

## Mountain Plover - *Charadrius montanus*

Abundance: Common

Status: NSSU

NatureServe: G2 S2

Population Status: population status and trends are unknown; species-specific monitoring is needed, as current survey and monitoring activities are not adequate to determine population status and trends

Limiting Factor: Habitat (and Human Activity): limiting factors are severe and continue to increase in severity; sensitive to human disturbance during nesting

Comment: change is attributed to unknown population status and trends; moved from NSS4 to NSSU

### Introduction

The Mountain Plover nests locally in the western Great Plains from Montana south to New Mexico, in Utah, and in Mexico. It winters in a broad band from Texas west and north to the Central Valley of California. It occurs throughout much of Wyoming and breeds in at least five concentration areas (Cody, Red Desert, Shirley Basin, Laramie, and Baggs). The Mountain Plover is considered a common summer resident in Wyoming, with a statewide population of approximately 3400 individuals (range 2270 to 4430).

### Habitat

The Mountain Plover inhabits low, open habitats such as arid shortgrass and mixed-grass prairies with scattered clumps of cacti and forbs, and saltbush habitats of the shrub-steppe of central and western Wyoming. It prefers to nest in large, flat grassland expanses with less than 5% slope; sparse, short vegetation (10 cm [4 in] or less); and bare ground. It is adapted to areas that have been disturbed by prairie dogs, heavy grazing, or fire.

### Problems

- h This species is impacted by the loss of breeding and wintering habitat as a result of fire suppression.
- 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 A narrow range of habitat requirements combined with a high degree of site fidelity increases its vulnerability to impacts at traditional breeding sites.
- h Crucial breeding areas for Mountain Plovers in Wyoming are only partially identified, so management efforts and habitat maintenance may not be adequate.
- h Human activities have caused the loss of suitable nesting habitat in some areas.
- h Impacted by the elimination of burrowing mammals through control programs and habitat loss.

### Conservation Actions

- h Implement monitoring in suitable habitat where it is presently not being conducted, and continue monitoring in areas where it is currently in place.
- h Delineate crucial range and work cooperatively with land management agencies to maintain habitat within the designated area.
- h Conserve grassland habitats by minimizing the conversion of native prairie to croplands, fragmentation, roads, urban development, exotic plants, and a shift in community ecology characteristics.
- 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 Develop and maintain a positive relationship with landowners on whose property this species nests. Educate and cultivate a feeling of participation in landowners to promote beneficial land use practices and management for this species on private land.
- h Encourage landowners to avoid potentially negative impacts to nesting areas through the use of financial incentives.
- h Identify and survey additional potential breeding sites where this species has not been documented before to avoid focusing management on only a portion of the population.
- h In areas where this species nests, conduct prescribed burns in the fall to avoid loss of nesting cover. Burns should be relatively small so a portion of the area contains nesting cover at all times and adequate residual cover for nesting is retained for the following spring.
- h Increase monitoring efforts to document population trends and identify needed management.
- 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 nesting areas to minimize conflicts with natural resources extraction, wind power development, and recreational activities during the breeding season.
- h Use prescribed burning in late summer or early fall to restore the early seral stage of nesting areas and reduce shrub density and structure.
- h Work cooperatively with other agencies to conduct surveys and manage habitat for this species.
- h Work with private landowners to conserve habitat for this species by seeking financial incentives from various sources and providing assistance and expertise with management activities.
- h On a landscape scale, maintain portions of grassland habitat in low structure, an early seral stage, and with some bare ground in a mosaic that is well distributed throughout the habitat. In areas where Mountain Plovers occur, maintain blocks of habitat (at least 20 ha [50 ac] in size) consisting of bare ground and up to 70% short, sparse vegetation on nearly level terrain.

#### Monitoring/Research

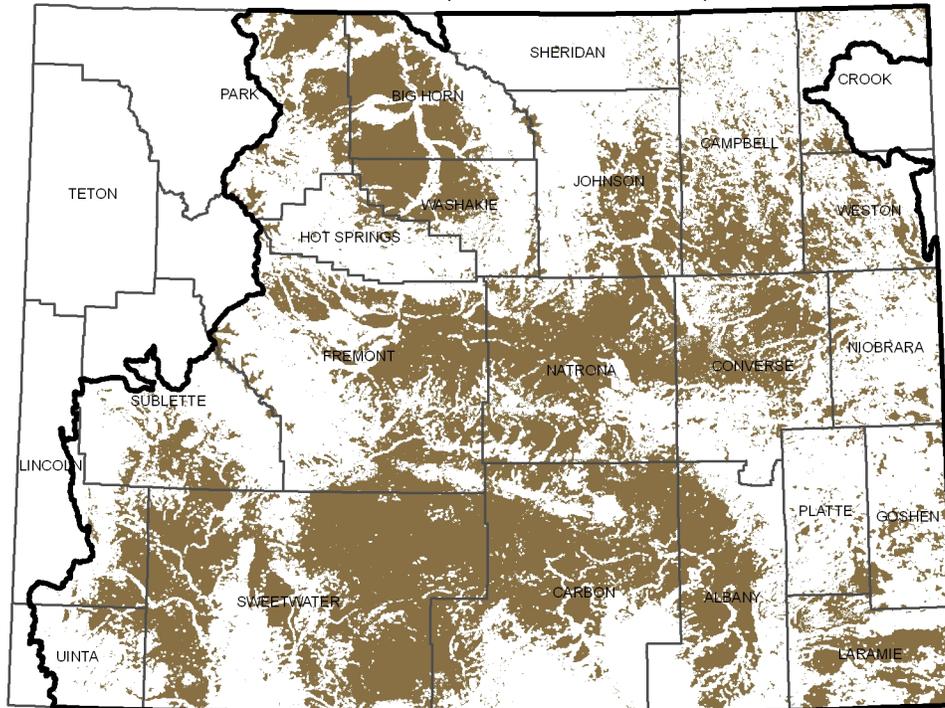
Monitoring and additional inventory work was initiated in the spring of 2010. State Wildlife Grants project to develop essential datasets and a plan for minimizing wildlife and community conflicts with wind development in southeastern Wyoming.

#### Recent Developments

In late 2009, the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced a 12-month review on the rangewide status of the Mountain Plover. A final determination on the proposal to list the Mountain Plover as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act will be submitted by May 1, 2011.

#### 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.