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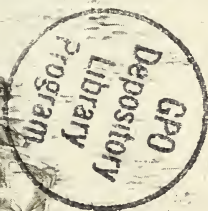
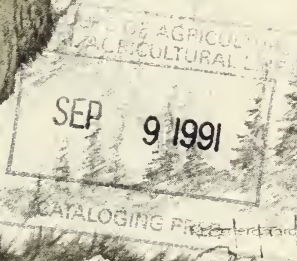


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# LIFE VIEWING PHEE RESERVOIR

**SELF-GUIDED TOUR  
BY BOAT IN THE  
SAN JUAN NATIONAL FOREST**



18 MAR-1991

San Juan National Forest  
Dolores Ranger District • 303/882-7296  
100 North Street • Dolores, Colorado 81323



### 11. BELTED KINGFISHER

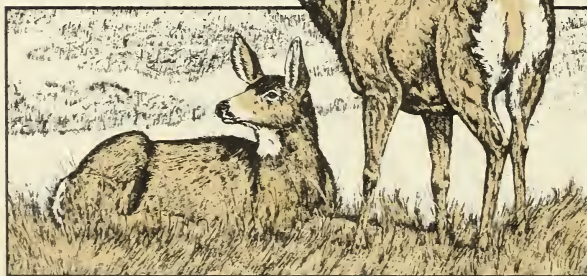
At 11-14 inches, the kingfisher is larger than a robin and appears even larger still because of its big head and ragged crest. Its color is blue-gray with the female showing a rust-band on her belly. It has a white collar and a beak that is thick and swordlike. This fish-eater

perches above the water, diving headfirst for its catch. Its flight seems jerky because of uneven wingbeats. You will find these birds on the prairies, lower mountain streams and lakes of Colorado. See if you can spot a pair flying rapidly up and down the reservoir, chattering at a high pitch. Kingfishers dig tunnels on the sides of banks three to ten feet deep for their nests.



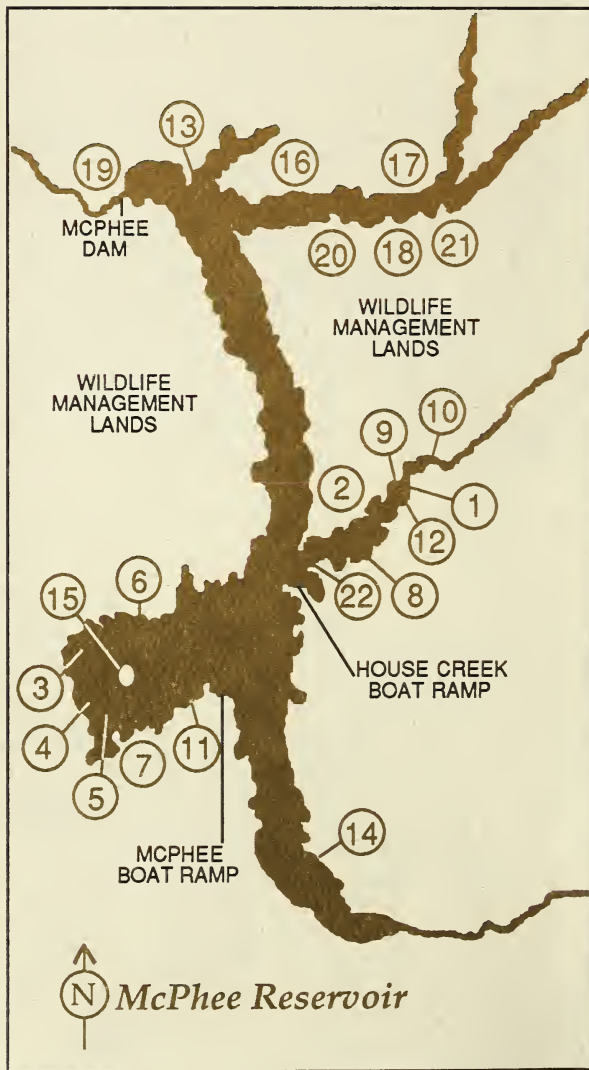
### 12. GREAT HORNED OWL

This impressive bird of prey has been called "the tiger of the woods." It stands 18-25 inches. "Horned" with prominent ear tufts, generally brown with heavy barring across the chest, this owl flies soundlessly with a wingspan of 48-55 inches. This owl is known as the "five hooter" with his soft hollow, eerie-sounding "hoos." The ponderosa pine bordering McPhee offer an ideal hunting ground for these nocturnal predators. Far from a picky feeder, the great horned owl preys upon birds as large as the red-tailed hawk and mammals that actually outweigh the owl. Nesting mother owls have been known to attack humans with their talons. Red-tailed hawks and great horned owls often share the same perches and nesting sites in hollow trees.



### 13. OSPREY

The Osprey is a hawk just slightly smaller than an eagle. It has a white head with a dark stripe through the eye. It has a strong hooked bill and white legs with large talons. The Osprey is dark; its underside is white. Both sexes look alike. In flight, wing spans reach four to six feet, and the undersides are white with dark patches. Commonly called a "fish hawk," this predator hovers while flying and plunges feet first for the catch. These predatory birds are strictly protected.





#### 14. BOBCAT

Of the three species of bobcat, only the Bailey or plateau bobcat is found in southwestern Colorado. It is a close relative of the lynx and weighs up to 30 pounds. The cats are gray with dark blotches scattered on the

upper body. The short tail is black on the top only and the cat has slightly tufted ears. Their mottled fur blends well into the land, making them easy to overlook. The rocky ledges and extremely rugged terrain around McPhee provide good hunting for this predator. Bobcats favor rabbit, although they have been known to prey upon a resting deer when the hare population is low. Stalking for prey at night, a bobcat averages more than five miles of travel per night.



#### 15. CANADA GOOSE

This popular honker is found worldwide, with ten species living in North America. At least seven of the ten species are found in Colorado. These geese are generally

gray-brown in color, with black heads and necks and an outstanding white "chin strap." They weigh from three to 18 pounds, depending on the species. They have been known to outsmart hunters, with one goose recorded as living 25 years! Nesting spots vary according to species. Nests are made in muskrat houses, marshes, inlets, or nests abandoned by birds of prey. These geese mate for life and return to their ancestral grounds to breed each season. Rangers urge you not to disturb geese near their nest, because they may move away for good.





## 16. RACCOON

One of the most adaptable mammals in North America, the raccoon is a skilled swimmer and expert climber. Normally not found in the dry southwest, raccoons call McPhee home because it offers plenty of food, water, and dens. At 15-50 pounds, the raccoon has the famous black robber's mask, a chunky body with grizzled gray-brown fur, erect ears and a long bushy banded tail. Raccoons may be seen probing with their "hands" under rocks in the lake for aquatic delicacies such as crayfish or minnows. Raccoons are omnivorous eaters, meaning they eat just about anything. Their diet consists of aquatic animals, fruits, nuts, and bird eggs. Their diet depends upon availability and season, just like humans. Raccoons prefer to be loners, but during severe winters, several will den together during storms.



## 17. STELLAR'S JAY

At 12-14 inches, the Stellar's Jay is a striking bird, as it shrieks loudly, leaping from tree to tree. A large blue bird with an outstanding black crest and head, its wings, tail, and belly are deep blue. This is the only jay with a crest west of the Rockies. A common resident of Colorado, the Stellar's Jay is commonly found in ponderosa pine and other conifers throughout the mountainous portions of the state. Frequently this bird mimics the calls of the golden eagle and red-tailed hawk.



## 18. ROCK SQUIRREL

These squirrels are so named because of their habit of basking on top of rocks while watching for enemies. This squirrel is about the size of an eastern gray squirrel, but with a less bushy tail, shorter ears, and coarser hair. The fur color is buff gray with a silvery gray over the shoulders. Its back is mottled with spots, and the lower parts are whitish. In the foothills of Colorado, rock squirrels favor rocks, cliffs, and canyons for their burrow homes where they store seeds and nuts for hibernation. Seldom seen in trees, they will, however, climb scrubby trees to gather nuts. On a windy day, this squirrel can be seen swinging wildly on a branch, as if in great fun! The rock squirrel's call is like the sound of a loud shrill whistle, or that of a marmot. Rock squirrels are easy prey for hawks, owls, coyotes, weasels, foxes, and badgers.





### 19. MOUNTAIN LION

The largest of the North American cats, the cougar can attain a length of eight-and-a-half feet (including a black-tipped tail that can reach three feet in length).

The fur is a dull, pale, yellowish-brown.

The underside (chin, throat, and belly) is whitish. McPhee offers excellent habitat with rocky ledges, brush, and pinyon-juniper canyons. This habitat provides plenty of cover and food, not only for the cougar, but for its principal prey, the mule deer. These lions eliminate diseased and weakened deer, thereby improving the health of the herd as a whole. The cougar is rarely seen because it is nocturnal in habit. Known for its curiosity, this cat has been known to trail horsemen or hikers for long distances, although staying well behind and hidden from view. There is evidence that cougars mate for life, but the male does not live with the female from the time the cubs are born until after they are weaned.



### 20. MUSKRAT

This aquatic rat reaches 20-23 inches in length and weighs about two pounds. Resembling a rat, its naked and scaly tail is flattened on the sides. Colors range from light to chestnut brown or almost black. Its lower body is buff to pale gray, hind feet are partially webbed, and forepaws are used as hands. You may see these rodents scurrying along the shoreline at peak activity time between sunset and dusk. Their homes resemble beaver dens but are smaller, rounded lodges and burrows made in the bank. Males have been known to fight for females in the spring, when muskrats often display bites and slash marks. A muskrat can submerge under water for as long as 15 minutes at a time.!



### 21. MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

A small blue songbird (only six to seven inches long), flies from bush to bush. Its mild manner and penchant for posing make it easy to photograph. The male is a brilliant turquoise blue, though paler below with a white belly. The female is rather gray-brown above with a touch of blue on the wings, tail, and rump and a white belly. Bluebirds migrate to Colorado in mid-March, staying in the lower elevations until early May, and then ascending as high as 12,000 feet in elevation before leaving the area in October. These songbirds seek out nests already made by other birds and animals, such as a woodpecker's hole in a tree, a chipmunk's hole, or a cliff swallow's nest.



*" Adopt the pace  
of nature:  
her secret is patience "*

--R. W. Emerson,  
wilderness advocate



### 22. CRAYFISH

Nick-named "crawdad", the crayfish is a small lobsterlike crustacean. Like insects, crustaceans are arthropods--animals with jointed legs and a skeleton on the outside of the body. The crayfish skeleton contains four layers; one is pigmented and all but the innermost are hardened by calcium salts. In order to grow, the crayfish must shed its skeleton. Crayfish spend most of their time in shallow water, one to five feet deep where they scavenge for food. They reproduce at a very rapid rate and so become an important part of the food chain to many other animals around the lake. Crayfish were planted here by wildlife officials as food for the fish, but muskrats, raccoons and aquatic birds feed on them as well.



## WATCHABLE WILDLIFE

The San Juan National Forest is pleased to bring you this brochure to help you identify some of the wildlife that call the area around McPhee Reservoir home. Although you may not actually see the individual animals in the areas

indicated on the map, you will find the type of natural habitat where they can be found. Observe the small circled numbers on the map and the area where the numbers are located, then find the corresponding number in the brochure to learn about the animal you may see there. Most species are best seen during very early morning hours or late afternoon and evening. To have the most success at getting a closer view, you should approach slowly and quietly. When you leave, please leave quietly to refrain from alarming any wildlife so that others may have the opportunity to enjoy them. Binoculars are very helpful in identifying the animals from shore or from your boat.



## PUT THEM BACK ALIVE

Protecting the future of our fish and wildlife is everyone's responsibility. Please keep only the fish you can use and release the rest. You don't have to keep your legal limit. The largemouth and smallmouth bass are not currently being restocked, therefore, releasing spawning bass, whether they are 15 inches in length or not, will help maintain the quality and quantity of bass fishing. It is especially important to practice the "catch and release" of these bass during peak spawning periods in May and June.

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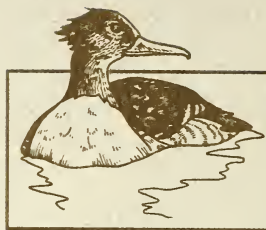


"Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute!"

## THE HABITAT

The shores of McPhee now offer winter range for deer and elk because their original winter range is now under water. The "mitigation area" was purchased by the Bureau of Reclamation solely for this purpose. Numerous projects have improved the

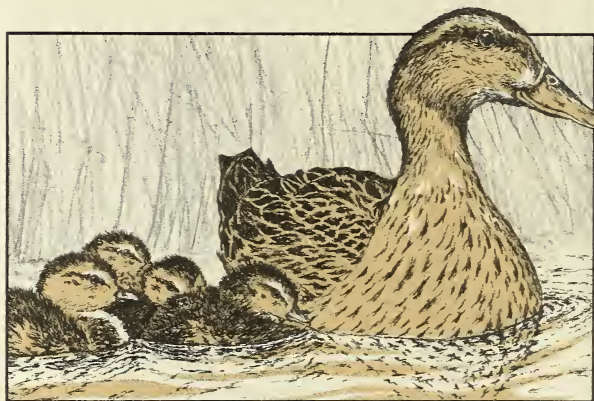
forage-producing capacity of this winter range. The planting of dryland alfalfa and perennial grasses on previously cultivated fields, prescribed burning of oakbrush in the browse feeding area, control of noxious weeds such as Musk thistle and Canadian thistle, and watershed restoration to decrease soil erosion and increase water supplies, have all helped.



## 1. COMMON MERGANSER

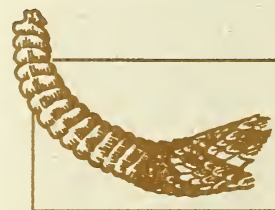
The largest and the most common of mergansers reaches a length of 21-27 inches. A male has a fairly long body which appears dark on top and light on the bottom. He has a green-black head and a long pointed

bill with serrated edges. Males are sometimes mistaken as mallards because of their green heads. The female is gray with a cinnamon-brown neck and crested head. She is white underneath, with a white patch on each wing. In flight, mergansers hold their long necks and heads horizontal with their bodies. They dive underwater and swim considerable distances before surfacing. This species breeds regularly along swift rivers and reservoirs in southwestern Colorado. McPhee Reservoir boasts a year-round population.

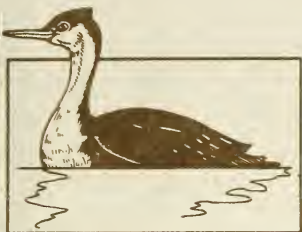


## 2. PRAIRIE RATTLESNAKE

This rattlesnake common to southwestern Colorado is gray to brown in color with black splotches on the back. It can reach 30-40 inches in length. The rattle is evident



on the tail. The snake will usually coil before striking. It is ordinarily found on the plains but also ventures into open rocky areas and sunny spots in pinyon-juniper and brush. Be conscious of snakes when walking in this kind of habitat and always wear protective footwear.



### 3. WESTERN GREBE

The grebe is a large long-necked diver and in recent years has become more plentiful in eastern Colorado. It stands 22-29 inches tall. The crown, hindneck, and back are black. The

throat, foreneck, and underparts are usually pure white. It has an extremely long light-yellow bill. The grebe's shrill whistle resembles that of the osprey. Courtship performances are unique: With necks arched and crests raised, the grebes dance, often rubbing against one another. Studies show that boating and waterskiing disturb nesting grebes, so please respect the habitat of these waterbirds.



### 4. AMERICAN COOT

The American coot is a marsh dweller. It is found throughout the United States and stands 13-16 inches. The only

slate gray, ducklike bird with a white pointed bill, the coot appears black from a distance. Coots swim while pumping their heads and necks back and forth. This sociable bird is usually found in large flocks floating on the reservoir. In Colorado, coots are often seen with yellow-headed blackbirds, although they may be belligerent toward unrelated waterfowl. Coots feed by diving for submerged vegetation. In takeoff, the coot skitters across the surface with wings flapping as it awkwardly climbs into the air.



### 5. MALLARD

Mallards are the most popular waterfowl hunted in North America. It is also the most abundant type of duck in Colorado. Their prolific success comes from being among the most clever of all waterfowl.

These year-long residents of McPhee Reservoir are 21-27 inches in height. The male has a glossy green head and neck, a narrow white collar, gray body, chestnut-colored breast, and a purplish-blue wing patch. The female is mottled brown with a whitish tail. Mallards are subject to heavy predation. Their eggs are favorites of magpies, crows, badgers, skunks and other carnivorous animals. Another predator is man, who puts heavy hunting pressure on mallards, especially in eastern Colorado.

6. COYOTE 1022334245

Since the disappearance of the wolf from nearly all of the United States, coyotes have expanded their territory and are found almost anywhere. A coyote looks like a small slender

wolf, but with a more pointed yellowish muzzle. Coyotes also have larger, sharper, more erect ears than wolves. Their fur is fairly long and heavy with a buff-gray and black color. The bushy tail, whitish underneath with a black tip, is pointed downward when the coyote runs, as opposed to the wolf which carries it straight out. Coyotes are known to breed with dogs, but not with wolves. They are excellent mouse catchers and can be observed pouncing on mice in tall grass or sagebrush. When hunting in packs like their larger cousins, coyotes can bring down a deer, but usually eat rabbit, carrion, and rodents.



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7. MULE DEER

Mule deer are named for their enormous ears. Their summer coat is a rusty yellow or "buckskin." But in the fall, winter, and spring, mule deer turn deep gray with white rumps and white tails tipped in black. The antlers on the males (bucks) have two equal "Y" branches,



each forking into two points. In contrast, white-tailed deer and elk have one main branch curving forward with points. The antlers of mule deer are shed yearly from mid-January to mid-April. Small herds find safety in numbers, with a doe, her fawns, and a yearling often traveling together. Bucks travel alone.

8. OSPREY PLATFORM

Ospreys welcome erected platforms to house their bulky nests. The San Juan National Forest is trying to keep these federally protected raptors year-round in the area. This platform was built in May, 1988. No ospreys have settled here yet, but local rangers predict it will happen someday. To find



the manmade nest, look for the tallest ponderosa pine. The top 12-15 feet of the tree has been cut off. You should be able to see the bulky nest on the stump. The four-foot plywood square is wired with sticks at about 60 feet up. The nest is placed high for the osprey's visibility in search of fish, which is its main food source. (See also #19).

9. BEAVER

Since the days of fur trapping, beaver have been reintroduced in almost every state. These shy furry rodents can weigh up to 80 pounds, but most usually top out at 40 pounds.



They have large webbed hind feet, a flat leathery tail, waterproof underfur, and chisel-like front teeth to gnaw trees and shrubs (using the bark and twigs for food). Their incisors grow continuously, so beaver grind and grit their teeth to control length. Though mostly active at night, their presence is detectable by stick dams and lodges. Beavers communicate a warning to each other when trespassers stray too close by the slap of the tail, which sounds like a rifle. By the age of two, young beaver are forced to leave home to build new lodges and find mates.

10. EAGLE NESTING PLATFORM

In a clump of old cottonwood trees, you will find a manmade Bald Eagle nest in the tallest tree. About 40-50 feet up, braced in the Y of the tree, is an inverted four-foot cone camouflaged with sticks. The nest, built in May, 1989 is placed high for the eagle's visibility in search of fish and fowl. A pair of mature bald eagles have been sighted



nearby. Bald eagles are on the Federal Endangered Species List. McPhee Reservoir is involved in an annual national eagle count each January conducted by the Colorado Division of Wildlife.

