

Valley Gartersnake - *Thamnophis sirtalis fitchi*

Abundance: Unknown

Status: NSSU

NatureServe: G5TNR S2

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: None.

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). They utilize rock and earth dams, gravel banks, rock crevices, stone causeways, old wells, ant mounds, beaver lodges, and rotting logs as hibernacula.

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.
- h Human disturbances (deliberate killing and hibernacula destruction) may be causing declines in the population or will cause declines in the future.

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

Baseline surveys were conducted in southwest Wyoming in 2009 and 2010 to better understand herpetofaunal assemblages and distribution (Snoberger and Walker 2012). Many Valley Gartersnakes were documented during these surveys and detailed habitat data was collected at these locations (Snoberger and Walker 2012). During these surveys, a range extension for Valley Gartersnakes was documented in Lincoln County (Matthews et al. 2010). Reptiles have received increased attention in Wyoming. Incidental observations are encouraged to be reported to the herpetology program.

References

Ernst, C.H., and E.M. Ernst. 2003. Snakes of the United States and Canada. Smithsonian Books, Washington and London. 668pp.

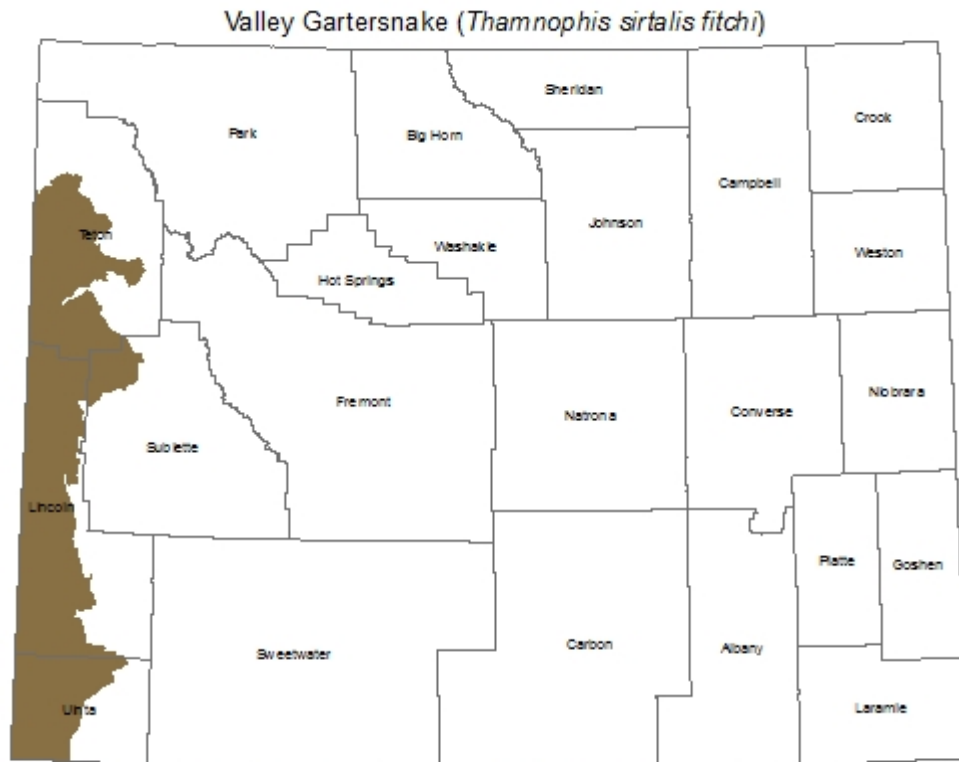
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Baxter, G.T. and M.D. Stone. 1985. Amphibians and Reptiles of Wyoming. Second Edition. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Cheyenne. 137pp.

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Matthews, C.E., H.J. Vogel, and L.A. Schreiber. 2011. Valley Gartersnake (*Thamnophis sirtalis fitchi*) geographic distribution. Herpetological Review 42:116.



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.