

Prairie Rattlesnake - *Crotalus viridis*

Abundance: Vulnerable

Status: NSS4 (Bc)

NatureServe: G5 S5

Population Status: Widely distributed, populations appear stable, but are known declines due to humans directly killing.

Limiting Factor: Human: disturbances and direct killing continue to result in additional loss.

Comment: Changed to SGCN species. Classification changed to NSS4 (Bc). Due to increasing threats. Most populations appear stable, but individuals typically killed upon sight and have led to population declines. Increasing human population will likely result in additional Prairie Rattlesnake population declines.

Introduction

In Wyoming, Prairie Rattlesnakes occur in all counties east of the Continental Divide and in Carbon County west of the Divide. The Prairie Rattlesnake's diet consists of rodents such as ground squirrels, prairie dogs, chipmunks and cottontail rabbits, as well as amphibians, lizards, other snakes, and birds. They hunt during the cooler parts of the day (Baxter and Stone 1985). Prairie Rattlesnakes bear 4 to 21 live young in August or September (Baxter and Stone 1985). Females generally reproduce biennially, but some may reproduce annually or triennially (Ernst and Ernst 2003). They overwinter in large aggregations in deep underground crevices, prairie dog burrows, or other abandoned mammal burrows and usually emerge in April or May. Not averse to water, Prairie Rattlesnakes are occasionally found swimming in large reservoirs (Baxter and Stone 1985).

Habitat

Prairie Rattlesnakes can be found in the plains, foothills, scarp woodlands, and near granite or limestone outcrops (Baxter and Stone 1985). They are often found near rocky outcrops, talus slopes, rocky stream courses, and ledges (Stebbins 2003). They were formerly abundant in shortgrass plains, where they favor black-tailed prairie dog towns, though populations in these areas have declined (Baxter and Stone 1985).

Problems

- h Lack of basic information on the species presence, distribution, and ecology in Wyoming.
- 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 Prairie Rattlesnake distribution in Wyoming.

Recent Developments

Baseline reptile and amphibian surveys were conducted in southwest Wyoming in 2009 and 2010 (Snoberger and Walker 2012), in southeast Wyoming in 2011 and 2012 (Snoberger and Walker 2013, 2014) and in northern Wyoming in 2013 and 2014. Several Prairie Rattlesnakes were documented during these surveys and detailed habitat data was collected at these locations (Snoberger and Walker 2012, 2013, 2014). 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.

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

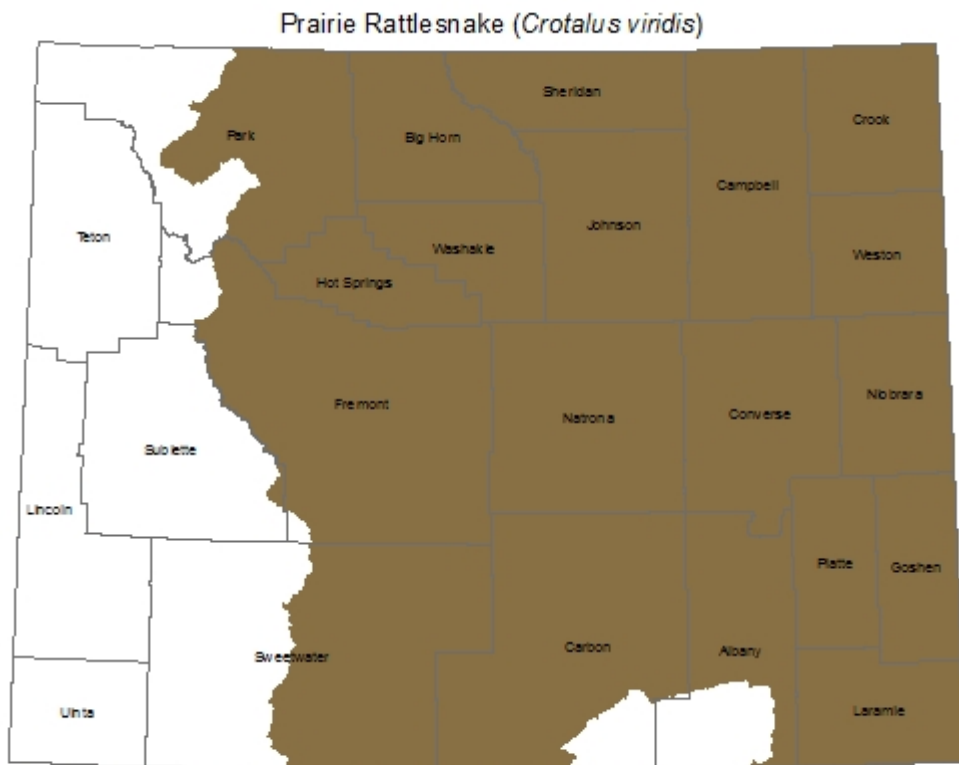
Baxter, G.T. and M.D. Stone. 1985. Amphibians and Reptiles of Wyoming. Second Edition. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Cheyenne. 137pp.

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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.