

Plains Hog-nosed Snake - *Heterodon nasicus*

Abundance: Unknown

Status: NSSU

NatureServe: G5 S4

Population Status: Appears widely distributed, population numbers and threats are unknown.

Limiting Factor: Habitat - threats to habitat are unknown.

Comment: Changed from NSS4 in 2005 due solely to changes in the matrix. Subspecies dropped from previous CWCS. Formerly *Heterodon nasicus nasicus*. All subspecies were elevated to species status.

Introduction

In Wyoming, Plains Hog-nosed Snakes are found in the eastern counties, mostly in the plains. They are a burrowing, diurnal species. If threatened, a Plains Hog-nosed Snake may spread its head and hiss loudly, and if harassed further, may roll on its back and play dead. They are not considered a dangerous species, but sometimes have a reputation for being harmful because of their defensive behavior (Baxter and Stone 1985). Plains Hog-nosed Snakes are active during the day, probably from April to October in Wyoming. They spend the night in temporary burrows constructed in loose soil. Hibernation occurs in burrows the snake digs itself or in abandoned mammal burrows (Ernst and Ernst 2003). Plains Hog-nosed Snakes preferentially feed on toads, but also eat lizards, small mammals, frogs, birds, salamanders, snakes, turtle eggs, and invertebrates (Baxter and Stone 1985, Ernst and Ernst 2003, Stebbins 2003). Females deposit 2 to 24 eggs in soft soil or sand from June to August (Ernst and Ernst 2003, Stebbins 2003). Hatchlings emerge after 50 or 60 days, usually in August or September (Baxter and Stone 1985, Ernst and Ernst 2003).

Habitat

Plains Hog-nosed Snakes prefer grasslands with sandy or gravelly areas where they can burrow, but can also inhabit open brushland and woodland, farmlands, canyon bottoms, scrub brush, and floodplains, (Baxter and Stone 1985, Ernst and Ernst 2003). They may show a preference for areas close to water (Baxter and Stone 1985).

Problems

- h Lack of basic information on the species presence, distribution, and ecology in Wyoming.
- h Increased oil and gas development will likely lead to habitat alteration or loss.
- h The threatening behavior of this snake and its resemblance to the rattlesnake may cause it to be killed needlessly by those thinking it to be harmful (Baxter and Stone 1985).

Conservation Actions

- h Survey and monitor population distribution, status, and habitat associations.
- h Develop management recommendations based on resulting data.

Monitoring/Research

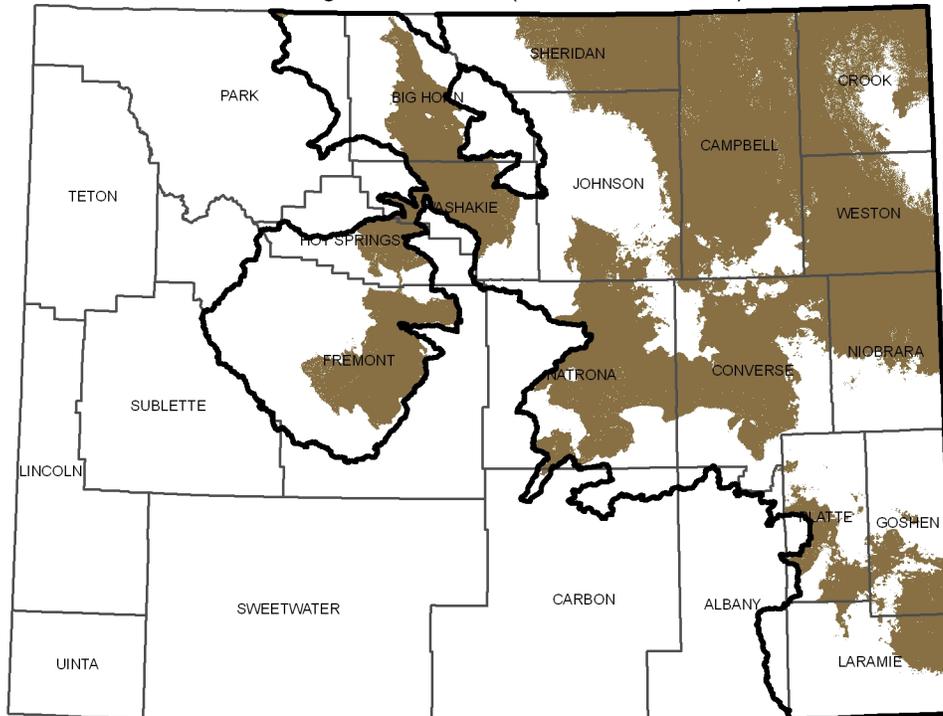
Conduct baseline surveys to gain a better understanding of Plains Hog-nosed Snake distribution in Wyoming.

Recent Developments

Reptiles have received increased attention in Wyoming. Incidental observations are encouraged to be reported to the herpetology program.

References

- Baxter, G.T. and M.D. Stone. 1985. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Wyoming*. Second Edition. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Cheyenne. 137pp.
- Ernst, C.H., and E.M. Ernst. 2003. *Snakes of the United States and Canada*. Smithsonian Books, Washington and London. 668pp.
- Stebbins, R.C. 2003. *A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians*. Third Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 336 pp.

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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.