

Valley Gartersnake - *Thamnophis sirtalis fitchi*

Abundance: Unknown

Status: NSSU

NatureServe: G5 S5

Population Status: Restricted distribution, population numbers and threats are unknown.

Limiting Factor: Habitat - limited habitat. Species found near permanent water along corridors. Degree of habitat loss is unknown.

Comment: Changed from NSS4 in 2005 due solely to changes in the matrix. Subspecies split from Common Gartersnake. Formerly considered *Thamnophis sirtalis*. The 2005 CWCS classification is for the former Common Gartersnake.

Introduction

Valley Gartersnakes are found west of the Continental Divide, in Lincoln and Teton Counties. They may also intergrade with Red-sided Gartersnakes (a related subspecies) in the Black Hills (Baxter and Stone 1985). Valley Gartersnakes overwinter in dens that may contain hundreds of individuals and may overwinter with other species of snakes. They utilize rock and earth dams, gravel banks, rock crevices, stone causeways, old wells, ant mounds, beaver lodges, and rotting logs as hibernacula. Valley Gartersnakes may travel several kilometers between hibernacula and feeding ranges. They are primarily diurnal snakes, but can be active nocturnally to feed on breeding anurans. These snakes become active in March or April in Wyoming (Ernst and Ernst 2003). Valley gartersnakes bear 3 to 85 live young between May and November. Valley Gartersnakes eat frogs, toads, fish, tadpoles, salamanders, birds, small mammals, reptiles, slugs, and earthworms (Stebbins 2003). They are good swimmers and climbers and may be found in the water (Ernst and Ernst 2003).

Habitat

Valley Gartersnakes inhabit lower elevation grasslands, woodlands, shrub brush, chaparral, forests, riparian areas, marshes, swamps, meadows, pastures, old fields, cemeteries, and vacant lots, usually near water or wet vegetation (Ernst and Ernst 2003, Baxter and Stone 1985).

Problems

- h Lack of basic information on the species presence, distribution, and ecology in Wyoming.
- h This species may have limited habitat in Wyoming and degree of this habitat loss is unknown.

Conservation Actions

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

Monitoring/Research

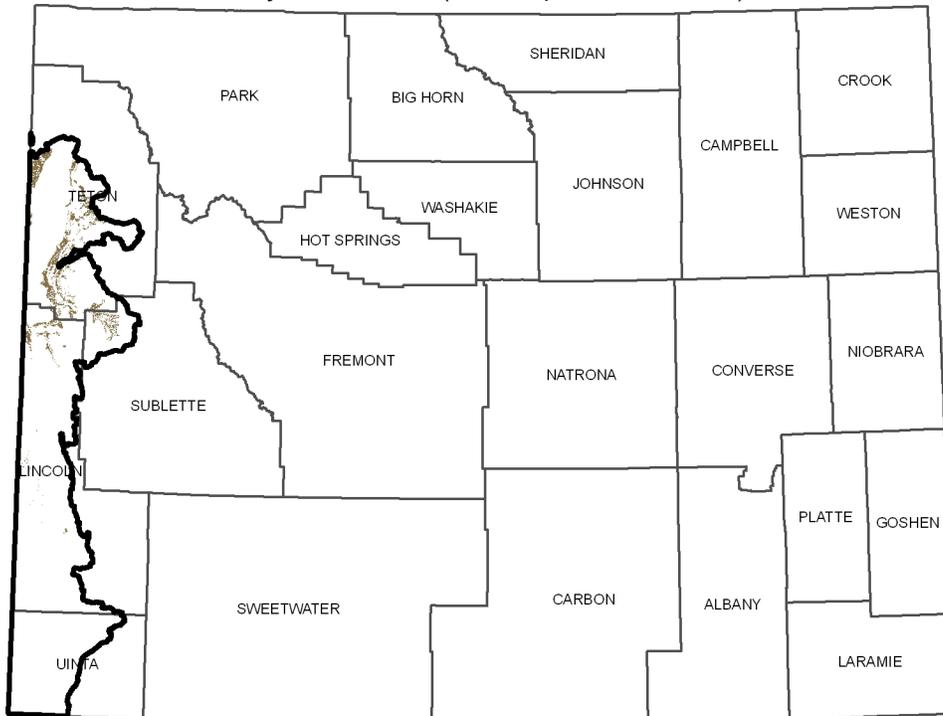
Conduct baseline surveys to gain a better understanding of Valley Gartersnake distribution in Wyoming.

Recent Developments

Reptiles have received increased attention in Wyoming. Incidental observations are encouraged to be reported to the herpetology program. A range extension for Valley Gartersnakes was documented in Lincoln County near Cokeville during the summer of 2009. Baseline surveys have been conducted in southwest Wyoming to better understand herpetofaunal assemblages and distribution. Valley Gartersnake distribution and habitat associations are being examined.

References

- Stebbins, R.C. 2003. A Field Guide to Western Reptiles and Amphibians. Third Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston. 336 pp.
- 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.

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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.