

Snowy Egret - *Egretta thula*

Abundance: Uncommon

Status: NSS3 (Bb)

NatureServe: G5 S3B

Population Status: population size is restricted but extirpation is not imminent; only 3 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 Snowy Egret breeds along the coastal areas of North America and in disjunct inland areas in the western United States south to South America. It winters from northern California, southwestern Arizona, the Gulf coast, and coastal South Carolina south into South America. Although it has been found in most parts of Wyoming, the Snowy Egret is considered an uncommon summer resident in Wyoming. It was documented nesting at 9 different sites between 1982 and 1994, although Bamforth Lake is the only location where it has consistently nested.

Habitat

The Snowy Egret inhabits grassy marshes, reservoirs, lakes, ponds, and wet meadows. It nests in mixed colonies in emergent vegetation or in shrubs on islands.

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.
- h Human activities have caused the loss of suitable nesting habitat in some areas.
- h Pesticide contamination is a threat to some populations, especially those that migrate to Latin America where they may accumulate DDT and DDE.

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 two Snowy Egret breeding locations and 15 breeding pairs of Snowy Egrets in Wyoming.
- h Maintain stable water levels throughout the nesting season in areas where this species breeds.
- h Minimize human disturbance at nesting sites during the breeding season.

Monitoring/Research

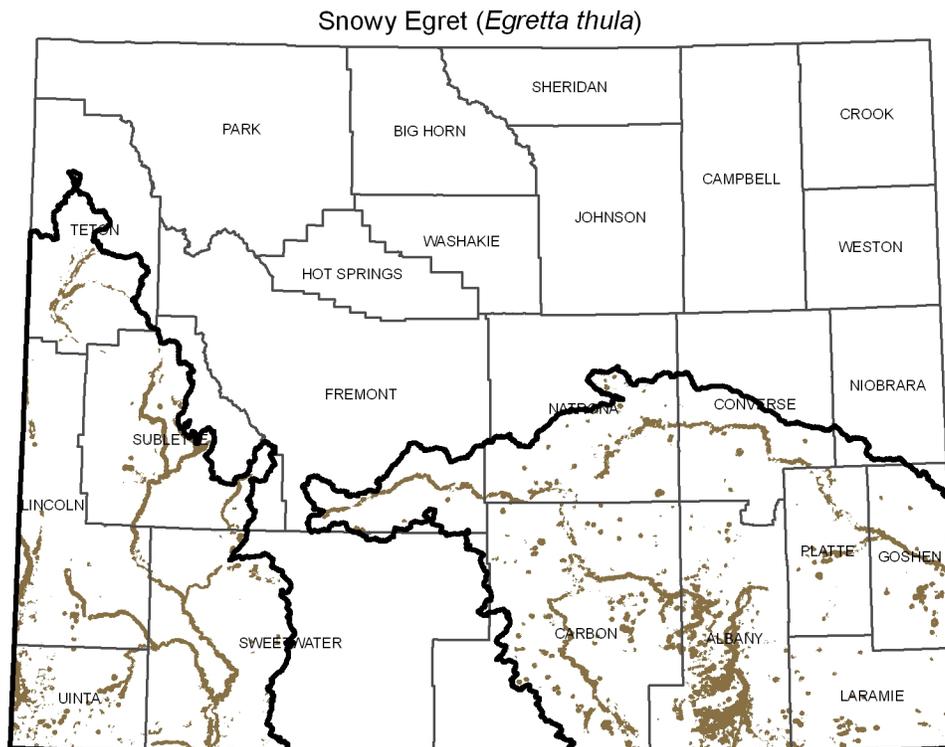
Monitor known nesting colonies a minimum of every three years to determine occupancy and estimate the number of nesting pairs.

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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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.