

# **Birding off the Beaten Track – Water Valley Area**



Brian Elder



# Outline

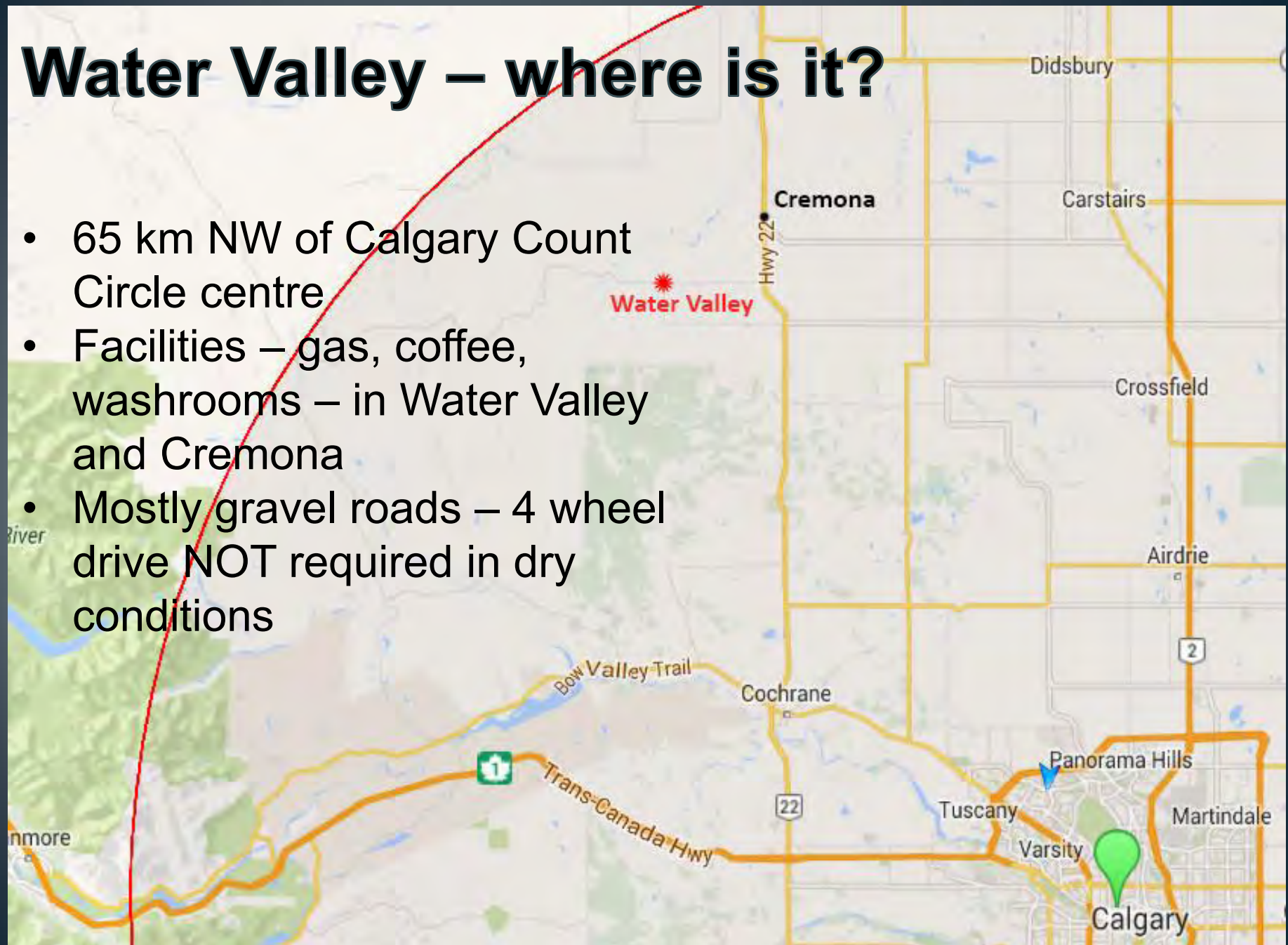
- Water Valley – where is it?
- Water Valley – habitats
- Why bird there?
- The “beaten track”
- Birding sites
  - Southern route - Just off the beaten track
  - North of the beaten track – a suggested route
- Some birds to watch for



Barred Owl

# Water Valley – where is it?

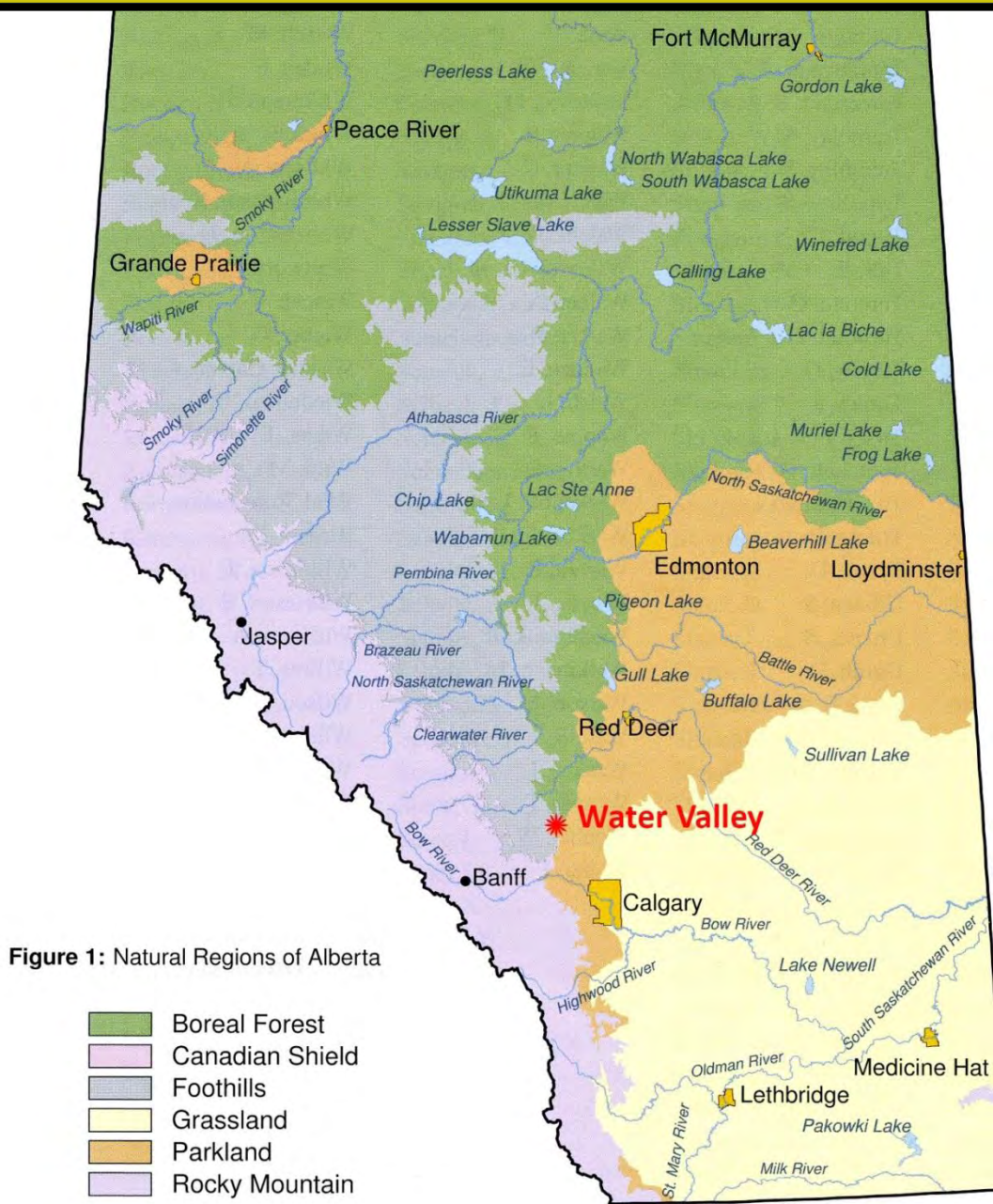
- 65 km NW of Calgary Count Circle centre
- Facilities – gas, coffee, washrooms – in Water Valley and Cremona
- Mostly gravel roads – 4 wheel drive NOT required in dry conditions





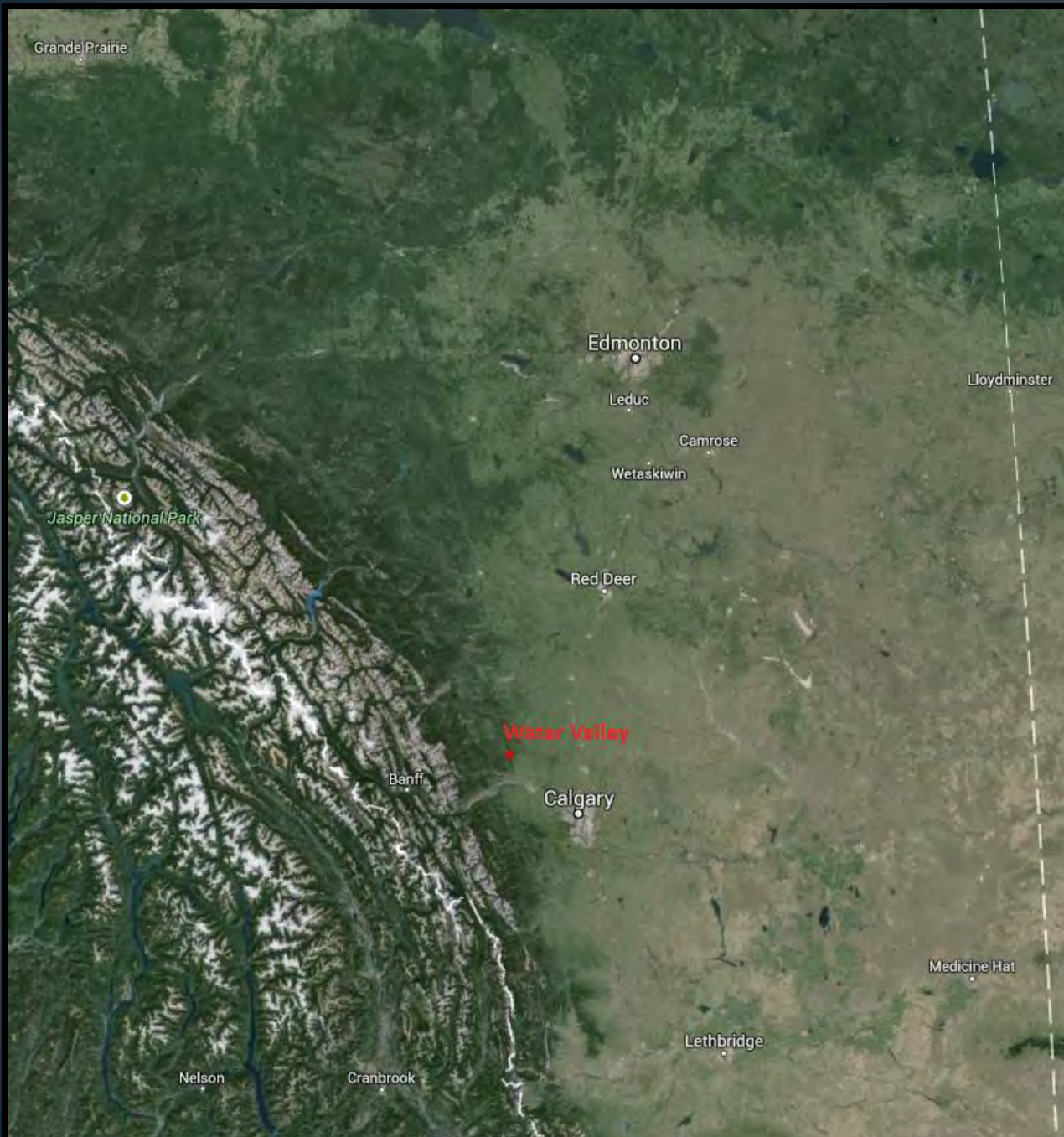
# Water Valley Habitats

- Water Valley is at the southwestern tip of the boreal forest;
- also at edge of parkland and foothills habitats





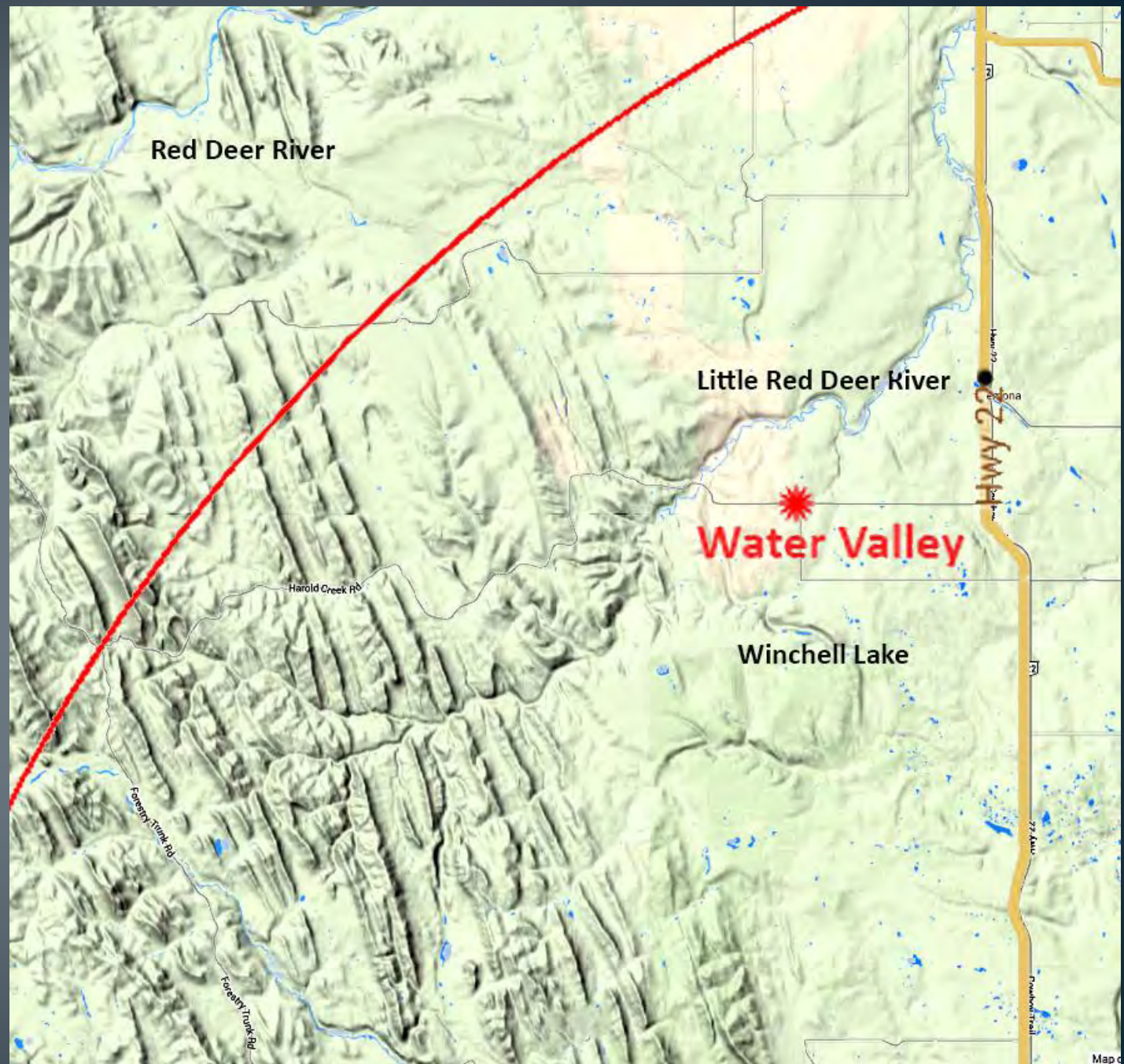
# View from space





# Terrain

- Elevation  
~ 1300 m;
- 1250 m in  
valleys
- 1500 m at  
west end of  
Harold  
Creek Road





# Water Valley habitats

- Coniferous forests, mixed forests, aspen forests, logged areas, pasture/hay fields, wet areas – swamps, meadows
- Very little in way of parks and pathways – most of birding is done along the road



Evening Grosbeak





# Human Impact

- Logging, oil & gas, gravel pits and acreages taking a toll on the habitat
- Acreages and residential areas also increasing in number
- Mostly private land – please respect “No Trespassing” signs



# Why bird Water Valley?



Connecticut Warbler



Spruce Grouse

- Owls, spruce grouse year round
- Good place to see many breeding birds not easily found in Calgary
- Chance for rarer boreal forest/ parkland birds at edge of their range



# Coniferous Forest



American Three-toed Woodpecker





Red Crossbill



Tennessee Warbler

# Mixed Forest



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker



Swainson's Thrush



# Deciduous Forest



Red-eyed Vireo



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

# Open country



American Kestrel



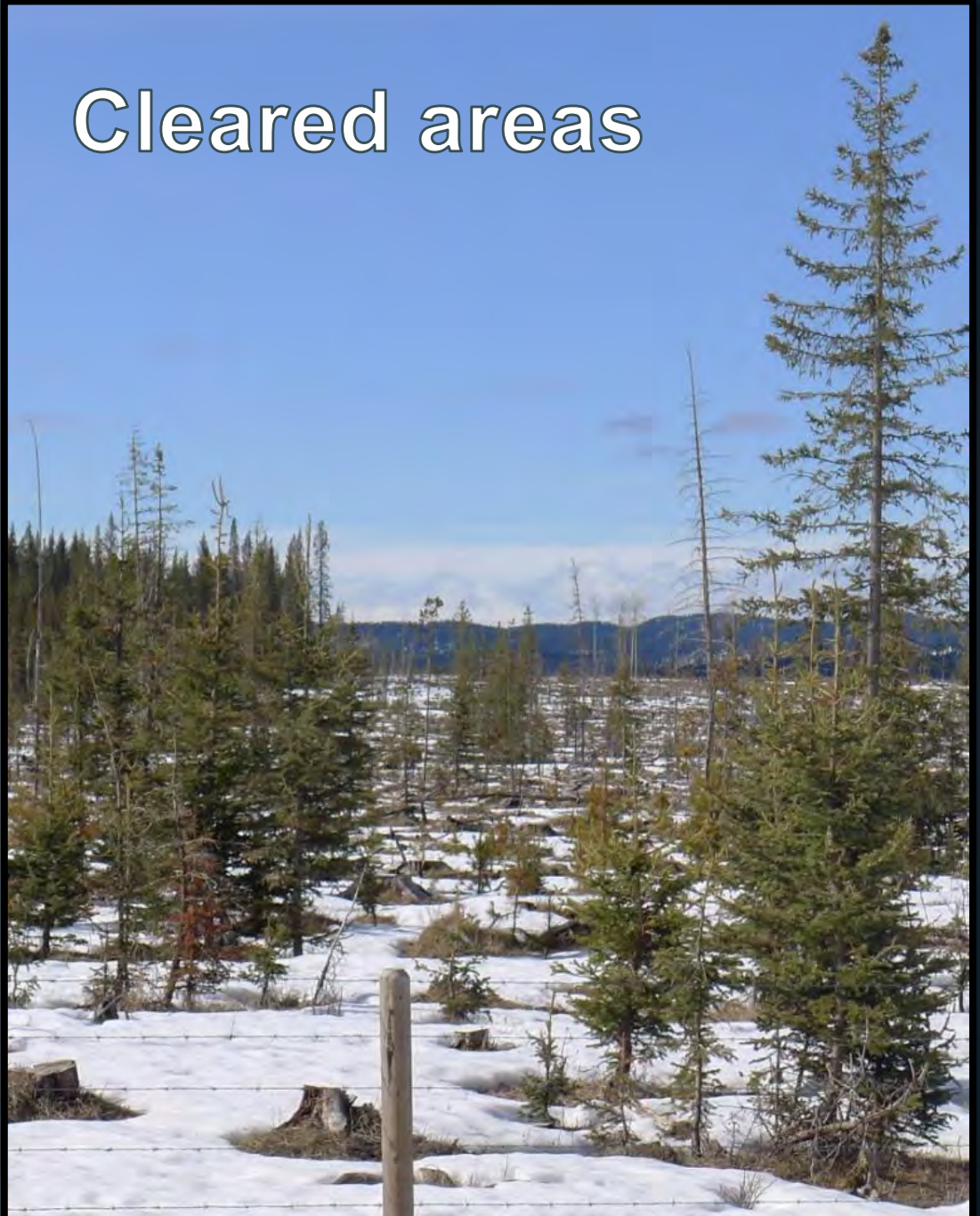
Mountain Bluebird





Pileated Woodpecker

## Cleared areas





# Wetlands







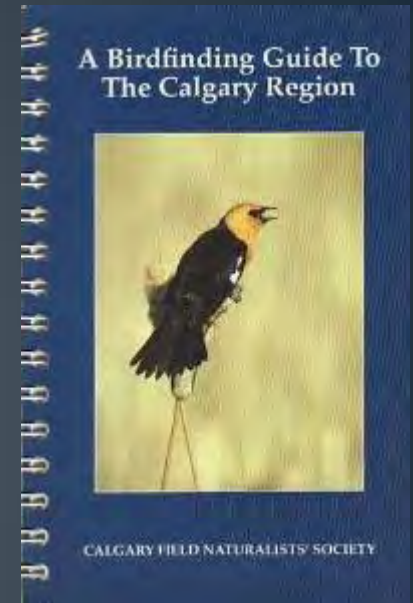
Common Yellowthroat



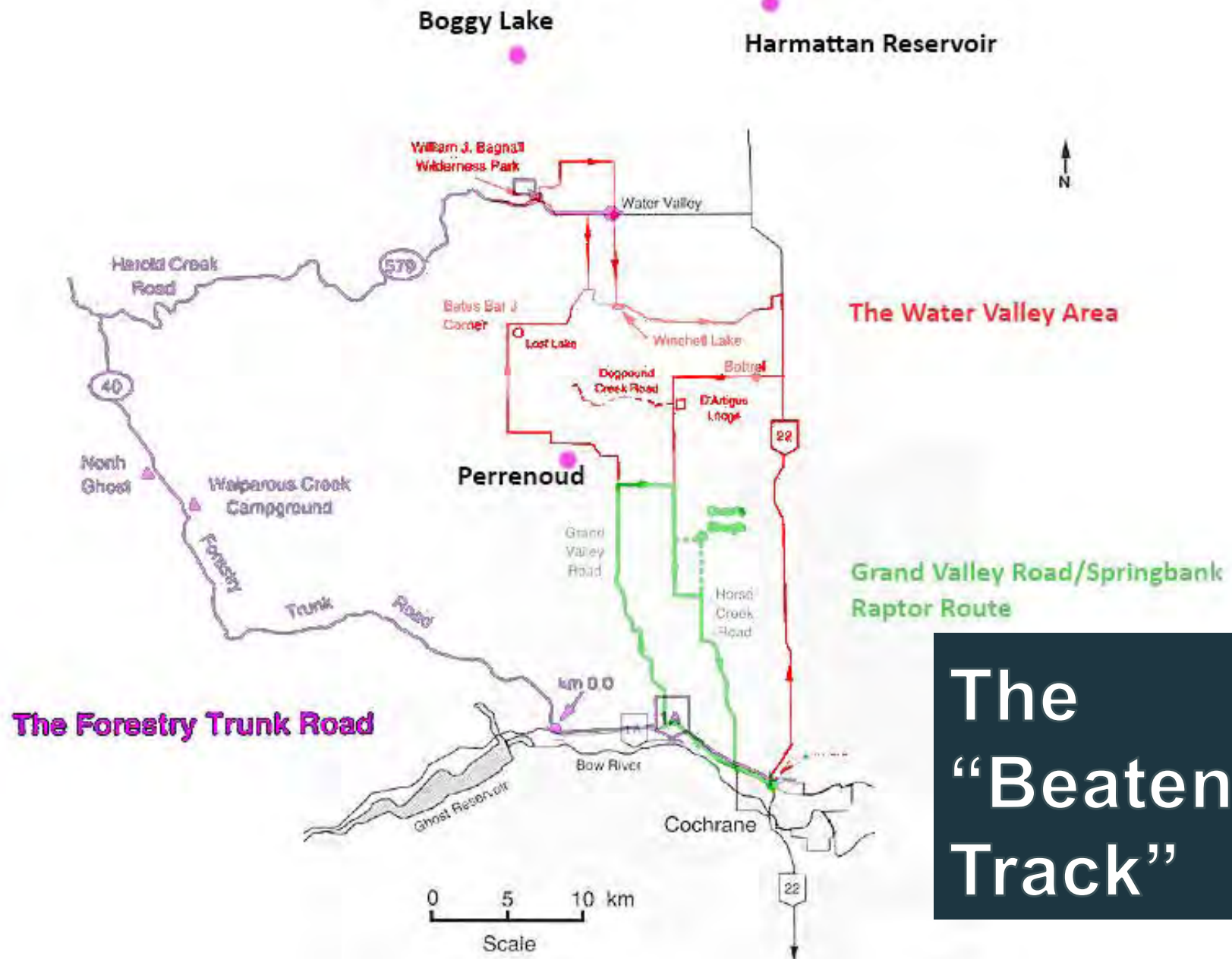
Alder Flycatcher

# The “Beaten Track”

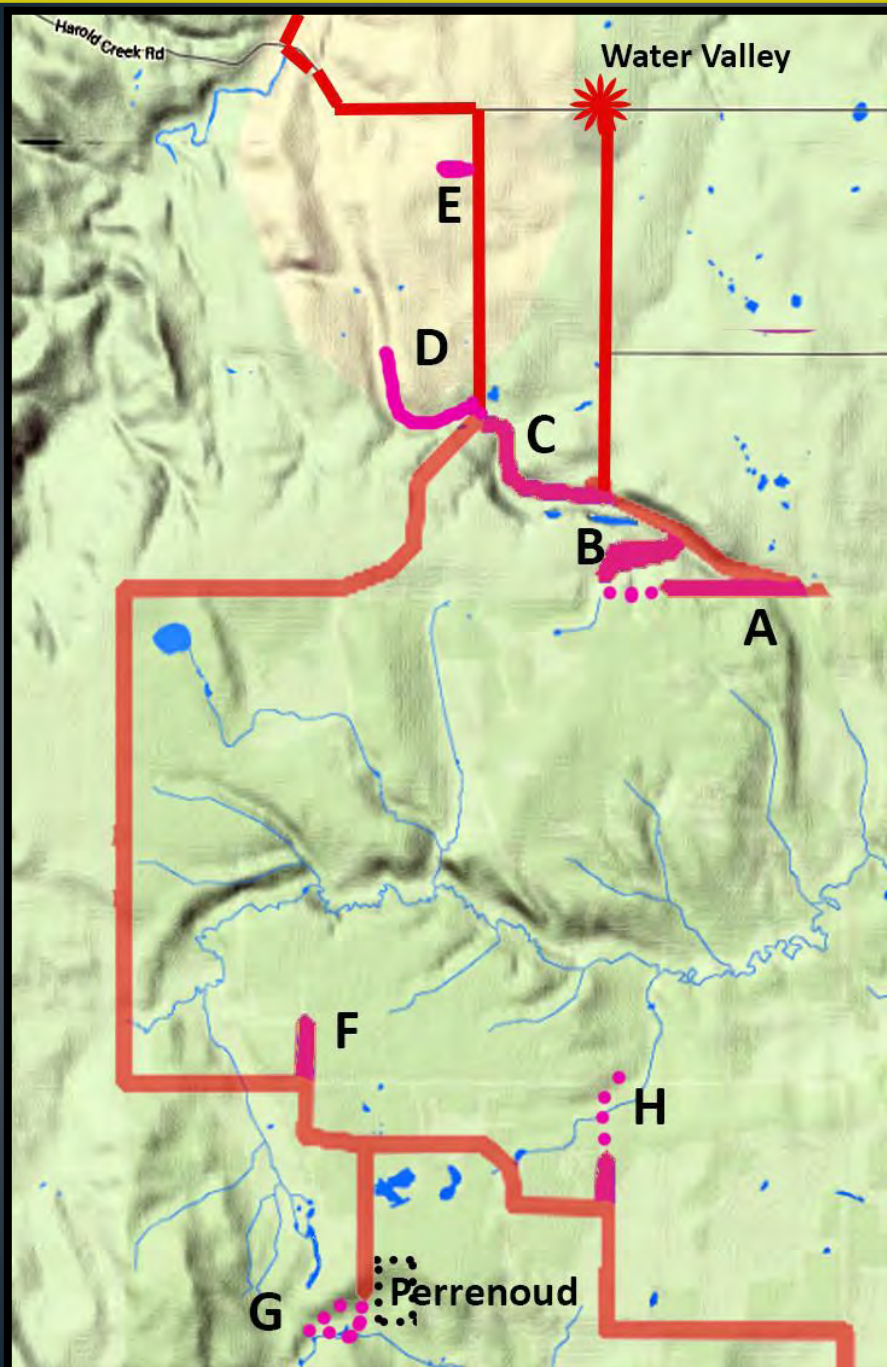
- A Birdfinding Guide To The Calgary Region
  - <http://www.naturecalgary.com/birding/birding-locations/>
  - focuses on Grand Valley Road for owls and raptors with a bit on Winchell Lake
- May 2011 BSG presentation (online)
  - added 3 off the beaten track sites :
    - Perrenoud Nature Reserve
    - Boggy Lake
    - Harmattan Reservoir







The  
“Beaten  
Track”

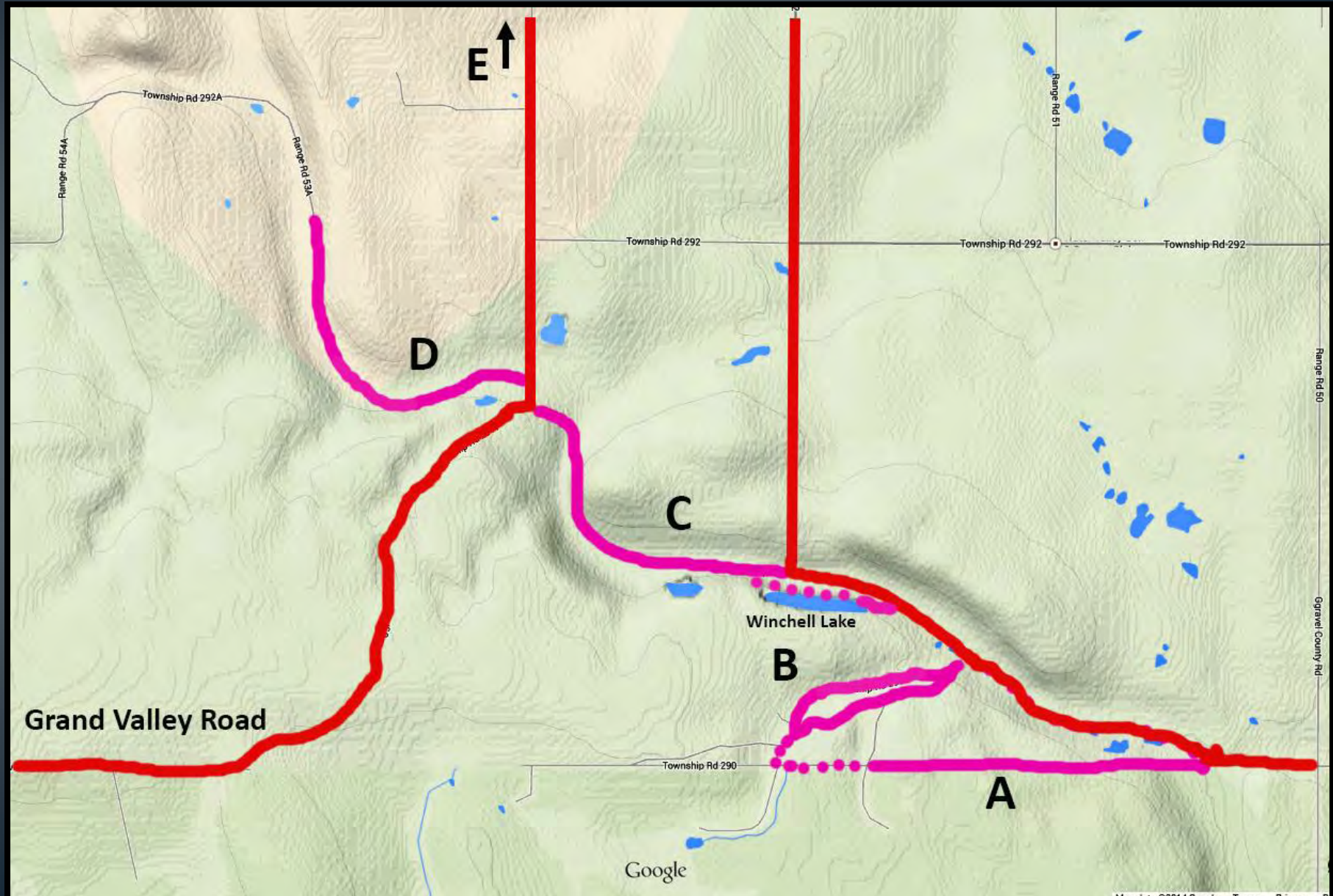


## Southern Route – Just off the beaten track

- Less traffic, less dust
- Opportunity to bird on foot

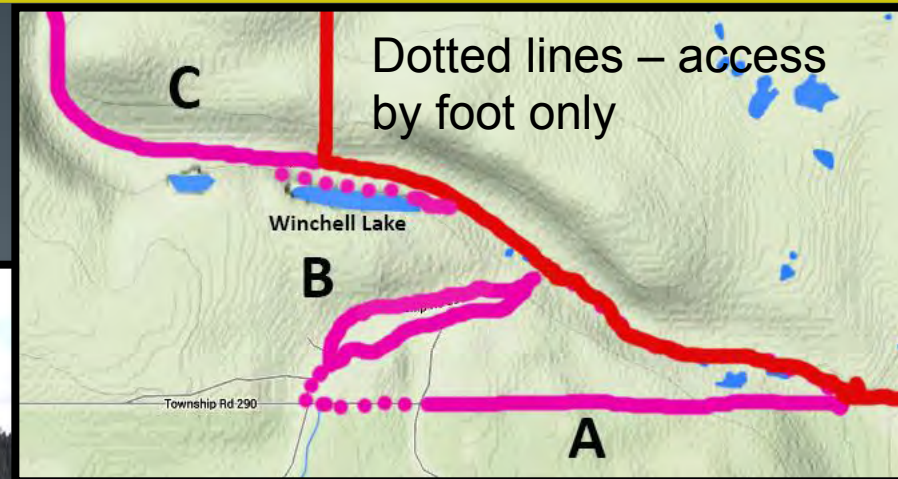


# Winchell Lake Area





# A. South side of Winchell Lake slough



- Can combine A & B to do 5 kilometre circuit on foot; some steep sections



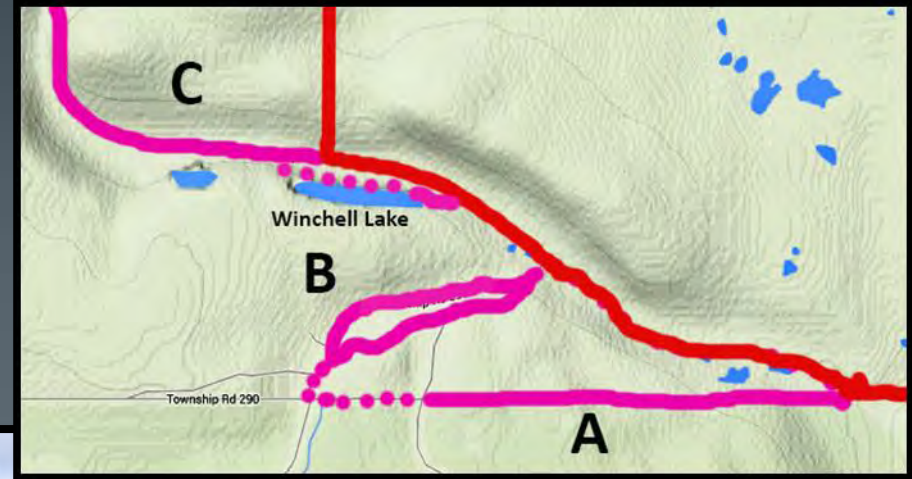


Cape May Warbler



Olive-sided Flycatcher

# B. Deer Springs Road







Solitary Sandpiper



Wilson's Warbler



Western Tanager



Blue-headed  
Vireo





- Road to Winchell Lake 300 metres to west
  - a singing Winter Wren was present two years in a row
  - Path along lake shore



Winter Wren



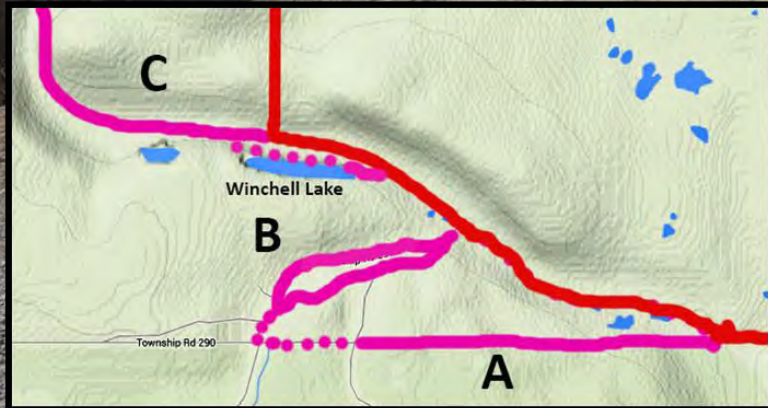
Orange-crowned  
Warbler



Common Loon



# C. West end of Winchell Lake







Townsend's Solitaire - juvenile



Pacific-slope Flycatcher



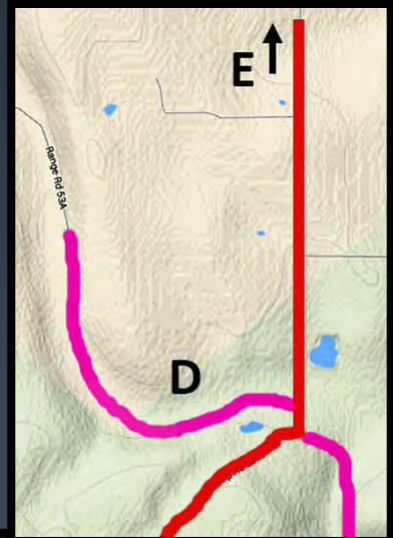
# D. Foster Hills Road – TR 291



Purple Finch - female



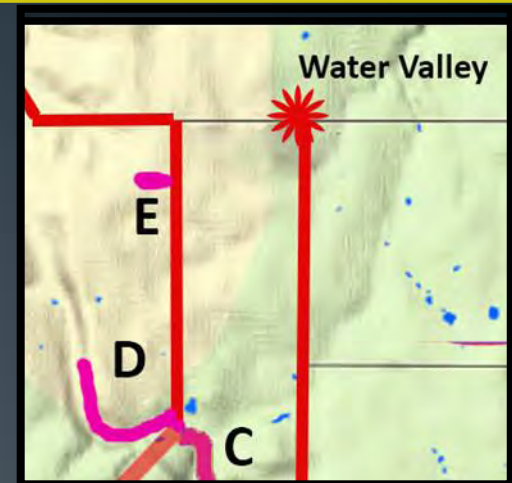
Varied Thrush





# E. Jack Eby Trail

- There is a heavily wooded, swampy site along TR 293A







Ovenbird

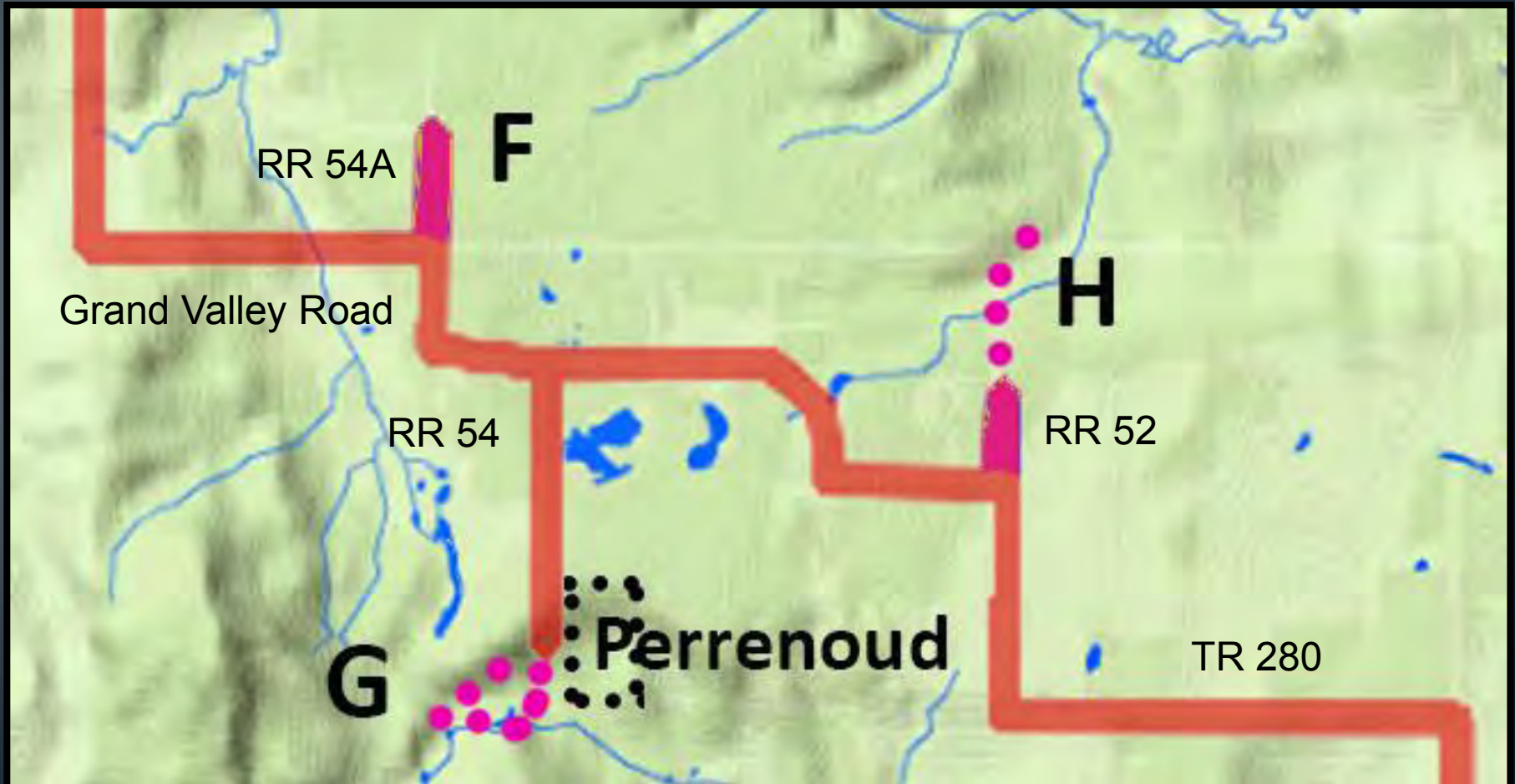




Great Gray Owls



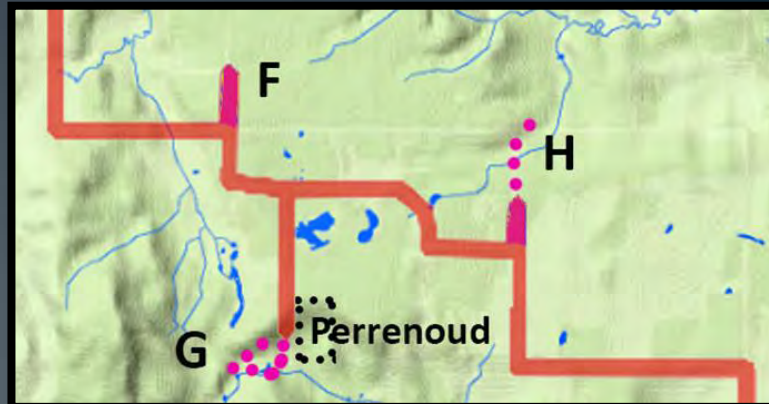
– southern east/west portion



# F. Range Road 54A



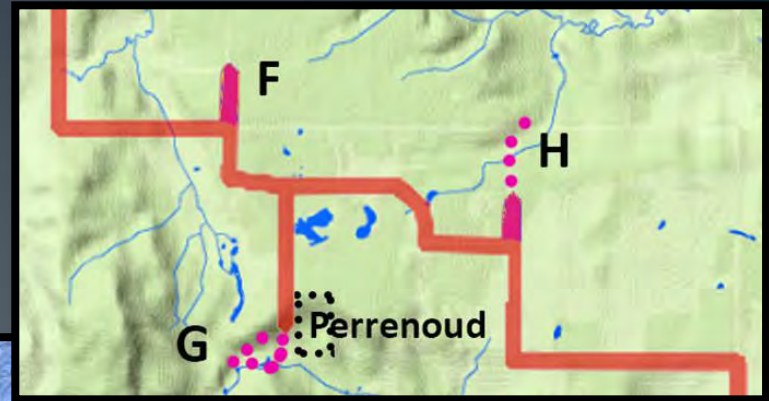
Boreal Chickadee



Gray Jay - juvenile



# G. Perrenoud extension







Philadelphia Vireo

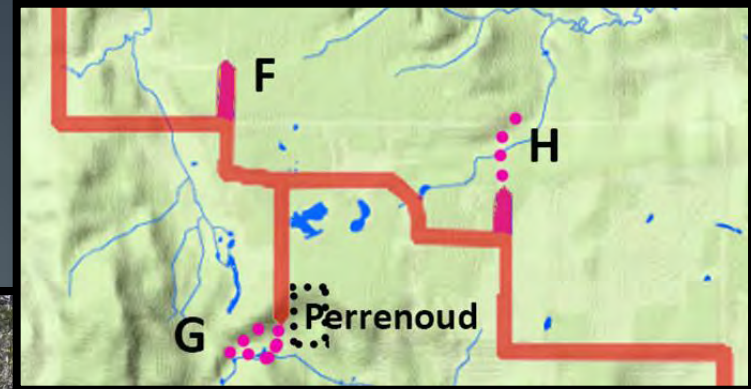




- Grazing land (forested) to west of Perrenoud
  - permission required to drive - from Griffin Valley 403-932-7433
- 3 Kilometre walking loop
  - Head south to valley floor, path continues to the west, back via the road



# H. Range Road 52





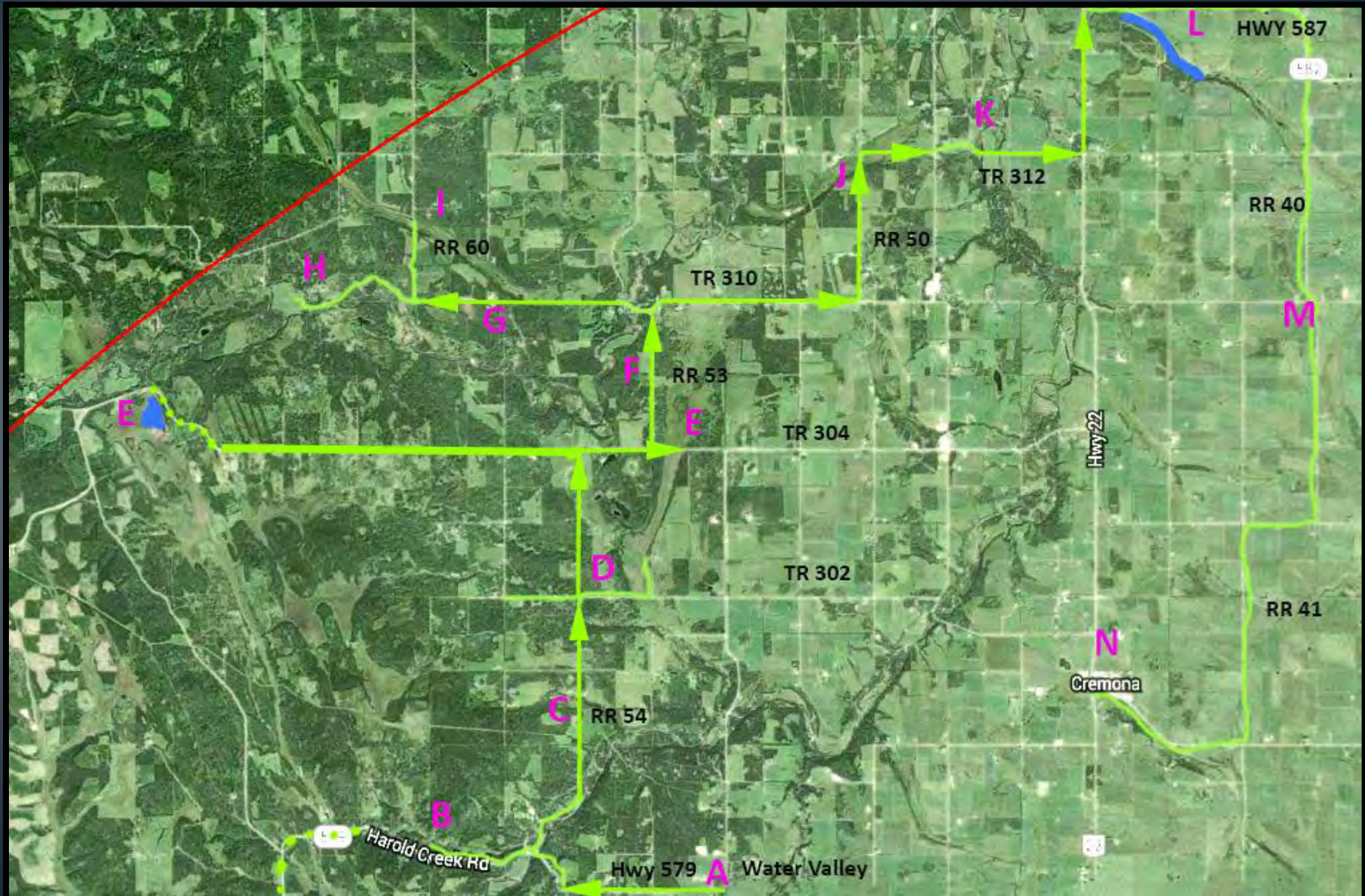
# Birding north of Water Valley

- WVN regularly tallies 100+ species on May Species Counts
- Can also be good for owls throughout the year
- Not as populated nor as busy as the area south of Water Valley





# Suggested route north of Water Valley





# A: Water Valley



Red-breasted Nuthatch

- Gas, coffee available
- Residential areas good for common birds
  - North on RR 52, east side: Little Red Acres
  - West on Hwy 579, south side: Ridgeland Estates (lower is better than upper)



## B: Bill Bagnall Park

- Entrance is on Harold Creek Road, 3 km west of RR 54
- Best known for Pacific-slope Flycatcher but Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is a possibility



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher



## B: Optional Extensions



- Doc Mills Road
  - Mixed forest, hillside
  - Some open fields
  - Extends from Harold Creek Road to Burnt Timber Road (Boggy Lake area)



Ruffed Grouse



- Harold Creek Road

- extends from Hwy 579 to the Forestry Trunk Road through a variety of habitats
- Elevation increases to 1500 m
- In the west, look for foothills birds such as Cassin's Vireo, Dusky Flycatcher
- In bad weather, look for Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch and American Pipits



Cassin's Vireo



# C: RR 54 – Hwy 579 to TR 304



- Sometimes referred to as Skunk Hollow Road
  - Common birds such as Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Eastern Phoebe
- Beyond Skunk Hollow Ranch, road is alongside of Little Red Deer River
  - Cape May Warblers are sometimes found here
- Northern sections have extensive wet areas – grassy and brushy.



Eastern Phoebe



# D: Big Prairie Road – TR 302



Le Conte's Sparrow

- West on TR 302
  - Nice swamp on north side
  - Purple Finches can be here
- East on TR 302
  - Large, wet meadow near RR 53
  - Cranes, wetland sparrows
  - RR 53 known the Black-headed Grosbeak road





## E: Burnt Timber Road – TR 304

- West to Boggy Lake – Northern Hawk Owl nested here for 2-3 years but has not been seen recently
- Boggy Lake and small roadside ponds en route can have a variety of waterfowl



Northern Hawk Owl





## E: Burnt Timber Road – TR 304

- East on 304
  - Small lake on south side: good for Common Loon, a variety of swallows
  - Large wet meadow on both sides of road: good for Sandhill Cranes, variety of sparrows





# F: RR 53 – TR 304 to TR 310



- Quite birdy where forest edge is close to the road



Northern Waterthrush



# G: Fallen Timber Road –TR 310



Sandhill Crane

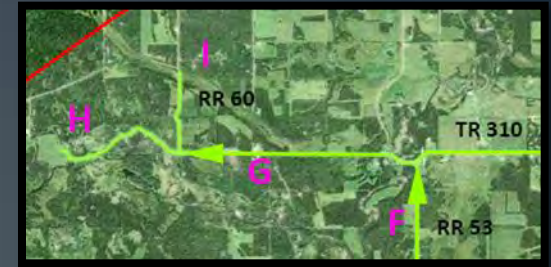


- This stretch of road goes through spruce forest, wet meadows, riverine forest



# H: Fallen Timber Recreation Area

- American Dipper nest under the bridge; Belted Kingfisher and Northern Rough-winged Swallows nest in the cliff-side
- Road extends 2 km through wet areas, fields and forest



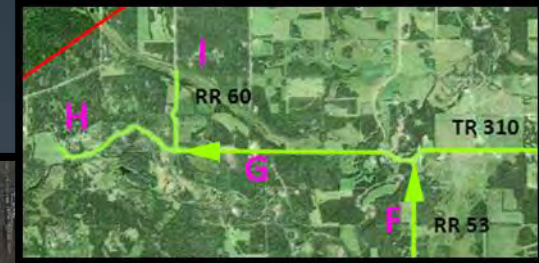




Young dippers begging for food



# I: RR 60 – north of TR 310



Looking  
west

Looking  
east







## J: TR 312, RR 50

- Extensive wetland – best spot for Swamp Sparrow
- Note: maps show TR 312 as a through road to the west – it is not



Swamp Sparrow





# K: Bridge on Elkton Rd



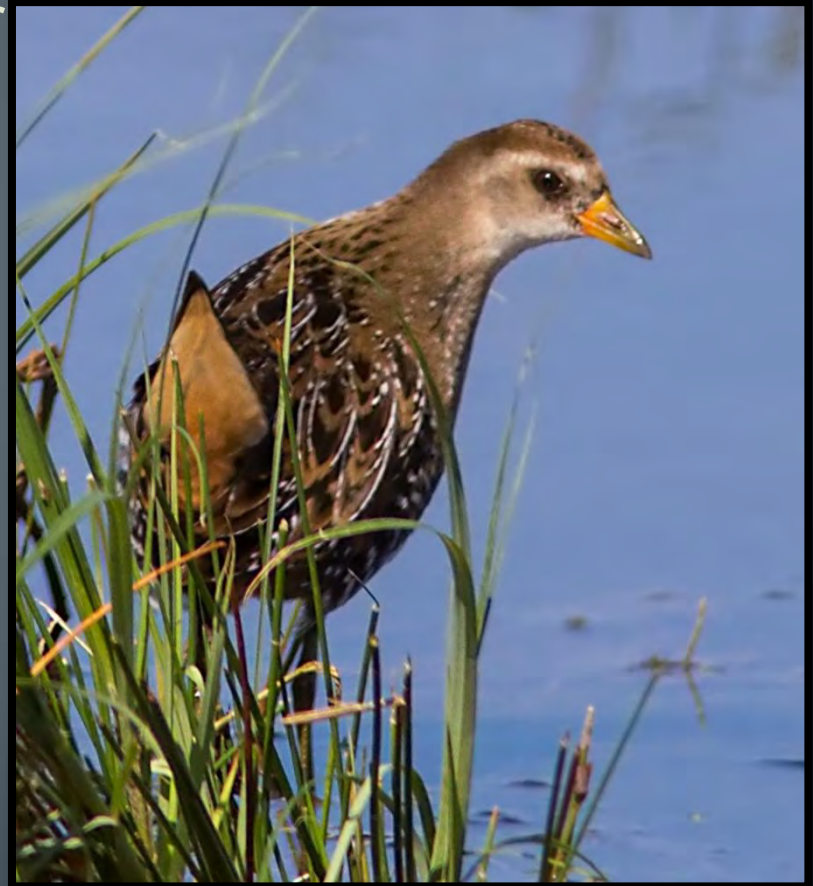
Ruby-throated Hummingbird



# L-N: East of Hwy 22



- Mostly farmland with wet areas in the valleys
- L: Harmattan reservoir - Species similar to Glenmore Reservoir
  - can have a rarity or two (Arctic Tern last May)
- Nice wet area on TR 312 just east of 22
- M: Small slough on RR 40 and TR 310
  - Many species of ducks; Black Tern and Sora
- N: Town of Cremona also good for ducks



Sora - juvenile



# Some birds to watch for

- Normal range of a number of boreal forest birds extends to the Sundre area but occasionally ....



Broad-winged Hawk





Nashville Warbler





Magnolia Warbler





Virginia Rail



# The End



- Thanks to Ray Wershler, Ray Woods, Doug Collister, and Bob Storms for their help