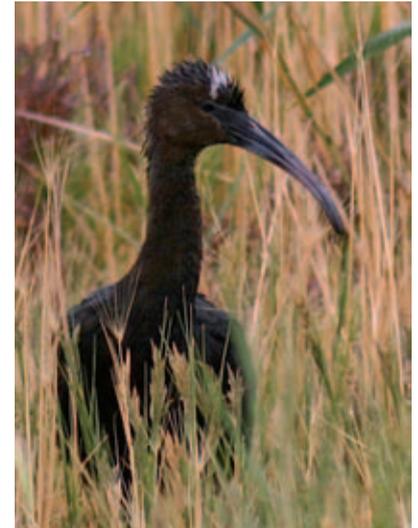


Lahontan Valley Wetlands IBA Outreach Program

Locations	Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, Nevada, USA
Rio Tinto company	Kennecott Minerals Rawhide
Partner organisations	Audubon Nevada; US Fish and Wildlife Service – Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; Federal Highways Administration
Key people	Don McIvor (Lahontan Audubon Society, Nevada Audubon); Janet Schmidt (Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge); Don Deines, Fred Fox and Ann Carpenter (Kennecott Minerals Rawhide); Steve Jarvis
Habitats	Freshwater marshes within the Lahontan Valley wetlands complex
Birds	White-faced Ibis, Canvasback, Redhead, Long-billed Dowitcher, American Avocet, Wilson’s Phalarope, Bald Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk
Outcomes	Establishment of strategic infrastructure facilities for visitors regarding wetland IBA interpretation and wildlife viewing; publication of IBAs of Nevada and public outreach



White-faced Ibis

Audubon Nevada partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Rio Tinto’s Kennecott Minerals to develop and establish key visitor facilities at the Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge, one of the most important freshwater marshes in the Great Basin. Coupled with this facility was the publication and launch of Nevada’s directory of 35 IBAs, of which the Lahontan Valley Wetlands is of global importance for breeding and migratory shorebirds and waterfowl.

Project background and history

The Lahontan Valley is designated as a Site of International Importance by the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network (one of less than 50 such designations) and as an IBA by National Audubon Society. Stillwater National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in the Lahontan Valley is designated a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy. Although much touted by biologists and birders for its major importance in the Pacific Flyway, there are no informational kiosks or other places in the valley where the general visitor may acquire awareness of this critical oasis in the Great Basin ecosystem.

Kennecott Minerals Rawhide has a gold mining operation (now in closure) a considerable distance from Stillwater NWR. However, the business has a prominent place in Fallon (a key settlement in the Lahontan Valley), and the chosen project was one that had been developed through a consultation process with the mine and other community and conservation stakeholders. The business recognised that the Lahontan Valley IBA served to highlight the biodiversity issues and concerns needing to be addressed at the regional scale. The overarching goal was to effectively reach and then educate the citizens of Nevada about the value of the Great Basin’s wetlands, using Stillwater NWR as a focal point. As a part of this outreach effort, Stillwater NWR is to be interpreted in the context of BirdLife’s IBA Programme, thereby educating visitors about this valuable global conservation effort.

Project details

Project objectives included working with partners to design, develop and construct a viewing platform, interpretive trail and outreach site to educate visitors on the importance of Stillwater Marsh and the Lahontan Valley. The primary theme was the importance of the area over time to both human and wildlife inhabitants. The first funded project element was the site preparation for the facilities at Stillwater Point. Through Congressional appropriated funding, the Federal Highways Administration constructed a parking lot, vault toilet and orientation kiosk at Stillwater Point Reservoir. This is planned to become the NWR’s key gathering spot, a premier location for engaging visitors and creating a sense of awareness. Included in the appropriated funding was a new 10-mile interpretive auto tour loop with an environmental education site that will continue from Stillwater Point into an area of the NWR currently closed to the public. This area will

remain closed to hunting but will provide enhanced viewing opportunities of an array of Refuge habitats for the general public.

Current Stillwater NWR Complex partners who also contributed in many different ways (from in-kind to funds) to the Stillwater Point Viewing Area include: City of Fallon, Fallon Naval Air Station, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Department of Transportation, Churchill County, Spring Wings, Lahontan Audubon Society, Nevada Commission on Tourism, Nevada Department of Wildlife, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Churchill County 4-H, and a long list of volunteers.

As part of the outreach for Stillwater NWR, the project also made a key contribution to the publication of *Nevada's Important Bird Areas*. This book, which features Lahontan Valley as one of 35 IBAs in the state, will be available to the general public. It will also be a valuable tool for state and federal agencies as well as non-governmental organisations working on resource management in Nevada.

The Lahontan Audubon Society's IBA Program operates with numerous cooperating partners. Partners include the Great Basin Bird Observatory, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Nevada Department of Wildlife, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, Nevada Department of Tourism, and Nevada State Parks. Funding partners who contributed to the development of the IBA book included the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the AB Schultz Foundation, the GS Whittell Fund, Patagonia, Inc., the Harris Foundation, the Charles H. Stoudt Foundation, and the Wilburforce Foundation.

The visitor facilities at Stillwater Point were dedicated in May 2006, during the Spring Wings Birding Festival, which is held annually in Fallon.

The future

The Rio Tinto-BirdLife International Programme is facilitating the development of a Western Hemisphere Flyways and IBAs Programme, consistent with one of BirdLife's key strategic goals in the Americas. This would seek to link partners and sites along migratory flyways of global importance. Consideration is being given as to how the Lahontan Valley Wetlands IBA and its supporting partners could contribute to flyway migration using this site as a rallying point.

Stillwater NWR in the Lahontan Valley



Yampa Valley and Sagebrush Steppe Conservation Project

Locations	The Big Bottom floodplain on the Yampa River near Craig; Colowyo Mine's sagebrush uplands between Meeker and Craig, Moffat and Rio Blanco Counties, Colorado, USA
Rio Tinto companies	Rio Tinto Energy America (RTEA); Colowyo Mine; Rio Tinto Minerals
Partner organisations	Audubon Colorado; grazing lessees
Key people	Ken Strom (Audubon Colorado); Jim Showalter (grazing lessee); Bob Green (RTEA); Kurt Blunt (Colowyo Mine); Rich Zazenski (Rio Tinto Minerals)
Habitats	Riparian meadows and woodlands; sagebrush uplands
Birds	Greater Sage-grouse, Sandhill Crane, Bald Eagle
Outcomes	Restoration and enhancement of sensitive avian habitats; biodiversity action planning for sagebrush and riparian habitats



Riparian habitats along the Yampa River

Audubon Colorado is in the final year of a five-year programme of habitat assessment, biodiversity action planning and implementation of initial habitat enhancement measures at an important area of riparian habitat owned by the Colowyo Mine. The lessons learned and the techniques developed during this effort are now being applied to a new initiative of biodiversity action planning for the wider sagebrush landscape that surrounds the riparian zone. The overall goals of the expanded programme are to restore and enhance habitats for a variety of sensitive species, including Greater Sage-grouse and Sandhill Crane.

Project background and history

Over the past several years, working in partnership with Rio Tinto businesses in Colorado and Wyoming, Audubon Colorado has piloted a science-based strategy of conservation assessment and biodiversity action planning at RTEA's Colowyo Mine site in north-western Colorado, beginning with a programme of habitat restoration and planning for riparian habitats along the Yampa River. These are important biodiversity areas within the larger sagebrush landscape that RTEA Colowyo manages. This site-based strategy is a key element in achieving meaningful progress in landscape conservation for the resident and migratory bird species of the sagebrush steppe biome, including the riparian habitats found along the Yampa and other nearby rivers. Among the priority species that are the focus of this planning and implementation are Greater Sage-Grouse and Brewer's Sparrow of the sagebrush ecosystem, and Sandhill Crane and Bald Eagle of the riparian ecosystem.

In 2004, Audubon Colorado began a five-year programme of habitat assessment and planning for RTEA Colowyo's Big Bottom property on the Yampa River near Craig. Over the course of this programme, Audubon staff and volunteers have worked with Colowyo staff and the local grazing lessee of the site to gather data on bird use of the area, evaluate habitat conditions and habitat management needs, and develop initial plans and begin the implementation of selected habitat restoration efforts.

The goal of these efforts has been not only to restore and enhance habitat conditions at this particular site, which is important for local populations of birds and other wildlife, but also to develop a biodiversity conservation planning approach for the site that can serve as a prototype and framework for more comprehensive biodiversity action planning across all of the Colowyo lands. An important additional element of this work has been to communicate the lessons learned and other information about the site and the project to the broader community through various activities including an annual Birdwatch event.

Project details

Breeding season bird surveys of the Big Bottom floodplain have been conducted during May or June annually since 2004. Additional nest surveys have been conducted throughout the breeding season each year to document specific breeding and nesting activities at the site. Highlights have included the growth of a Great Blue Heron rookery and then its relocation, in 2007, to a different site within the floodplain, and the successful nesting by a pair of Bald Eagles every year except 2008.