).

Greater sage-grouse are species of greatest conservation need in Utah. Their populations are monitored closely, because sage grouse populations have declined in some areas. The WMA is not located in a Sage-grouse Management Area. A sage grouse lek (a communal breeding ground) has been observed by the area biologist approximately 1 mile south of the WMA on private property, and sage grouse have been observed on the property.

AQUATIC SPECIES

Bear Lake cutthroat trout are found in Swan Creek.

CARNIVORES

Cougars (*Felis concolor*), American black bear (*Ursus americanus*), bobcat (*Lynx rufus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*), and red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) are found on Swan Creek WMA.

GRAZING

The DWR may use domestic livestock grazing to manage vegetation on the WMA if grazing is determined to be beneficial for the maintenance or improvement of wildlife habitat.

II. PROPERTY INFORMATION

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Swan Creek WMA is located in northern Utah, in Rich County, approximately three miles north of Garden City and one mile west of the Bear Lake shore line. It encompasses 672 acres of low to mid elevation curl-leaf mountain mahogany woodland and shrubland. The north boundary of the property is the Idaho state line with residential developments located adjacent to the WMA. To the west is the Wasatch-Cache National Forest. Residential developments are also located south and east of the WMA.

LAND ACQUISITION HISTORY

In May 1988, DWR acquired 670 acres from First Security Mortgage Company to protect big game winter range west of Bear Lake. Pittman-Roberson Federal Aid funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services Federal Aid program was used for this acquisition.

In March 1974, Utah Power & Light Company deeded 2.352 acres to DWR. These parcels were deeded to DWR as mitigation for DWR lands that were inundated with water when Utah Power & Light built a dam for Electric Lake in southern Utah. A small cabin can be found on the property. The old storage shed and turbine was torn down in 2010 due to their dilapidated condition. The above ground turbine tubes were removed in 2011, and the ground restored to natural conditions.

ENCUMBRANCES

When DWR acquired the WMA, Garden City already had a buried water pipeline which takes water from the Swan Creek spring to Garden City's water treatment plant. Rich County has an easement along W Swan Creek Road for a buried sewer line. This easement was issued in 2009 and will need to be renewed in 2039. All easements, ROW's, and MOU's are on file in the DWR Salt Lake Office.

WATER RIGHTS

The following are the water rights filed on the WMA prior to DWR ownership.

Owner	Water Rights	CFS	Priority Date	Source
Kimball, Heber C.	23-1283	0	1870	Swan Creek
Booth, Bryan L.	23-2913	0	1870	Swan Creek
Brown, Trudy Ann & Lynn D.	23-1284	0	1870	Swan Creek
Swan Creek Canal Company	23-158	66.5	Sept 1882	Swan Creek
Hodges Irrigation Company	23-219	66.5	Sept 1882	Swan Creek
Swan Canal Company	23-359	66.5	Sept 1882	Swan Creek Spring
Division of Wildlife Resources	23-404	19	9/6/1910	Swan Creek
Garden City Corporation	23-134	0.5	3/12/1934	Swan Creek Spring
Garden City Corporation	23-1713	1	2/26/1962	Swan Creek Spring
Division of Wildlife Resources	23-1714	10.4	2/28/1962	Swan Creek Spring

Garden City Corporation	23-3378	1	8/12/1977	Swan Creek Spring
Division of Wildlife Resources	23-3525	4	10/30/1978	Booth Springs
Kunz, Mark L. & Blaine L.	23-3656	50	10/20/1982	Swan Creek Spring
Swan Creek Power Associates	23-3658	50	12/31/1982	Swan Creek Spring

MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

All mineral, oil and gas rights, except sand and gravel rights, were retained by all former property owners. Detailed information on these rights are on file with the DWR Salt Lake Office.

III. PROPERTY INVENTORY

EXISTING CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

ROADS

The main road is a graded county dirt road (2150 North) from US-89 and heads west through houses and past a small cabin on the WMA property on the way to the spring. There is a decommissioned 4-wheeler trail that has been blocked off behind the spring head which prevents motorized travel up the stream drainage to protect the watershed from erosion and further degradation while still allowing foot traffic. Public vehicle access on the SCWMA is limited to a 100 yard route from the eastern property boundary to the upper parking area. There are approximately three miles of two-track trails that are available for administrative vehicle use and public non-motorized use, from May 1 to November 30th.

FENCING

There is a tall fence with razor wire around the springhead. The northern border along the Idaho state line is fenced and as funding or needs arise, future sections may be installed. All fence installations on the WMA will be completed with wildlife friendly specifications. Signs that delineate the boundaries of the WMA are posted on metal T-posts. A large sign welcomes visitors at the eastern boundary as well as the main gate that is used to restrict access to the parking lot when the WMA is closed. The main parking lot has two metal gates for administrative access, two equestrian walk-through style gates, and drill pipe fencing to restrict unauthorized vehicle access.

PHYSICAL FACILITIES

There is a small two bedroom cabin, used for DWR administrative purposes, and storage shed on the Utah Power parcel. There was a small storage shed across the road from the cabin and a garage structure that used to house turbines for the power company. In 2010, the old shed and turbine holes were torn down, debris hauled away and turbine holes filled. In 2011, the 3’ diameter pipes located between the old power plant and the upper diversion ditch were also removed.

HABITAT PROJECTS

The Division will work cooperatively with land management agencies and private landowners to plan and implement projects that will improve wildlife habitat and range conditions in general. Improvement projects will focus on maintaining the existing habitat diversity for big game use in both winter and summer. Due to the limited availability of water on the property, future water enhancement projects (i.e. rain harvesting ponds, and/or guzzlers) would increase the value of this property to wildlife and address potential depredation issues and vehicle/wildlife collisions at lower elevations.

Due to the presence of BLCT within the drainage, stream enhancement projects have been implemented, and routine monitoring is conducted. In 2010, a fish screen was installed on the lowest irrigation canal of Swan Creek to prevent the loss of both adult and juvenile fish. Population monitoring is primarily carried out each spring using a cutthroat trout spawning trap, along with electrofishing every five years.

IRRIGATION

There are no active or planned areas for irrigation on the Swan Creek WMA.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

A review of the State Historic Preservation Office's cultural resource database shows very little of the Swan Creek WMA has been assessed for cultural resources. In 2024 a small archaeological survey was completed in support of proposed infrastructure improvements at the WMA. Proposed infrastructure improvement areas (road, parking area, and fence) were intensively archaeologically surveyed with no significant findings. No other archaeological surveys have been conducted on the WMA.

A letter provided by the Utah State Historic Preservation Office for the nearby Garden City water treatment plant's Environment Assessment (EA) stated that there are no historic properties located within the project area. Garden City's facility is located adjacent to the Swan Creek WMA, and a portion of the property was included within the EA cultural resources assessment. The City's nearby cabin, storage shed, and turbine garage were not considered historical properties.

Given the WMA includes steep foothills above Bear Lake, the WMA likely has a low density of cultural resources. But given the proximity to private recreational residences, agricultural landowners, and a perennial spring, cultural resources from the historic period are possible. These resources would most likely be associated with historic livestock or range management practices. There is also a small historic mining site (pit or adit) on the WMA that has not been recorded but may have some interesting or significant history behind it. There is also a historic canal originating at the Swan Creek Spring that briefly crosses the WMA and may have historical significance.

The Bear Lake area also has a deep cultural history of use by Indigenous groups prior to the arrival of white settlers. Cultural resources associated with resource procurement or short-term camps are possible on the WMA. The nearby Swan Creek Spring was likely used by Native American groups, but such evidence is likely long-since destroyed and would likely be outside the WMA. No Indigenous-affiliated sites or artifacts are known on the WMA, but may simply be due to the lack of intensive archaeological survey, areas of

poor ground visibility (e.g. thick vegetation), or lack of inquiry with locals who may have more detailed knowledge of the area.

Per standard cultural resource compliance requirements, future WMA projects that involve ground disturbing activities in previously undisturbed areas should receive an archaeological survey in advance of project implementation. Significant findings are not expected but given the historic and indigenous use of the Bear Lake area, cultural resources discoveries are possible.

SPECIES OF GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED

The draft 2025 Utah Wildlife Action Plan was created “to manage native wildlife species and their habitats, sufficient to prevent the need for additional listings under the Endangered Species Act.” The State of Utah has identified several Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGGN), which “do, or potentially could, present the possibility of an ESA listing.” There are four wildlife species that are considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need that have been observed on the Swan Creek WMA, are found in similar habitats on surrounding lands, or would be expected to occur given habitat types present on the WMA (Table 1). The State of Utah has also identified Species of Greatest Information Need (SGIN), which have an unknown status or uncertainty about status or distribution but could be of conservation concern. Species are designated such due to a lack of current scientific knowledge for a given taxon or information critical to understanding its conservation needs. There are seven wildlife species that are considered a Species of Greatest Information Need that have been observed on the Swan Creek WMA, are found in similar habitats on surrounding lands, or would be expected to occur given habitat types present on the WMA (Table 2).

Table 1. Species of Greatest Conservation Need that occur within the Swan Creek WMA.

Species	Scientific Name
Bonneville cutthroat trout	*Oncorhynchus clarkii utah*
Greater sage-grouse	*Centrocercus urophasianus*
Little brown bat	*Myotis lucifugus*
Hoary bat	*Lasiurus cinereus*

Table 2. Species of Greatest Information Need that occur within the Swan Creek WMA.

Species	Scientific Name
Common Nighthawk	*Chordeiles minor*
Calliope Hummingbird	*Selasphorus calliope*
Long-eared bat	*Myotis evotis*
Long-legged bat	*Myotis volans*
Western water shrew	*Sorex navigator*
Oregon jumping mouse	*Zapus oregonus*
White-tailed jackrabbit	*Lepus townsendii*

IMPORTANT FISH AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

In addition to the SGCNs listed above, the Swan Creek WMA provides crucial winter range habitat for mule deer, elk, moose and several other upland species.

GENERAL CONDITIONS OF HABITAT

HABITAT TYPES

The Swan Creek WMA provides year round habitat for many species and consists of curl-leaf mountain mahogany woodland and shrubland. The dominant plant species is curl-leaf mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*), with an understory of bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata), serviceberry (Amelanchier utahensis), mountain snowberry (Symphoricarpos oreophilus*) and mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata spp. vaseyana*).

RANGE AND WATERSHED CONDITIONS

In 1990, one range trend monitoring site was established on the WMA (02-21 Swan Creek). Since the study site establishment, curl-leaf mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus ledifolius*) has dominated the shrub overstory. The herbaceous understory has remained abundant and diverse throughout the study period. Perennial grasses have been a co-dominant site component in most years; the native species bluebunch wheatgrass (*Pseudoroegneria spicata*) has been the most abundant perennial grass species in all sample years. However, the introduced species bulbous bluegrass (*Poa bulbosa*) has increased in both cover and abundance over the study period and may threaten the diversity of the herbaceous component if the trend continues in the future. In addition, the introduced annual grass species cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) has been sampled each year and was the dominant herbaceous component in 1996, but has varied greatly in abundance over time. Perennial and annual forbs have been abundant and diverse, but have provided less cover than grasses.

Deer winter range condition has ranged from poor to excellent, and has generally improved as preferred browse age structure has diversified and perennial grass cover

has increased. Deer winter range conditions were considered to be excellent in 2021. Improvements of deer winter range conditions could be achieved through efforts to maintain and support mature plants and their reproduction in the preferred browse community. This range trend monitoring site is evaluated every five years.

RIPARIAN CORRIDOR

The Swan Creek WMA encompasses portions of Swan Creek, a perennial stream flowing from the west border to the east border of the property. Swan Creek provides spawning habitat for adfluvial cutthroat trout and yearlong habitat for stream resident BLCTt. The only fish found in Swan Creek during electro-fishing surveyed for the past 40 years are cutthroat trout and rainbow trout x cutthroat trout hybrids. Interestingly, no sculpin, brook trout, or any other fish have been sampled. All non-native fish (rainbow trout and hybrids) have been removed from the creek.

The creek is very valuable to the cutthroat trout population and to the overall Bear Lake fishery program. The channel has year-round flow to Bear Lake and the distance between the mouth of the stream and the lake (even during extremely low water periods) is less than a quarter of a mile. The cutthroat trout, therefore, are able to ascend the stream to spawn in all years. The DWR operates a cutthroat trout trap near the mouth of the stream which collects eggs from wild fish that are then reared in a hatchery and stocked back into the lake the following spring.

The stream type in the area of the fish trap is a Rosgen C4 channel and has stable banks. Farther upstream, on the WMA, the channel type changes to a B2 or B3 channel with stable banks. Downstream of the Swan Creek canal, the Swan Creek stream habitat supports large numbers of cutthroat trout. The stream channel upstream above the canal becomes steep and does not provide optimal habitat for large numbers of fish.

The riparian zone along the entire stream is well developed and there is no livestock grazing. The majority of the riparian corridor outside the WMA boundary is privately owned and has been developed.

HABITAT LIMITATIONS

The main habitat limitation of the WMA is its small size, totaling only 672.35 acres. With residential development surrounding the property, there is insufficient contiguous winter range to support significant populations of big game animals. However, this area remains the only winter range habitat currently protected from development in the immediate vicinity. Additionally, water availability has been noted as a potential limiting factor as wildlife transition to and from the winter range.

The Swan Creek canal was constructed in the late 1800's to distribute irrigation water in the Garden City area (May 15 - Oct. 31). It begins approximately a quarter of a mile east of the Swan Creek spring, and flows south about 10 miles, with any "excess" water entering Bear Lake north of Gus Rich Point. The canal is approximately eight feet wide and can take approximately 50 cfs of Swan Creek water. Depending upon the flows needed, the water can be up to three feet deep. In 2010, a fish screen was installed to prevent adult and juvenile fish loss.

HUMAN USE RELATED PROBLEMS

There was an ATV trail that headed up the bottom drainage, adjacent to the spring. Several attempts were made to block the trail with boulders but failed. Larger boulders were placed and this has been effective in blocking ATV travel up this sensitive riparian corridor. Neighboring properties to the north and south of the WMA are zoned for residential development and are developing quickly. Two neighboring properties to the south of the WMA built portions of their development on WMA land. Property surveys have since been done to better mark the boundary and resolve the issue. Potential and future impacts could include development and increased recreational use of neighboring properties, which results in an increased risk for unauthorized motorized use of the WMA and illegal use during the winter closure months.

ADJACENT LAND USES AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS

On the north border, on the Idaho side of the state line, there is residential development and to the south of the WMA, all the land has been zoned for development and will most

likely have houses on it in the future. The surrounding parcels in both Utah and Idaho are popular with off-road vehicle enthusiasts and several water storage tanks have already been constructed in this area. This will make the WMA even more important in the future as encroaching development further reduces the available acreage of quality winter range. The WMA is bordered on the south and east by Garden City. To the west is Forest Service land, but it is mainly at too high of elevation to be productive winter range.

The town of Garden City completed construction of a culinary water treatment plant in 2009, which is adjacent to the east-side of the SCWMA on privately owned land. The town also installed a sewer system to handle treatment wastes, and Utah state law mandated that the current homes along the Swan Creek be required to hook onto the sewer line and to abandon their septic systems. This has resulted in further protection of the Swan Creek watershed.

ZONING AND LAND ORDINANCES

The Bear Lake Regional Commission lists the SCWMA as zoned for agriculture. Current management activities on the WMA are compatible with this zoning and the general plans for the area. On the north border, in Idaho, there is ongoing residential development. To the south of the WMA, the land has been designated for future development, which has already begun being developed. As development encroaches, the WMA will become increasingly vital, as it will help preserve remaining quality winter habitat for wildlife, in an area undisturbed by motorized use.

IV. MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The management of the Swan Creek WMA considers the goals, objectives, and strategies of DWR planning efforts, as well as county and state plans. These plans include, but are not limited to, the DWR Strategic Plan, the Utah Wildlife Action Plan, species management plans, and state and county resource management plans. This section is a summary of relevant objectives and strategies contained within those plans.

DWR STRATEGIC PLAN

The management of the Swan Creek WMA will be consistent with the goals and objectives of the DWR Strategic Plan:

- Agency Goals: Create a culture of respect, innovation, efficiency and effectiveness within the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.
    - Objective A6 - Increase our coordination with partners, including local, state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, universities, tribal nations and others to accomplish shared goals.
- Constituency Goal: Strengthen support for wildlife management by demonstrating the value and importance of wildlife to all Utahns.
    - Objective C1 - Increase opportunity for and participation in fishing, hunting and other wildlife-related activities.
    - Objective C5 - Improve our understanding of how the broader public views and values wildlife —- and how it contributes to their quality of life — and take reasonable steps to address their needs, wishes and priorities.
- Resource Goals: Conserve, enhance and actively manage Utah's protected wildlife populations, their habitats and the water resources they rely on, using the best available science.
    - Objective R1 - Increase, decrease or maintain wildlife populations, as needed, to meet the objectives in our management plans
    - Objective R2 - Maintain existing wildlife habitat and increase the quality of critical habitats and watersheds throughout the state.

- Objective R4 - Decrease risk to species and their habitats through integrated implementation of the Wildlife Action Plan, species recovery plans, conservation agreements and other management plans (species, AIS, disease, etc.).

- Objective R5 - Conduct management work to help prevent species of concern from being federally listed as threatened or endangered, and work to delist those species that are currently listed.

- Objective R7 - Decrease the number of wildlife-related incidents — including property damage, crop depredation and threatened or endangered species listings — that negatively affect private property owners.

WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN

The draft 2025 Utah Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) draft was created with the goal *"To manage native wildlife, fish, mollusk, crustacean, amphibian, reptile, insects, and plant species and their habitats, sufficient to prevent the need for additional listings under the Endangered Species Act."* The scope of work required to achieve this goal is beyond what any single organization can accomplish on its own. It will require collaborative, creative, solution-based partnerships.

The WAP is updated on a 10 year cycle. It is important to note that the information shared below from the draft of the 2025 WAP may change slightly upon final adoption of the document in fall of 2025. Although no significant changes are anticipated, any changes will be noted in an Appendix to the HMP. The WAP identifies wildlife species most in need of conservation attention and the habitats they require for survival. The WAP includes a statewide threat assessment, which identifies threats to each key habitat and then ranks the impact of that threat according to the number of conservation importance that could be affected. The Swan Creek WMA contains multiple key habitats listed in the WAP. The threats listed below are not a comprehensive list of statewide threats identified for these habitats but are those that may be most relevant on the WMA. Management activities on the MWA will attempt, to the extent possible, to address these

priority threats, and will use the suggested strategies for management as outlined in the WAP.

TERRESTRIAL KEY HABITATS

ASPEN-CONIFER

Priority threats include:

- Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity - (Very High)
- Expansion of Urban Footprint - (Low)
- OHV Motorized Recreation - (Medium)
- Improper Grazing (current) - (High)
- Improper Grazing (historic) - (Very High)
- Problematic Animal Species - Native - (Medium)

Strategies for management include:

- Increased disturbance from either prescribed or natural fires, particularly in aspen stands with a large component of fire.
- Apply mechanical disturbance to stimulate aspen regeneration and avoid or reduce conifer invasion, reduce fuel loading, and increase conifer diversity to help reduce the risk of wood-boring beetle infestation (e.g., bark beetles).
- Monitor smaller, naturally occurring or human-created disturbances for ungulate damage, and take follow-up actions such as additional habitat work, fencing, hazing, hunting, and/or domestic grazing management. This may be required to prevent or reduce damage caused by domestic, wild, or feral ungulates.

- Promote policies that reduce improper and intensive browsing and grazing by domestic livestock.

- Reintroduce beaver where appropriate and install beaver dam analogs (BDAs) where beaver introduction is not feasible.

MONTANE AND SUBALPINE

Priority threats include:

- Improper grazing (current); Improper grazing (historic) - (Medium)

- OHV Motorized Recreation - (Low)

- Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity - (High)

Strategies for management include:

- Reduce overstocked and homogenous forest types to help reduce the impacts of severe wildfire events.

- Create mosaics of age classes and fuel breaks to limit the size of high-severity wildfires and help keep various age classes of forest on the landscape.

- Manage noxious weeds and recreation.

MOUNTAIN SAGEBRUSH

Priority threats include:

- Improper grazing (current) - (Medium)

- Improper grazing (historic): (High)
- Roads (Transportation Networks) - (Medium)
- OHV Motorized Recreation - (Low)
- Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity - (Medium)
- Invasive Plant Species (Non-native) - (Medium)

Strategies for management include:

- Although large-scale pinyon-juniper management is controversial, use of this technique to keep sagebrush from being overtaken by pinyon-juniper can be very effective and can benefit a number of sagebrush obligate species. Early treatment when pinyon-juniper seedlings are small is more cost effective, has less of a visual impact, and creates less woody debris.
- Fuel breaks around and within large, intact stands of sagebrush can assist firefighters in managing large wildfires and can help reduce acreage of impacts from wildfires.
- Continued research to improve sagebrush habitat.
- Continuing to work with federal land managers to protect larger and healthier stands of mountain sagebrush habitat. This can include identifying the locations of these habitats and helping drive potential impacts to less intact habitats.
- Work with local government to identify larger and healthier stands of mountain sagebrush habitat and help avoid development in these habitats.
- Identify new noxious weed infestations and treatments.

- Although prescribed fire can be an effective tool for creating various age classes and helping to reinvigorate decadent stands, the risk of weed invasion and long-term loss of sagebrush cover must be carefully considered.

MOUNTAIN SHRUB

Priority threats include:

- Improper grazing (current) - (Low)
- Improper grazing (historic) - (Medium)
- OHV Motorized Recreation - (Low)
- Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity - (Medium)
- Agricultural / Municipal / Industrial / Water Usage - (Low)
- Invasive Plant Species (Non-native) - (Medium)

Strategies for management include:

- Fire, flooding, and erosion all impact mountain shrub habitat. Implementing fire policies that encourage a more natural fire regime will assist in the enhancement of mountain shrub habitat.
- Promoting policies that reduce inappropriate grazing by domestic livestock and wildlife.
- Continuing the use of appropriate methods for reducing the spread and dominance of invasive weeds and annual grasses.

RIPARIAN

Priority threats include:

- Improper grazing (current) - (High)
- Improper grazing (historic) - (Very High)
- Roads (Transportation Networks) - (High)
- OHV Motorized Recreation - (Medium)
- Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity - (High)
- Presence of Diversions - (High)
- Dam / Reservoir Operations - (High)
- Channelization / Bank Alteration (direct, intentional) - (High)
- Groundwater Pumping - (Low)
- Agricultural / Municipal / Industrial Water Usage - (High)
- Water Allocation Policies - (Very High)
- Invasive Plant Species (Non-native) - (High)

Strategies for management include:

- Identify riparian habitat impacted by land use practices and continue to support funding for low-tech, process-based restoration (e.g., BDAs, one-rock dams).
- Continue to support funding for weed treatment in riparian habitat.

- Identify old water structures (including levees) that channeled rivers and separated floodplains from streams. Remove obsolete structures where possible to help reconnect floodplains and re-establish riparian zones.

- Assist in revegetation and restoration of burn scars.

- Promote zoning, policies, and laws that lead to responsible human intrusion and development.

- Promote development of BDAs and post-assisted log structures.

AQUATIC KEY HABITATS

RIVERS AND STREAMS

Priority threats include:

- Improper grazing (current); Improper grazing (historic) - (High)

- Roads (Transportation Networks) - (Medium)

- OHV Motorized Recreation - (Medium)

- Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity - (High)

- Presence of Diversions - (Very High)

- Dam / Reservoir Operations - (High)

- Channelization / Bank Alteration (direct, intentional) - (High)

- Groundwater Pumping - (Low)

- Agricultural / Municipal / Industrial Water Usage - (Very High)

- Water Allocation Policies - (Very High)

Strategies for management include:

- Promoting policies that maintain or restore natural flow and sediment regimes.

- Promote policies that reduce inappropriate grazing by domestic livestock and wildlife.

- Promote policies that minimize or eliminate the placement of roads in riparian zones.

- Promote policies that reduce inappropriate residential and commercial development in floodplains.

- Continue the use of appropriate methods for reducing the spread and dominance of invasive weeds and aquatic vegetation.

- Use proven stream restoration techniques to aggrade the channels of highly degraded streams, especially those that are so channelized and/or incised that they are no longer connected to the floodplain, (e.g., incorporation of low-tech, process-based restoration techniques such as BDAs) to restore natural stream conditions.

SPRINGS

Priority threats include:

- Improper grazing (current); Improper grazing (historic) - (High)

- Roads (Transportation Networks) - (Low)

- OHV Motorized Recreation - (Low)
- Inappropriate Fire Frequency and Intensity - (Low)
- Groundwater Pumping - (High)
- Agricultural / Municipal / Industrial Water Usage - (Low)
- Water Allocation Policies - (Very High)
- Invasive Plant Species (Non-native) - (Medium)

Strategies for management include:

- Promoting policies that maintain or restore natural flow and sediment regimes.
- Promote policies that reduce grazing by domestic livestock and wildlife that negatively impact springs.
- Promote policies that minimize or eliminate the placement of roads in riparian zones.
- Promote policies that reduce development that impacts springs.
- Promote policies that reduce dewatering of springs.
- Continue the use of methods for reducing the spread and dominance of invasive noxious weeds and aquatic vegetation.
- Follow SSI's restoration and rehabilitation recommendations for heavily degraded springs and springs that contain rare species of springsnail and other mollusks, including removal of exotic weeds and protection from grazing.

WILDLIFE SPECIES MANAGEMENT PLANS

DEER AND ELK HERD UNIT MANAGEMENT PLANS

The Cache Unit deer and elk plans share the same goals which are to:

1. Manage for a healthy population of animals capable of providing a broad range of recreational opportunities, including hunting and viewing.

2. Balance deer herd impacts on human needs, such as private property rights, agricultural crop and local economies.

3. Maintain the population at a level that is within the long-term capability of the available habitat to support.

Both plans describe how winter range is a major limiting factor for the Cache Unit, representing less than 30% of the total unit. The plans call for the protection and improvement of the winter range to increase over-winter survival of deer and elk. Swan Creek WMA plays a critical role in the survival of animals that winter there.

UTAH STETEWIDE MOOSE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The 2017 statewide moose management plan describes issues and concerns related to moose management in Utah, as well as establishes goals, objectives, and strategies for management. The plan identifies the quantity of quality habitat as the primary limiting factor for moose in Utah and habitat degradation as the largest threat facing moose populations. Moose habitats are being degraded from fragmentation (human development) and plant succession (as deciduous forests are converted to coniferous). The plan's habitat management goals are to assure habitat is available to sustain healthy and productive moose populations.

UTAH CONSERVATION PLAN FOR GREATER SAGE-GROUSE

In 2019, The Utah sage-grouse conservation plan was developed with the goal of protecting, maintaining and increasing sage-grouse populations and habitats within

Sage-Grouse Management Areas (SGMAs). Sage-grouse have been observed on SCWMA, but it does not fall within a SGMA.

To accomplish that goal, the plan outlines these strategies:

- Identify the highest-priority sage-grouse habitats and migration corridors, and protect at least 5,000 of those acres annually through conservation easements, or other mechanisms.

- Improve and increase sage-grouse seasonal habitats by 75,000 acres each year, including riparian and mesic habitats.

- Monitor sage-grouse population trends annually and, if necessary, implement adaptive management responses to ensure that priority populations remain viable and stable.

- Coordinate with local, state and federal fire fighting jurisdictions to include sage-grouse habitats as a priority during pre-fire attack planning and suppression, second only to the protection of human life and property.

- Fund, support and implement critical research that supports the implementation of this plan.

UTAH UPLAND GAME MANAGEMENT PLAN

The 2022 Upland Game Management Plan provides guidance on the management of dusky grouse, ruffed grouse, gray partridge, and several other game species. Threats identified in the plan include fire suppression that impedes aspen regeneration, forestry practices that preclude early successional habitat availability, practices that degrade riparian areas, and habitat loss and degradation due to pine beetle infestation.

For northern Utah, the plan describes these objectives for upland game:

- Increase winter habitat for upland game.

- Year-round habitat development for pheasant, quail, rabbits, gray partridge, and on WMAs.

- Increase access to private lands for gray partridge, pheasant, quail (WIA)

BONNEVILLE CUTTHROAT TROUT RANGE-WIDE CONSERVATION AGREEMENT AND STRATEGY

The goal of the Bonneville Cutthroat Trout Recovery plan is “to ensure the long-term existence of BCT within its historic range by coordinating conservation efforts among states, tribal governments, federal management agencies, and other involved parties.”

LOCAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS

In 2015, the Utah Legislature passed H.B. 323 which required each county to develop a Resource Management Plan (RMP) as part of the county’s general plan. The State of Utah aggregated the land use decisions and directives that emerged from county plans and published a state RMP in 2018. The state and county RMP’s were created to address a disconnect between local land use needs/desires and federal land use planning. RMP’s provide a basis for coordinating with the federal government. Counties also utilize RMP’s to coordinate state planning activities.

Under Utah State Code 63L-10-104, “State agencies and political subdivisions shall refer to and substantially conform to the statewide resource management plan when making plans for public lands or other public resources in the state.”

Plans applicable to the Swan Creek WMA include the state RMP, and the Rich County RMP. Management of the WMA will be consistent with these local resource management plans to the extent possible.

V. STRATEGIES FOR PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

DEVELOPMENT AND ANNUAL MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The following development activities will be implemented as funding and time allows:

- The property boundary will be established by installing new fences in areas without existing fences, and by placing boundary signs in areas with steep topography that prevents the construction of fences.

- DWR staff will evaluate the design and condition of existing fences. Fences that are problematic to deer and other wildlife will be replaced or modified to ensure they are wildlife friendly.

ANNUAL MAINTENANCE

DWR staff will assess the property annually and perform the following types of maintenance activities.

- Fences will be maintained to ensure seasonal closures can be enforced, and livestock trespass and other unlawful activities are limited.

- The access road and parking lot will be maintained as needed to ensure they are usable and safe, and to prevent erosion.

- Signs will be inspected and replaced as needed.

- Water rights will be exercised to maintain them.

- Noxious weeds will be inventoried and sprayed by DWR staff and when necessary through a contract with the Rich County Vegetation Management Division.

- Transmitting cameras will be installed when necessary to monitor public use and assist with enforcement of rules and regulations.

VI. STRATEGIES FOR HABITAT IMPROVEMENT

HABITAT IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The management of the Swan Creek WMA is focused on maintaining and enhancing habitats for big game, upland game, BLCT and other wildlife species. Habitat conditions will be evaluated annually, and when needed, habitat improvement projects will be proposed for specific sites. Detailed habitat improvement plans are beyond the scope of this management plan. Habitat improvement projects will be specifically aimed at preserving and enhancing summer and winter range conditions for deer, elk, and moose. Examples of these projects include scalping and seeding, vegetation management, controlling noxious weeds, developing water sources, and suppressing annual grasses to promote browse regeneration.

ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Swan Creek WMA was acquired to preserve and protect habitat for big game, upland game, and BLCTt. The access management plan is designed to ensure the public use of the WMA is done in a manner that is consistent with that purpose.

WMA ENTRANCES

The WMA can be accessed from the eastern boundary via West Swan Creek Spring Rd. There is a lower trailhead at Swan Creek Spring that runs alongside Swan Creek. The main entrance is located at the end of West Swan Creek Spring Rd, where you will find a 10,000-square-foot parking lot. All access to the WMA is non-motorized.

PUBLIC ACCESS

The SCWMA is closed to all public access during the winter months (Dec. 1 - May 1) to protect wintering wildlife and wildlife habitats.

MOTOR VEHICLE USE

In Utah, motor vehicles are defined as a vehicle that is self-propelled (Utah Code 41-6a-101-43a), which includes class ll-lll ebikes. Motor vehicles can damage roads significantly when roads are wet, which results in increased maintenance costs and in some cases erosion that ends up in streams.

To prevent damage to roads and wildlife disturbance, all motor vehicle use is prohibited on the WMA, including oversnow travel (e.g., snowmobiles, timersleds, etc.). DWR may adjust closure dates as needed to mitigate impacts to wildlife. DWR and state contractors may operate vehicles during the closure period to perform maintenance, surveys, law enforcement, habitat improvements, and other administrative responsibilities.

HIKING AND BIKING

Overland travel by foot or bike is only allowed on designated routes (appendix A). There are approximately three miles of roads within the WMA that are designated for hiking and biking. Unauthorized user-created trails are not permitted and will be closed and rehabilitated.

CAMPING

Dispersed tent camping and trailer camping is allowed on the WMA during its open season. Trailers will be restricted to the main parking lot. Camping is limited to 10 consecutive days in a 30 day period (R657-28-4), or as posted.

FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Fire management activities will be coordinated with the Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands (FFSL) according to guidelines established in the Memorandum of Understanding (2005) between DWR and FFSL. Fire management provisions include:

- When prescribed fire is needed as a habitat management tool, DWR will coordinate with FFSL to ensure burn plans are submitted by required deadlines.

- Open fires are allowed, but cannot be unattended and adequate provisions must be taken to prevent the spread of fire (R657-28). State, federal or local fire restrictions will apply to the WMA when deemed necessary by the fire officials and DWR.

- The use of fireworks and explosives are prohibited on the WMA (R657-28).

WOOD PRODUCTS

Wood products are managed according to Administrative Rule R657-28, Use of Division Lands. Timber resources on the property consist mainly of curl-leaf mahogany and pinyon juniper. None of these species are available in large enough quantities for commercial harvest. No wood products are available for public harvest on the WMA.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING PLAN

Livestock grazing is managed according to Administrative Rule R657-28, Use of Division Lands. DWR may use domestic livestock grazing to manage vegetation on Division lands if the Division determines that grazing is beneficial for the maintenance or improvement of wildlife habitat. DWR staff may develop a grazing prescription for the WMA taking into account the following considerations:

- The purpose of the Swan Creek WMA is to provide high quality habitat for wildlife.

- The Swan Creek WMA consists of transitional and winter range for wildlife, with most wildlife using the WMA from late October through late April.
- Livestock fences will be constructed using wildlife friendly standards so they aren’t barriers to wildlife.

- Grazing prescriptions will be designed to avoid grazing in, and protecting sensitive areas, such as riparian areas.

- Grazing will be used as a tool to reduce noxious weeds, invasive annual grass fuel loads, and increase desirable forage diversity.

- Hunting seasons occur from mid August through November each year. This will need to be considered when determining the grazing period so conflicts between livestock and the hunting public can be minimized.

- There currently isn't adequate infrastructure to properly manage livestock on the WMA. Virtual fencing will be considered as a tool to properly manage livestock and support proper grazing.

Grazing on the WMA will be evaluated by regional personnel.

VII. SUMMARY STATEMENT OF PROPOSED USES

The goals and objectives of this management plan support the primary purpose of the Swan Creek WMA, which is to protect and enhance habitat for mule deer, elk, sage grouse, and Bear Lake cutthroat trout, while also providing habitat for other game and nonegame species. DWR will allow wildlife-related recreational activities that are consistent with the purpose for which this WMA was acquired. Destruction and/or degradation of wildlife habitat from recreational uses may result in further restrictions to protect the resource.

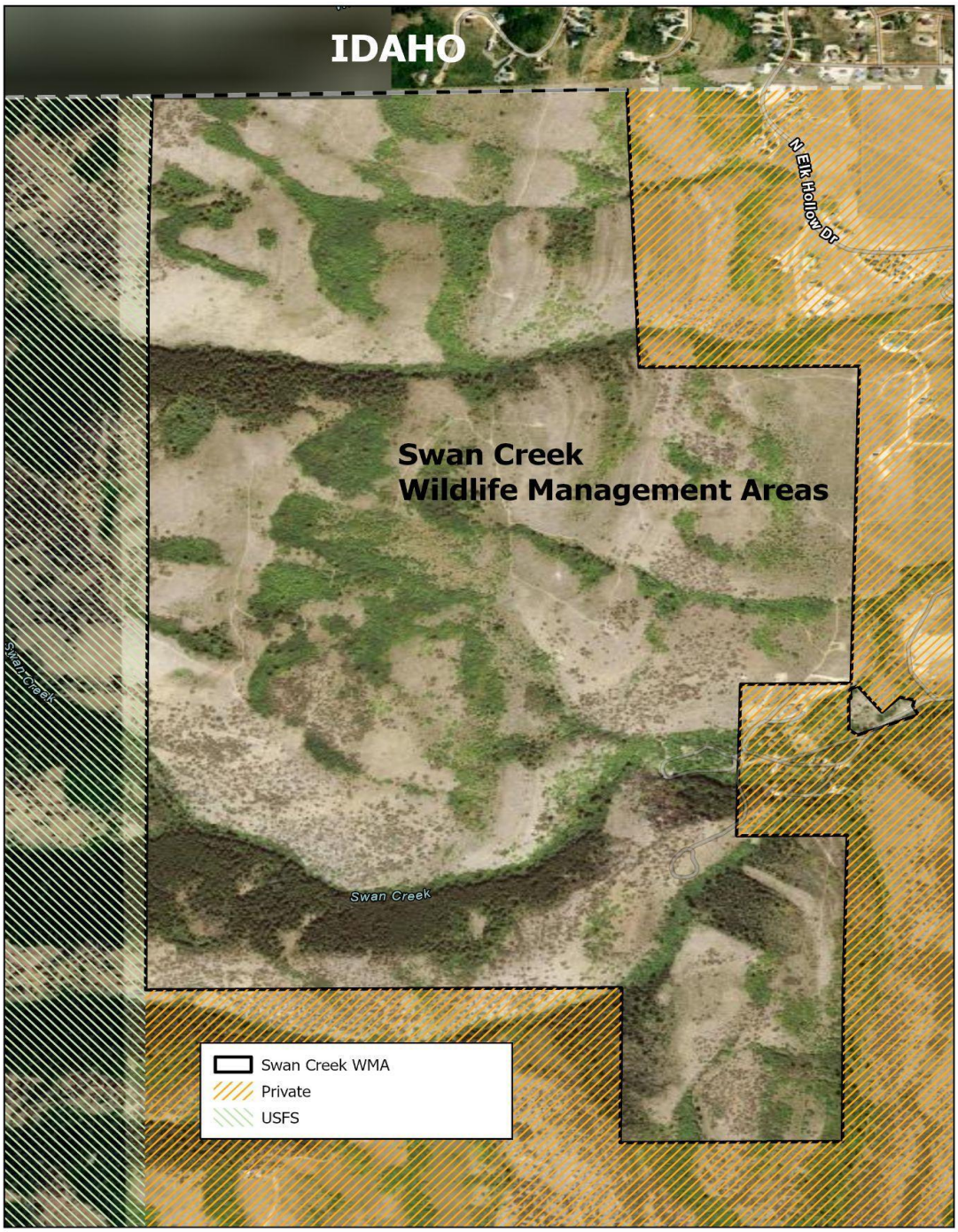
VIII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation is accomplished through site assessments, surveys (wildlife and public), data collection (species presence and harvest), and analysis. Regional habitat section personnel, the area wildlife biologist, and the district conservation officer will be responsible for monitoring the overall effectiveness of the program. Appropriate sections will provide expertise as required. Range Trend personnel will continue to evaluate study sites on a 5-year rotation and will add additional monitoring sites as

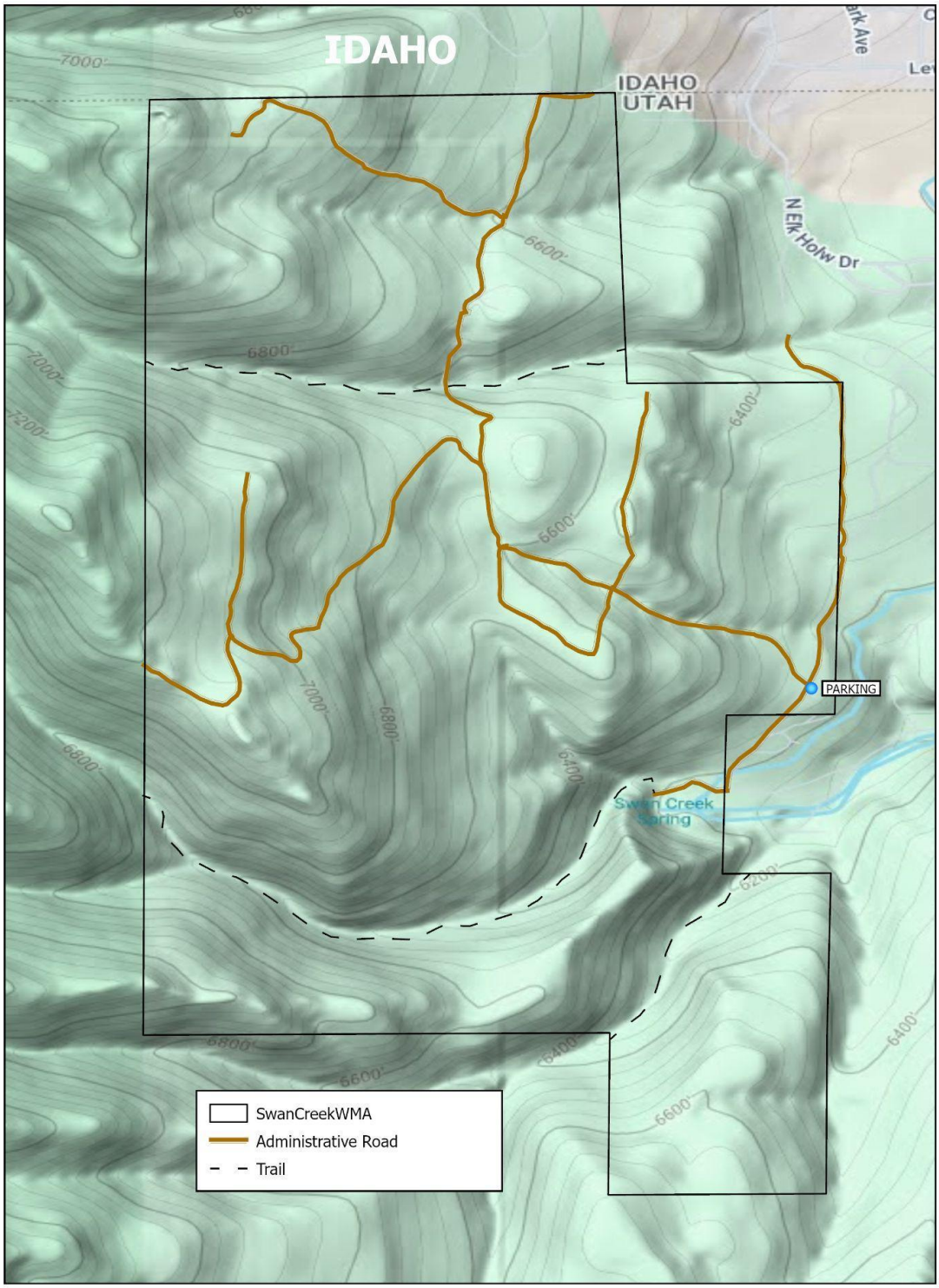
needed. The regional habitat section will amend this habitat management plan as needed.

IX. APPENDICES

Appendix A - MAPS



WMA Overview Map



Roads and Trails

Closed to all motorized vehicles - Seasonal closure to all public access Dec 1 - May 1