

Lesser Scaup - *Aythya affinis*

Abundance: Uncommon

Status: NSS3 (Bb)

NatureServe: G5
S3B,S4N

Population Status: population size and distribution is declining but extirpation is not imminent

Limiting Factor: Habitat: limiting factor is severe; continentally, the current hypothesis is that climate change has contributed to reduced wetland abundance and is causing duckling hatch and invertebrate flush to become out of sync; in Wyoming, climatic conditions strongly influence wetland suitability and Lesser Scaup abundance.

Comment:

Introduction

The primary breeding range extends southeast from central Alaska to Hudson Bay and south to northern Wyoming and Central Minnesota. The species will occasionally breed as far south as northeastern California, Colorado, and Nebraska. In Wyoming, lesser scaup breed in south and western regions of the state. The species winters from Mid-Atlantic States to the West Indies and Columbia and along the west coast from British Columbia to Mexico. Lesser scaup are relatively common across the state during fall and spring migration. Spring surveys indicate the combined populations of greater and lesser scaup have declined dramatically from 1984 through 2003. Most of the decline has been recorded in the western Canadian boreal forest. The combined populations are 27 percent below the long-term average. In Wyoming, lesser scaup are less common during the breeding season than during migration. The lesser scaup is not considered a common summer resident in Wyoming. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) classifies the lesser scaup as a Species of Special Concern with a Native Species Status of 3 (NSS3) because its continental breeding population is declining and habitat is restricted and vulnerable, but no recent or on-going significant loss has occurred.

Habitat

Lesser scaup are among the least adaptable waterfowl species in relation to changes in habitat conditions, particularly changes in reproductive habitat; Although lesser scaup are omnivorous, they feed primarily and at times almost exclusively, on aquatic invertebrates. Amphipods are the most important food for migrating and breeding scaup and for ducklings. Preferred breeding habitats are permanent, intermittently exposed, and semipermanent wetlands > 2 acres in size. Alkali wetlands are relatively poor habitat for reproduction due to the lack of vegetative cover along the margin. The primary brood habitat is permanent or semipermanent wetlands with emergent vegetation. However, food availability is more limiting than cover. Broods tend to use expansive areas of open water for security and escape cover. Scaup select breeding sites near water bodies devoid of fish. Low water levels, intensive livestock grazing, and early haying (before July 15) can result in increased predation and reduced habitat quality. Scaup nest in uplands, usually close to the water's edge. they have a broad breeding range encompassing both forest and grassland habitats and are strongly philopatric with respect to breeding, migration and wintering areas.

Problems

- h Climate change may be creating asynchrony between nesting/hatching and availability of insects, resulting in low brood survival.
- h Human encroachment of wetlands is impacting this species.
- h Population status and trends are not well-known in Wyoming, but the continental population appears to be declining.
- h Species is impacted by fish stocking in ponds and wetlands -- fish compete for invertebrate food resources.
- h Species is susceptible to impacts from energy development and other large-scale projects that destroy or impair suitable habitats.
- h There are no ongoing efforts to delineate important habitats in Wyoming.

Conservation Actions

- h Identify and delineate important habitats.
- h Integrate habitat management for this species and other wetland obligates to the extent possible.
- h Monitor population status and trends.
- h Protect important wetland areas on private lands through conservation easements.
- h Restore and create wetland habitats through available funding and mitigation programs.
- h Work cooperatively with land management agencies and others to protect and manage key habitats.
- h Delay haying in locations where this species nests until after July 15.

Monitoring/Research

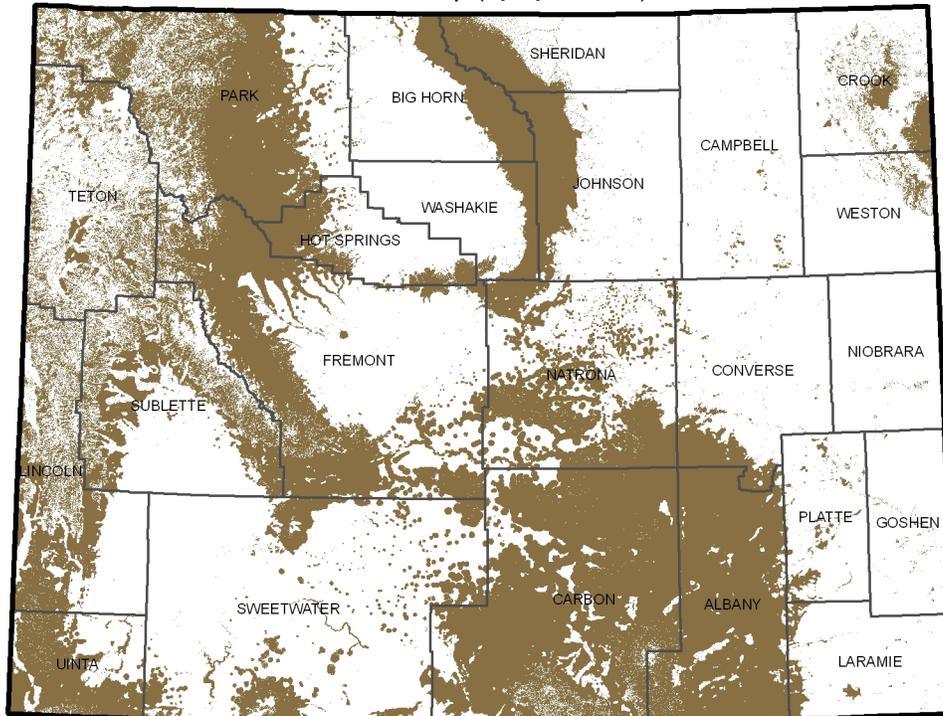
There is no ongoing monitoring or research in Wyoming.

Recent Developments

None.

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.