

Evaluation of
SWAMP CEDAR ECOLOGICAL AREA
White Pine County, Nevada
for eligibility for
REGISTERED NATURAL LANDMARK
designation

Prepared by
Alvin R. McLane
Hydrologic-Geologic Assistant
Desert Research Institute
University of Nevada, Reno
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Introduction

A few years ago the writer's attention was drawn to a statement about an unusual phreatophyte, a plant whose roots extend to the saturated groundwater zone or capillary fringe, found only in Nevada (Maxey and Eakin, 1949, p. 26). The authors remarked: "An unusual phreatophyte, locally referred to as 'swamp cedar', grows in small areas west of White River, especially in sec. 33, T. 11 N., R. 61 E. This tree has been tentatively indentified as a variety of the Rocky Mountain juniper (Juniperus scopulorum) or possibly a hybrid between the Rocky Mountain juniper and the western or Utah juniper (Juniperus utahensis). It also grows in Spring Valley, about 30 miles east of White River Valley, in marshlands and other places where the water table is near the land surface. These are the only two localities where the writers have observed this phreatophyte."

Later, W. D. Billings (1954, p. 8) described these trees as an interesting ecotype of Rocky Mountain Juniper (Juniperus scopulorum). However, J. H. Simpson (1876, p. 120) must be given credit for originally discovering these trees. While crossing Spring Valley (Simpson's Antelope Valley) on July 19, 1859, he penned in his journal: ". . .and intermingled. . . are extensive groves of tall cedars, which thus far on our routes, existing, as these groves do, in the bottom of the valley, is quite an anomoly." Simpson continues: "Birds frequent these groves, and make the air resonent with their music. The scenenry, too, is quite pretty."

Swamp cedar, as far as is known, ranges only in White River Valley, mainly in Sec. 33, T 11 N, R 61 E; and in Spring Valley, mainly in Tps. 11, 12, 15 and 16 N, R 67 E.

Rocky Mountain juniper isn't unique in Nevada, where the tree generally thrives on dry or rocky soils in foothills or mountain slopes, generally, at altitudes of 5,000 to 9,000 feet. However, the ecotype of Juniperus scopulorum, the swamp cedar, is certainly unusual.

Location

The most desireable area for the natural area, probable, would be the place in Spring Valley known as The Cedars, southwest of towering Wheeler Peak (13,063 ft). The area is readily reached from Major's Place on U. S. Highway 6 & 50, east of Ely; then via oiled road toward Shoshone to the area of the old Floyd Smith place.

Boundaries

The exact boundaries can't, or shouldn't presently be determined. According to discussion with Don Cain, Area Manager, the Ely District of Bureau of Land Management is planning to manage The Cedars location for recreation. It is hoped that this agency will set aside an area of the junipers for a natural area, either at The Cedars, or possible in the large stands north of U. S. Highway 6 & 50 in the Cleveland Ranch area.

Size

At least two square miles should be available for a natural area. This should cover a wide range of ground water conditions, to determine what effect, if any, what that the water table fluctuations, or varying distances to water, would have on the junipers. The size would, also, attract a sizeable wildlife habitat.

Ownership

The main ownership is Bureau of Land Management.

Correspondents

The main correspondent is Nolan Keil, Nevada State Director, Bureau of Land Management, Room 3008 Federal Building, 300 Booth Street, Reno, Nevada 89502. The area is locally administered by R. H. Ledosquet, District Manager, Ely District Office, Bureau of Land Management, Pioche Star Route, Ely, Nevada 89301.

Land Use

The area is presently used for stock grazing and some irrigation for pasturage is currently practiced.

Dangers to Integrity of the Area

The only danger to integrity of the area immediately noticed is that of overgrazing.

Description of Natural Values

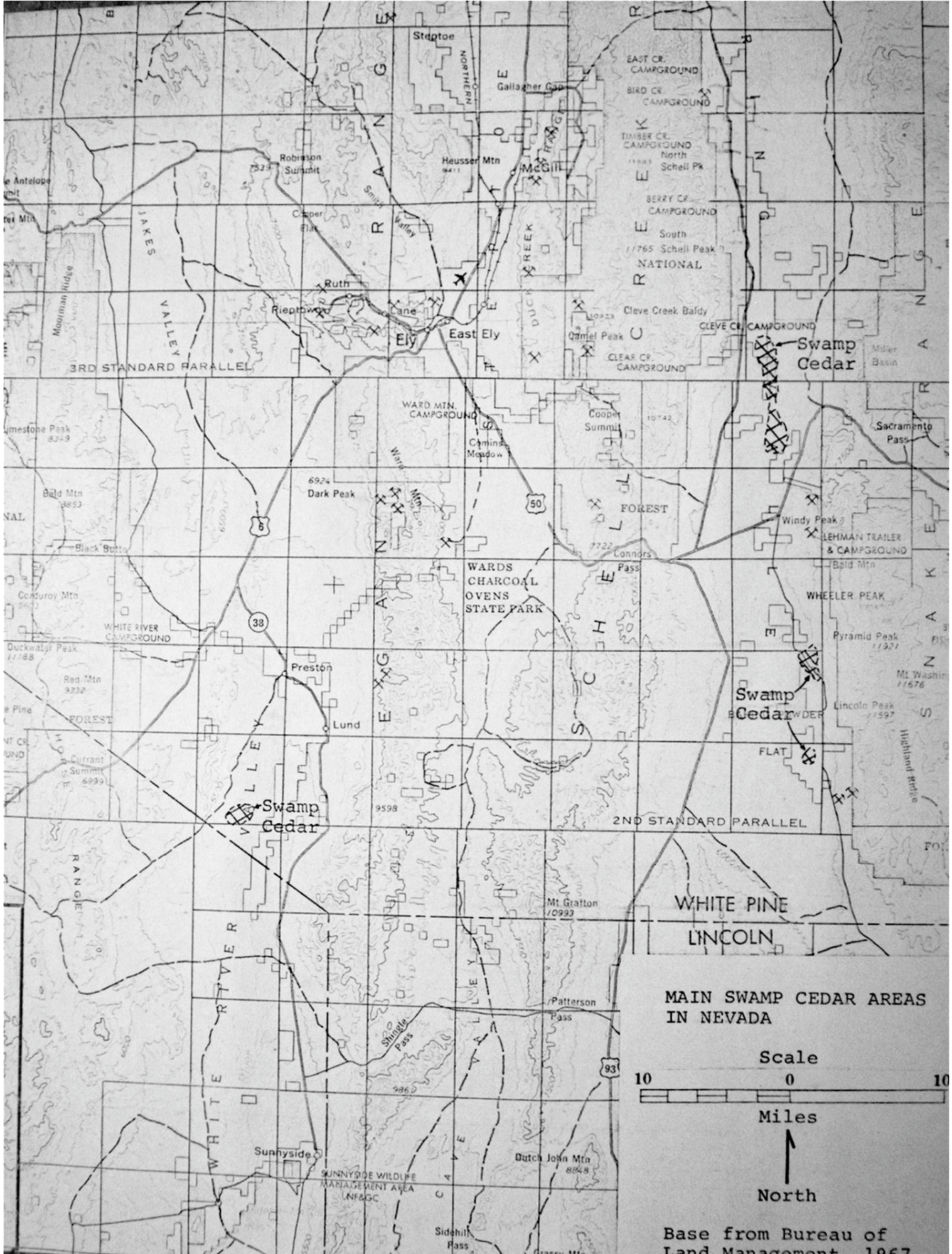
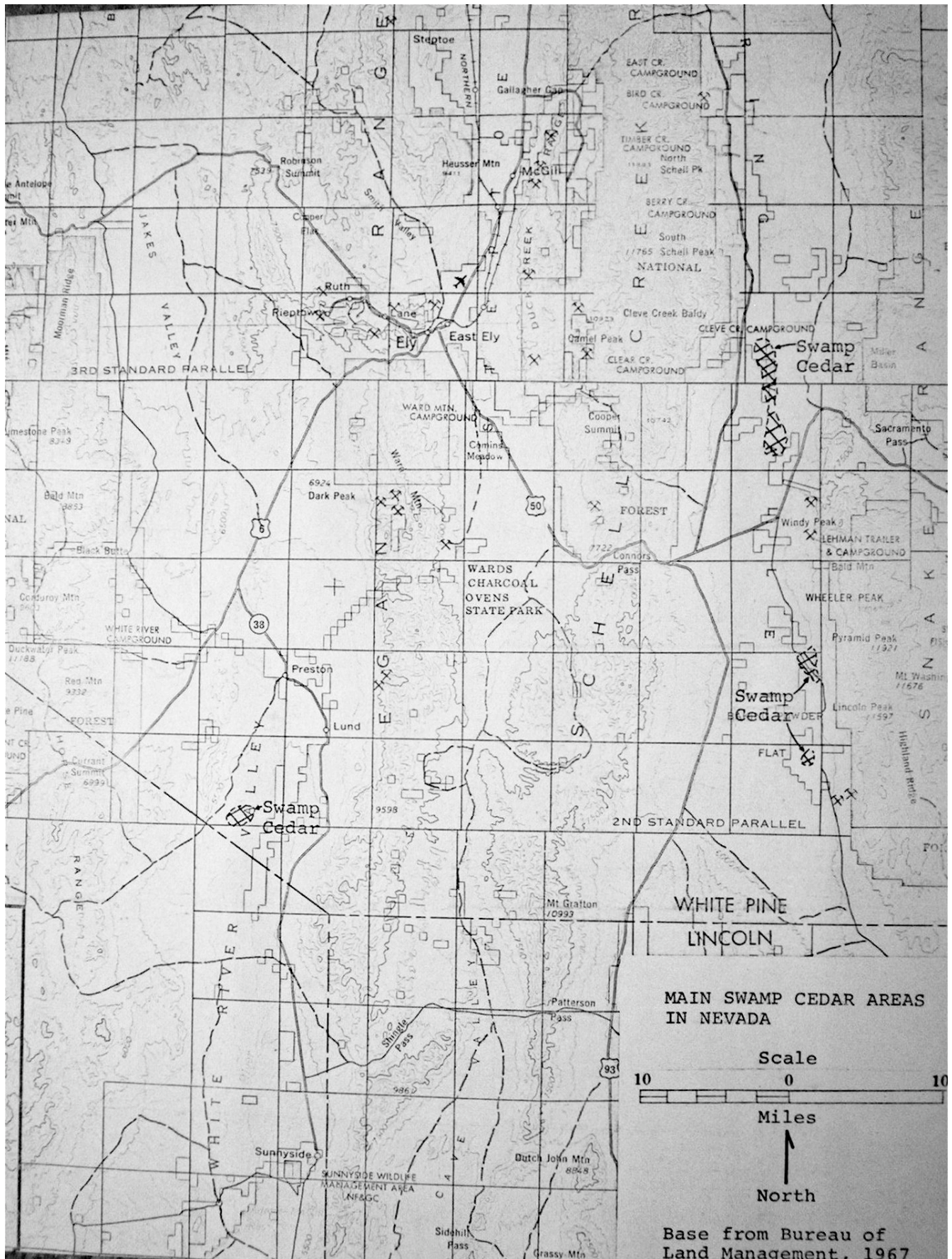
The swamp cedar is a small tree, generally ranging from 10 to 20 feet in height. It is unusual how that these trees have adapted to environmental selection and isolation. The trunks may be as much as 2 feet or more in diameter. Its gray-brown bark is laced with shredded scales. The trees are associated with rabbitbrush and greasewood.

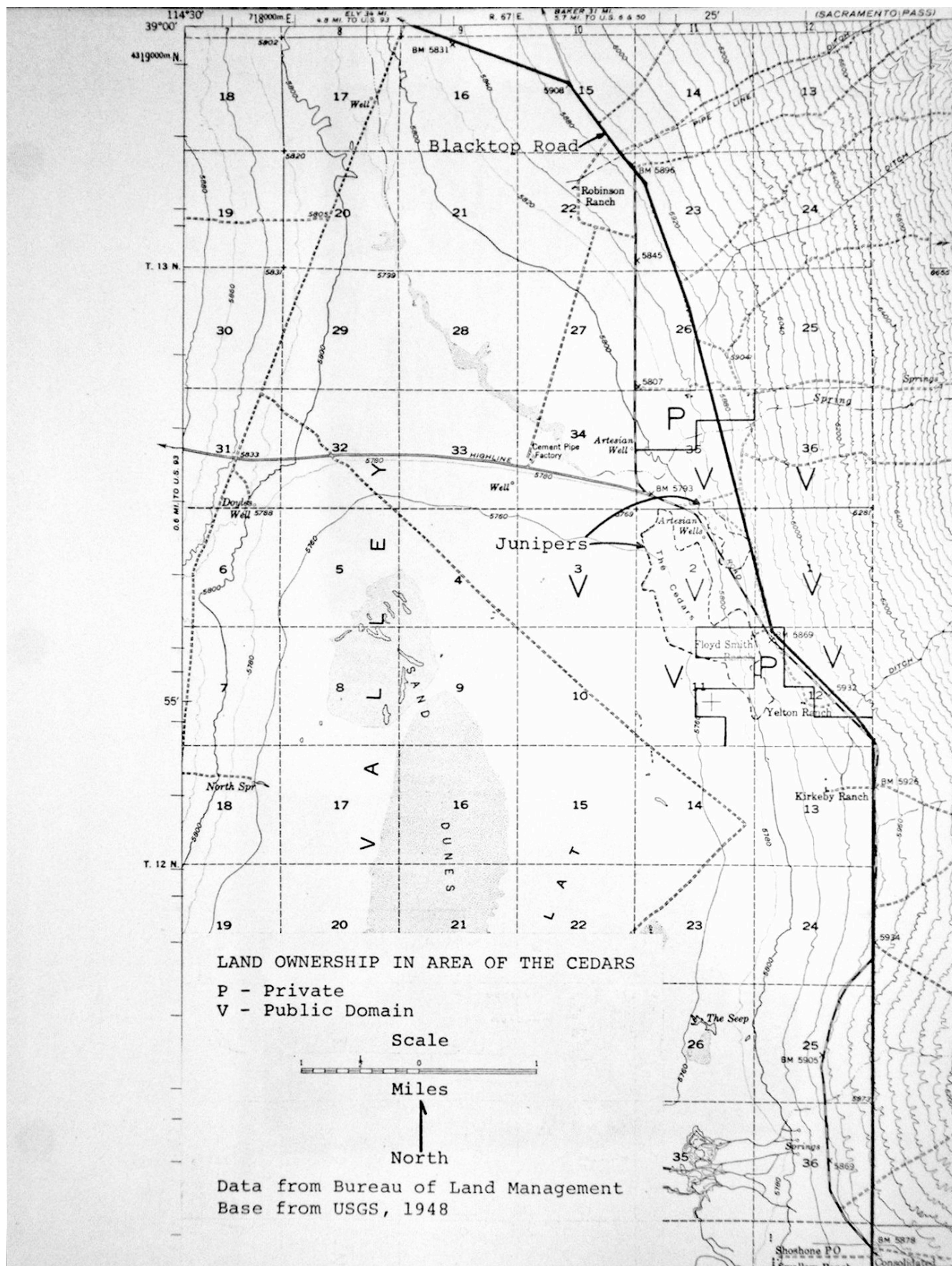
Where these trees grow, in valley bottoms close to water, is necessarily attractive. Spring valley, whose altitude is around 5,800 feet, is bounded by the towering Snake Range on the east, and the nearly as impressive Schell Creek Range (11,000+ ft) on the west. Wheeler Peak, the monarch of the Great Basin, which dominates the area is quite inspiring when viewed from Spring Valley, especially from the vicinity of Cleveland Ranch.

When the site was visited on May 4th, 1970, with Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Schmidt from Reno, a number of birds and small animals were noted. Hawks, lesser goldfinch and mallard ducks were some of the birds immediately recognized.

Eligibility for Landmark Status

Due to some of the particulars involved - grazing, irrigation, and the Bureau of Land Management intention to develop The Cedars - it isn't presently advisable to consider any of the swamp cedar areas for a Natural Landmark.







Bark detail examined by Joseph Schmidt
on swamp cedar, 4 May 1970

Swamp cedar about 20 ft high, 4 May 1970

