

## Burrowing Owl - *Athene cunicularia*

Abundance: Uncommon

Status: NSSU

NatureServe: G4 S3

Population Status:

Limiting Factor:

Comment: NSS4 to NSSU due to unknown population status and trends

### Introduction

During summer, the western subspecies of the Burrowing Owl inhabits southern British Columbia to southern Manitoba south through most of the western US to central Mexico. It winters from California to Texas south through most of Central America. In Wyoming, the highest concentrations of Burrowing Owls are in the south and east, although it occurs and breeds throughout most of the State. The Burrowing Owl is considered an uncommon summer resident in Wyoming.

### Habitat

The Burrowing Owl uses a wide variety of arid and semiarid environments, with well-drained, level to gently sloping areas characterized by sparse vegetation and bare ground. It prefers open prairie, grassland, desert, and shrub-steppe habitats, and may also inhabit agricultural areas. It depends on mammals, particularly prairie dogs and ground squirrels, that dig burrows, which it uses for nesting, roosting, and escape.

### Problems

- h Impacted by the elimination of burrowing mammals through control programs and habitat loss.
- h Conversion of native grasslands to croplands and habitat loss to urbanization and industrialization have caused a contraction in this species' breeding range and rangewide population declines.
- h Narrow nesting habitat requirements makes species susceptible to habitat degradation and loss.
- h Population status and trends are largely unknown in Wyoming.
- h This species is sensitive to human disturbance during nesting.

### Conservation Actions

- h Continue inventory and monitoring efforts and implement the Monitoring Wyoming's Birds grid-based monitoring program to determine density and population trends.
- h Avoid or minimize pesticide use in habitats where this species nests to ensure a food source is maintained. If possible, all pesticide use should be postponed until this species has completed its breeding cycle.
- h Maintain prairie dog colonies where this species is present via conservation easements and voluntary agreements with landowners, and habitat management plans with land managers.
- h Manage the habitat within 0.4 to 0.8 km (¼ to ½ mi) of Burrowing Owl nesting areas to minimize human disturbance during the breeding season.
- h Manage Burrowing Owl foraging and nesting areas to minimize the reduction of small mammal populations, especially prairie dogs and ground squirrels, and the control of insect populations.
- h Manage Burrowing Owl nesting areas and shortgrass prairie habitat to minimize the potential for degradation and conflicts with development.

### Monitoring/Research

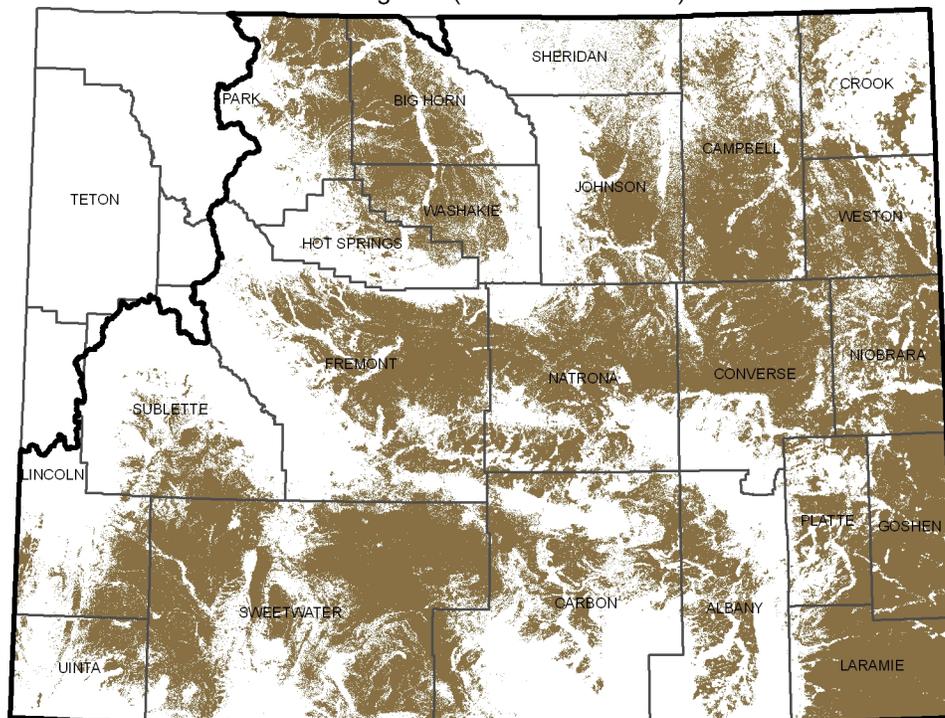
Needs specialized, periodic monitoring because existing monitoring programs do not detect this species in sufficient numbers to determine population density and trends. State Wildlife Grants project to develop essential datasets and a plan for minimizing wildlife and community conflicts with wind development in southeastern Wyoming.

### Recent Developments

An increase in industrial development in preferred habitat may negatively affect populations.

## References

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SOURCE: Digital maps of ranges and predicted distributions for Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need: April 2010. Wyoming Natural Diversity Database. University of Wyoming, Laramie, Wyoming. Note that brown indicates the predicted distribution of the species; heavy black lines indicate outermost boundaries of possible occurrence.