

A LINK WITH THE PAST

According to legend, Freezout Lake derived its name from one of a number of different sources. Some point to an instance in which a few soldiers stationed at Fort Shaw (established in 1867) were caught in a blinding blizzard coming through the flats. Hence, the area was called "Freezout Flat" from that time on. This version may be true as the basin was known and documented by that name early in the 1870's. Other versions state that if a homesteader or rancher were unsuccessful in their attempt to make it on the flat, it was called a "Freezout." Lastly, in 1885, a stage station was established in the area and was later named Camp Freezout or "Freezout Way Station." Often travelers spending bitter cold nights at the desolate station would play a variation of poker called "Freezout" while tending the stove. Early visitors to the Freezout Station included Charles M. Russell, the renowned cowboy artist, and Brother Van, an early missionary to the Blackfoot Indians. Brother Van recalled seeing herds of bison watering at the alkali lake.

DEVELOPMENT

Freezout Lake had always been a natural sump that at times, would go completely dry. With the development of the Greenfield Irrigation District, however, the WMA is able to collect irrigation waters from the system and with the addition of other natural sources, now maintains water year-round. In fact, prior to development of the WMA, during the late 1940s and early 1950s railroad tracks and roads in the vicinity of the lake were occasionally flooded.

Wildlife studies were conducted on the area and development and acquisition of the WMA were initiated by the Montana Department of Fish and Game in 1953. A system of dikes, ditches and water control structures was developed to control water levels. Islands have also been constructed to provide waterfowl nesting and roosting sites. The vegetative structure and composition of the area has been altered in places to benefit primarily waterfowl and upland game bird production by increasing more desirable and palatable plant species. Limited cultivated grain (wheat/barley) fields have also been utilized on the WMA to provide food for waterfowl and to protect surrounding farms from waterfowl depredation. Lastly, certain dikes, roads and parking lots have been graveled and sanitary facilities have been constructed at the area's most popular recreational sites. All improvements, opportunities & maintenance of the area are funded by hunting license dollars.



MANAGEMENT

The area is managed primarily for waterfowl production and public hunting and viewing opportunity. Providing habitat for upland game birds and other seasonal bird use are also continued management goals. Habitat management may include fluctuating water levels to improve lake/pond productivity and various forms of upland field maintenance (establishing new nesting/brood rearing cover habitat, weed control, haying, burning, etc.).

HUNTING

Freezout Lake WMA offers excellent waterfowl hunting. Snow geese, which usually arrive near the end of October and linger until the onset of severe winter weather, may be present in spectacular numbers. A variety of other waterfowl also are present, albeit at varying degrees, until the lake freezes. Beginning in 1970, a limited number of permits for hunting swans were established for use on the Area. Since that time, these permits have been expanded to portions of counties in the Freezout Lake area, although the vast majority of hunting opportunity and subsequent harvest occurs on the WMA. Freezout has become the hub of swan hunting activity in Montana. Upland game bird hunters will also find ring-necked pheasants, Hungarian (Gray) partridge and sharp-tailed grouse.

The southern and southwestern edges of the area (see map inside) are seasonally closed to public entry to provide security for migrating waterfowl. If this security area were not provided, Freezout Lake WMA would not harbor the large numbers of waterfowl it does. Sportsmen hunting waterfowl along the boundary of the closed area may enter the closed area to retrieve waterfowl without firearms in their possession. This "closed area" is open each fall to the hunting of upland game birds from the start of the upland game bird season until the beginning of waterfowl season. The area remains closed through November 19. The "closed area" then reopens on November 20 each year for additional hunting opportunity (usually by this date the majority of the area has froze over and waterfowl activity on the area is quite limited).

WILDLIFE

Freezout Lake WMA offers opportunities for viewing wildlife through out the year. During winter, visitors may observe hawks and owls, including rough- legged hawks, the rare gyrfalcon and, occasionally, snowy owls. Pheasants, Hungarian partridge, mule and white-tailed deer, red fox, coyotes and jackrabbits may also be seen.

During March and into April, waterfowl migration begins with birds sometimes arriving in spectacular numbers. In spring, mating flights and nesting activities abound throughout the area. During summer, broods of Canada geese, ducks, upland birds and other water birds can be readily observed. Starting in September, fall migrations begin with teal and pintails commonly arriving first. The flights of migrants continue until freezeup, when the last waterfowl leave the area.

Approximately 230 species of birds have been documented on the 12,000 acre area including a multitude of shore-birds, raptors and other non-game birds, however, waterfowl are truly the area's "bread and butter." Several hundred thousand waterfowl may utilize the area during peak migration periods – as many as 300,000 snow geese and 10,000 tundra swans have been observed on the area at one time.

Freezout Lake WMA also provides trappers with the opportunity to harvest furbearers, primarily muskrats, during the winter and early spring. Muskrats are routinely observed year-round. Several hundred muskrats may be harvested from the area, in addition to mink, raccoons, fox, coyote and skunks.

ENJOY YOUR VISIT

But while you're here, please keep the following in mind:

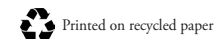
1. Vehicles must remain on designated roads or in designated parking areas.
2. Camping is permitted, free of charge, in the established camping area or designated parking areas.
3. Open campfires are not permitted.
4. Rules and regulations, as posted, must be obeyed.
5. Hunting and trapping regulations (open seasons, bag limits, areas open to hunting/trapping, shooting hours, etc.) are strictly enforced. Refer to current hunting/trappings regulations for further information.
6. Dogs must be kept under control at all times.
7. Littering is prohibited.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

For more information, visit: fwp.mt.gov

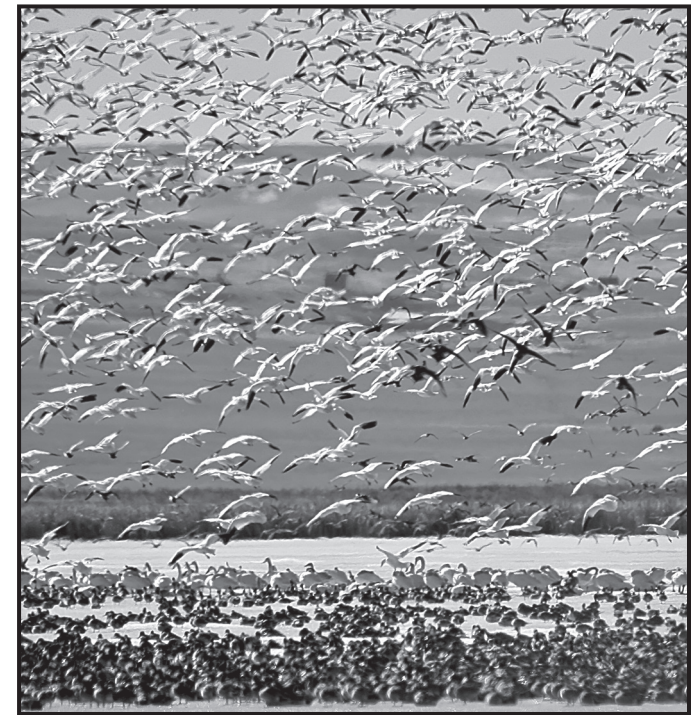


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Welcome to

FREEZOUT LAKE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

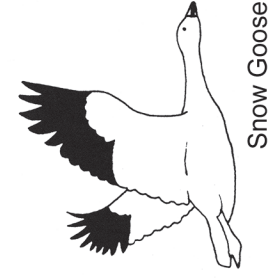
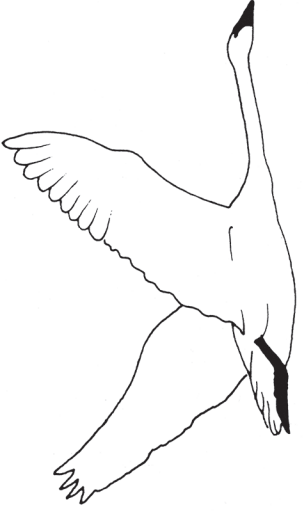
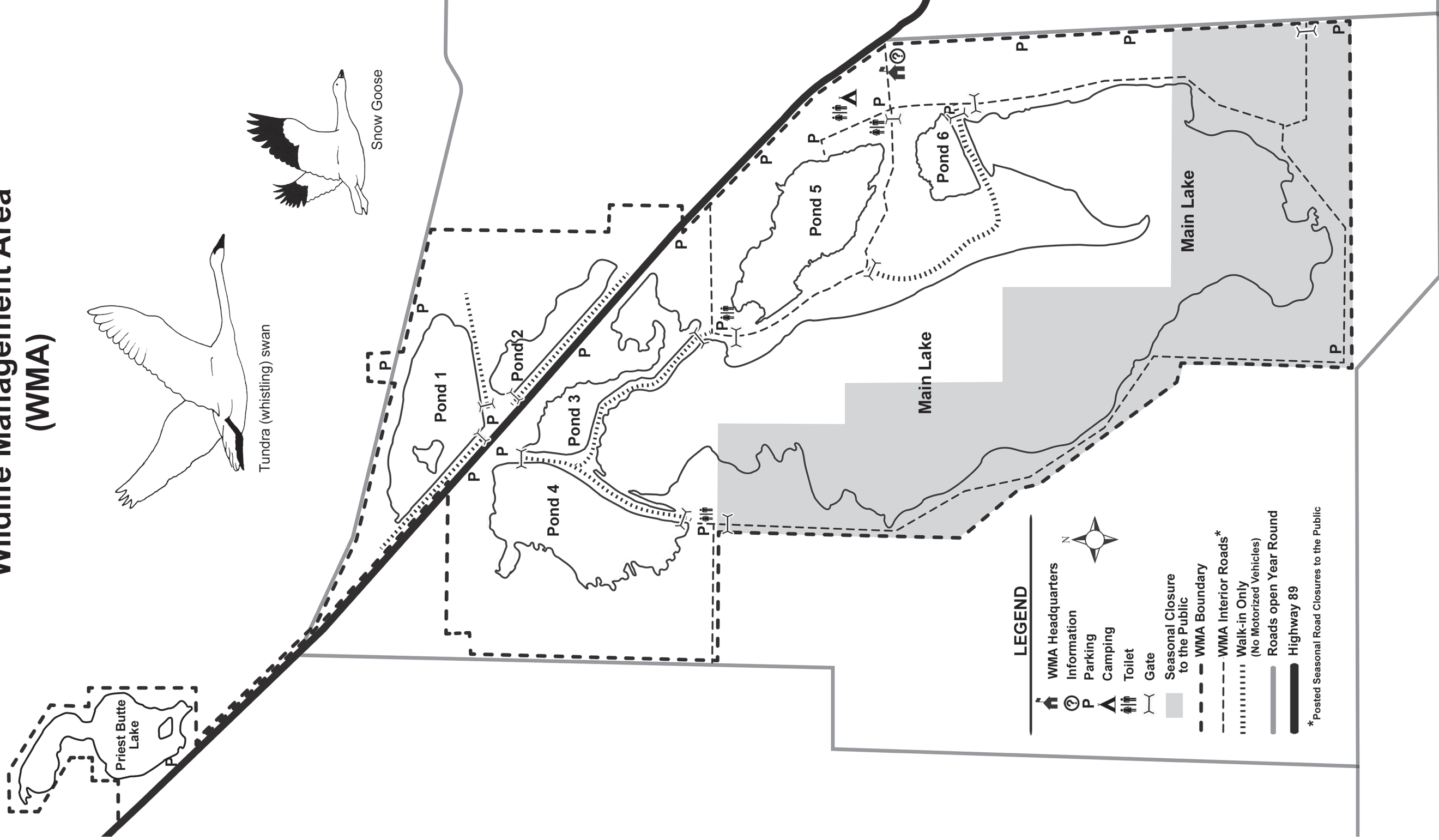


... A prairie jewel preserved for those whose hearts are stirred by whistling wings, wind and water.

Located in north-central Montana, just north of Fairfield on the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountain Front, Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) has, through the years, become one of the most spectacular waterfowl hunting and bird viewing areas in Montana, if not the entire northern Great Plains.

Within the WMA's 12,000 acres are Freezout Lake, Priest Butte Lakes (located 7 1/2 miles to the north of the WMA headquarters) and a number of interconnecting ponds and a series of ditches and dikes constructed to control water levels. The area is managed to ensure year-round use by waterfowl, upland game birds, marsh-dwelling birds and other species of wildlife that inhabit wetland areas. Efforts to maintain and manage a diversity of wetland and upland bird habitats and associated vegetation, have made Freezout Lake WMA a waterfowler's "heaven" and a birdwatcher's delight.

Freezout Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA)



LEGEND

- WMA Headquarters
- Information
- Parking
- Camping
- Toilet
- Gate
- Seasonal Closure to the Public
- WMA Boundary
- WMA Interior Roads*
- Walk-in Only (No Motorized Vehicles)
- Roads open Year Round
- Highway 89

*Posted Seasonal Road Closures to the Public

