

Forster's Tern - *Sterna forsteri*

Abundance: Common

Status: NSS3 (Bb)

NatureServe: G5 S1

Population Status: population size is restricted but extirpation is not imminent; only 7 nesting locations are known statewide

Limiting Factor: Habitat (and Human Activity): limiting factors are severe; as with all colonial nesting waterbirds, there is limited available habitat, which is not likely to increase without intensive management and cooperation with private landowners and other land management agencies; sensitive to human disturbance during nesting

Comment:

Introduction

The Forster's Tern breeds locally from the central Prairie Provinces of Canada south to southern California, the coast of northeastern Mexico, and South Carolina. It winters from central California south to Costa Rica and from Virginia to the Greater Antilles. It is scattered across most of Wyoming, although breeding has been confirmed in only four general areas. The Forster's Tern is considered a common summer resident in Wyoming. It was documented nesting at eight different sites between 1982 and 1994.

Habitat

The Forster's Tern inhabits freshwater marshes and marshy borders of ponds and lakes, and prefers large marsh complexes with vegetated nest sites near patches of open water. It nests in small, loose colonies on mats of floating dead vegetation, large muskrat houses near the edges of open pools of water, or in a shallow depression in sand or mud close to water.

Problems

- h Breeding habitat in Wyoming is disjunct and secure breeding sites are limited in distribution.
- h The availability and suitability of breeding sites can be unstable between years as a result of fluctuating water levels and changes in land use practices.
- 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 Maintain a minimum of 4 Forster's Tern breeding locations and 45 breeding pairs of Forster's Terns in Wyoming.
- h In areas where Forster's Terns are nesting, maintain complexes of marshes with stands of emergent vegetation greater than 6 m (20 ft) wide and interspersed with patches of open water.
- h Minimize human disturbance at nesting sites during the breeding season.

Monitoring/Research

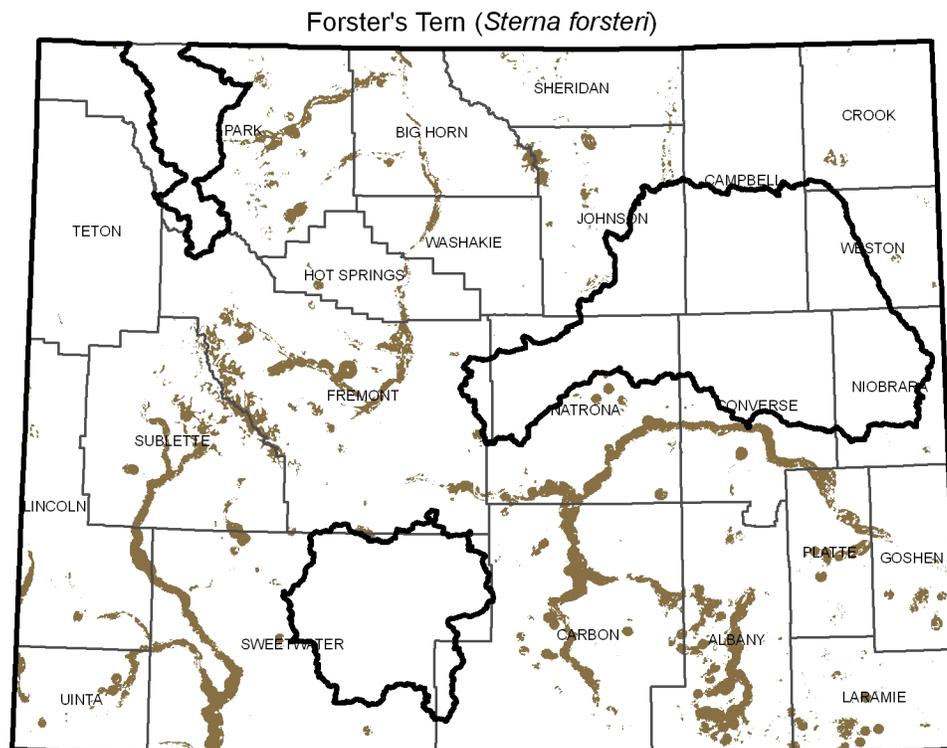
Monitor known nesting colonies a minimum of every three years to determine occupancy and estimate the number of nesting pairs.

Recent Developments

Drought-related habitat changes have degraded some of the historic nesting sites and reduced the number of nesting pairs detected during the past several years. A cooperative, 11-state colonial waterbird monitoring program was initiated in 2009 with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This will conclude in 2011, with an Atlas of all known nesting colonies in the 11 western states produced in 2012.

References

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- Oakleaf B, Cerovski AO, Luce B. 1996. Nongame bird and mammal plan: a plan for inventories and management of nongame birds and mammals in Wyoming. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Nongame Program. 183 p.



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.