Great Basin Gophersnake - Pituophis catenifer deserticola

Abundance: Rare

Status: NSS2 (Ba) NatureServe: G5T5 S3

Population Status: Vulnerable populations are restricted in numbers and distribution, extirpation is not eminent.

Limiting Factor: Habitat: the habitat for this species is experiencing severe and ongoing loss due to energy development.

Comment: None.

Introduction

In Wyoming, Great Basin Gophersnakes can be found in the south-central counties at lower elevations and in the Wyoming Basin west of the Continental Divide (Baxter and Stone 1985). Gophersnakes are typically active from April to October. They are mostly diurnal, but may be more nocturnal during hot, dry periods. Gophersnakes burrow frequently to make retreats, nests, and to excavate rodents (Ernst and Ernst 2003). Great Basin Gophersnakes primarily feed upon mice, gophers, chipmunks, and rabbits (Baxter and Stone 1985). Breeding takes place after snakes leave their winter dens. During June and July, females deposit 2-24 eggs in animal burrows, under rocks or logs, and in excavations dug in loose soil by the female (Ernst and Ernst 2003). Eggs probably hatch in August or September (Baxter and Stone 1985). When disturbed, a gophersnake may hiss loudly, puff its body, vibrate its tail, coil, and strike repeatedly. Gophernakes hibernate in mammal burrows or rock crevices and may share dens with other species of snakes, including rattlesnakes (Ernst and Ernst 2003).

Habitat

Great Basin Gophersnakes inhabit sagebrush and desert habitats in the plains zone (Baxter and Stone 1985). Gophersnakes need deep, loose soil and animal burrows for shelter (Ernst and Ernst 2003). Little is known about this species' habits in Wyoming.

Problems

- Ongoing human activities throughout the state will likely result in habitat loss for this species.
- Lack of basic information on the species presence, distribution, and ecology in Wyoming.

Conservation Actions

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

Monitoring/Research

Conduct baseline surveys to gain a better understanding of Great Basin Gophersnake distribution in Wyoming.

Recent Developments

Baseline reptile and amphibian surveys were conducted in southwest Wyoming in 2009 and 2010 (Snoberger and Walker 2012). One Great Basin Gophersnake was documented during these surveys and detailed habitat data was collected at this locations (Snoberger and Walker 2012). In 2009, a graduate project was implemented through the University of Wyoming to look at the effects of roads on reptile species within the lower Green River valley (Hubbard 2011). In 2015, the Bureau of Land Management funded a project looking at Great Basin Gophersnake distribution and comparing that information to predictive distribution models. Results of this project are still being compiled. Reptiles have received increased attention in Wyoming. Incidental observations are encouraged to be reported to the herpetology program.

References

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Baxter, G.T. and M.D. Stone. 1985. Amphibians and Reptiles of Wyoming. Second Edition. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Cheyenne. 137pp.

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Hubbard, K.A. 2011. The relative influence of adjacent road characteristics and habitat on lizard populations in arid shrublands. Master's thesis. University of Wyoming. Laramie, Wyoming.

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SOURCE: Digital maps of ranges for Wyoming Species of Greatest Conservation Need: February 2016. Wyoming Game and Fish Department. Note that brown indicates the current known range of the species.