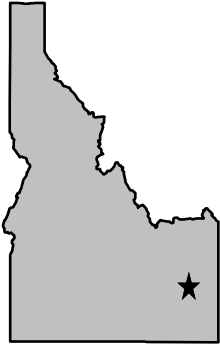


CHAPTER 9—GRAY'S LAKE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

A Marshland Biome



Gray's Lake National Wildlife Refuge lies near Soda Springs in southeastern Idaho and spans more than 19,000 acres of mountainous marshland at an elevation of 6,400 feet. Native Shoshone tribes first inhabited the area more than 300 years ago. Today, the refuge is home to the largest population of sandhill cranes in the world and is considered to be the largest hard stem bulrush marsh in North America. Over 200 species of mammals, birds, amphibians, and fish have been identified in this refuge. Trails through the marsh are not maintained because the ground is wet and boggy year round. One conservation effort under way involves transplanting whooping crane eggs into the nests of sandhill cranes. The sandhill cranes raise the young whooping cranes as their own, thereby increasing the numbers of migrating whooping cranes that return to the refuge each year.



Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) Found in Canada, Alaska, and nearly every one of the lower 48 states, this creature lives a solitary lifestyle unlike its distant relative, the wolf. The red fox is an omnivore, mostly eating mice, rats, fruit, and insects. The red fox hunts by standing still and listening intently until a mouse is detected. It will then leap into the air and pounce on the mouse, pinning it to the ground with its forelegs. Although called the red fox, they range in color from pale yellow to dark red-brown. The red fox is extremely abundant, appearing to thrive despite environmental changes and leading scientists to study the fox's impact on endangered bird populations.



Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*) This large bird stands nearly 5 feet tall making it the tallest bird to inhabit North America. When it spreads its wings, the wingspan averages 8 feet from wingtip to wingtip. The whooping crane has been listed as an endangered species for many years, with conservation efforts first beginning in 1938. There are currently 149 whooping cranes in America and only 320 world wide, although their numbers are slowly growing. Whooping cranes mate for life, which has been recorded to be up to 24 years in the wild.



Tiger Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) The most widespread salamander species in North America, the tiger salamander can live in dry or moist conditions. Though they vary greatly in color and markings, most have yellow or white blotches on their backs, sometimes merging to form a zebra-like pattern. This amphibian survives periods of dry by living in abandoned burrows or living in the hollows of rotting logs. Many waterfowl and fish eat this salamander. Because they are prey and because large tracks of their habitat have been eliminated, they are on the endangered species list.



Camas (*Camassia quamash*) A member of the lily family, this perennial creates beautiful loosely clustered flowers on long stems. When the bulbs of this flower are slowly steamed, a complex sugar contained within breaks down into sweet fructose, creating a truly sweet potato. Native peoples throughout North America relied on this root as a staple product in their diet. Some would cook the camas in pits until it was dry and then would pound it into flour. In the form of flour, the camas would keep for long periods of time and could be mixed with water to form delicious gravy.

Native Plant Knowledge and Use Activity: Invite an individual with knowledge of native plant use and lore to your classroom. Local universities or native tribes in your area may provide key contacts. Have the students prepare a display that shows how local Native Americans utilized common plants for nourishment, flavoring in foods, spiritual functions, medicine, tools, and transportation. This can be done as part of a harvest or pioneer festival in order to provide contrast to modern agricultural activities. Have the students prepare presentations comparing modern medicine with traditional native medicine.

<http://www.nps.gov/bibe/teachers/factsheets/ethnobotany.htm>

<http://www.ancientnative.org/foods.htm>

<http://www.csusm.edu/indianrock/projects/plantbrochure.html>