
Hooded Merganser

Lophodytes cucullatus

Aves — Anseriformes — Anatidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide:	Secure (G5)
Statewide:	Imperiled breeding/Vulnerable nonbreeding (S2B,S3N)
ESA:	No status
USFS:	Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM:	No status
IDFG:	Game bird

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Low breeding population in Idaho; regional threats.

TAXONOMY

No recognized subspecies or geographic variation; taxonomically intermediate between the goldeneyes (*Bucephala* spp.) and the mergansers in the genus *Mergus*, the hooded merganser shares many courtship behaviors and vocalizations with these species (Dugger et al. 1994). All mergansers are grouped with the goldeneyes and the less closely related scoters, eiders, long-tailed duck, and harlequin duck into the “sea duck” tribe: Mergini (Dugger et al. 1994).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The hooded merganser breeds throughout southern portions of eastern Canada, the eastern half of the U.S., the Pacific Northwest, and southern British Columbia; it is most common in forested regions of the Great Lakes (Dugger et al. 1994). The northern limit of this species' breeding range in Canada is poorly defined (Godfrey 1986). North Dakota is the only U.S. plains state with sizeable numbers; scattered breeding also occurs in south-central Montana, Oklahoma, Nebraska, South Dakota, and possibly in many mountainous regions in the western U.S. as far south as New Mexico (Dugger et al. 1994). The hooded merganser winters primarily in the southeastern U.S. for eastern birds and the northwestern Pacific, north of California, for western populations. In Idaho, this species is a year-round resident in the Panhandle and Upper Snake regions with additional birds spending the winter scattered throughout the southern part of the state, especially in the south-central region in the Twin Falls area (Stephens and Sturts 1997). The average number of mergansers (all species of merganser) in Idaho detected on mid-winter waterfowl surveys during the 20-year period 1983–2003 is approximately 4000 birds (Hemker 2004a).

POPULATION TREND

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate stable to increasing population numbers for the hooded merganser, both in Idaho and throughout its range in the West; none of the reported population trends are statistically significant, however (Sauer et al. 2005). Sample sizes are low for all BBS analyses because this species is not well-suited for

detection along roads where BBS data are collected; as a result, BBS trends for the hooded merganser should be treated with caution. Citing some historical records, Burleigh (1972) notes that this species was at one time apparently much more common in Idaho than it is today.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The hooded merganser is most closely tied to forested wetland systems throughout its range when nesting (Dugger et al. 1994). When brooding, this species also can be found on streams, lakes, swamps, beaver wetlands, marshes, and estuaries (Groves et al. 1997a). Winters primarily in freshwater, but also can be found on estuaries and sheltered bays. In Idaho, the hooded merganser prefers wooded streams and flooded bottomlands during the summer, and open bodies of water in winter (Burleigh 1972, Groves et al. 1997a). This diving duck nests in tree cavities large enough to hold the incubating bird, and preferably near water; other than a layer of down, no nesting material is used (Burleigh 1972, Dugger et al. 1994). Eggs are laid on fragments of rotted wood and other debris, such as dead leaves that may have accumulated during the winter. The hooded merganser eats primarily aquatic insects, fish, and crustaceans (Dugger et al. 1994).

ISSUES

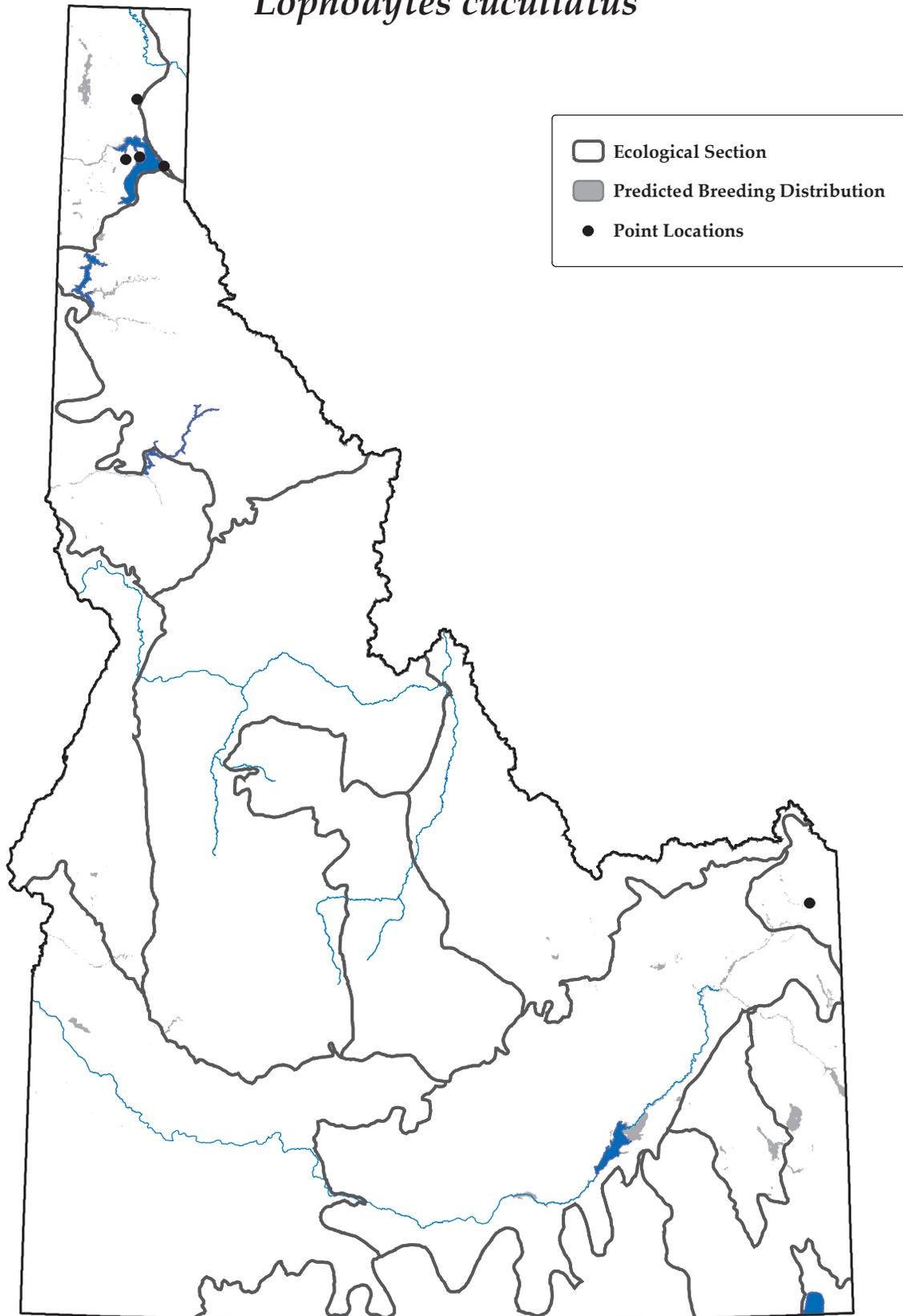
Hooded merganser populations have suffered on both breeding and wintering grounds from habitat alteration, mostly associated with changing forestry practices and especially snag removal (Dugger et al. 1994). Given the forested environments that this species inhabits in Idaho, this issue is presumably a potential concern in our state as well as throughout the species' range. Other issues affecting breeding birds include effects of acid rain, which changes the pH of water, although this is of greater significance in the eastern U.S. Finally, 1 issue for wintering birds that might be applicable in Idaho relates to river channelization, deforestation, and agricultural practices that reduce the size of forested floodplains and increase sediment loading in streams. These effects could reduce available winter habitat and possibly lower foraging efficiency by increasing water turbidity (Dugger et al. 1994).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

With activities coordinated through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP [Anonymous 1986]), primary actions should focus on setting forest management goals that include the establishment and conservation of cavity-producing trees (>100 years old, >30 cm [12 in] diameter at breast height) as well as the maintenance of riparian forested corridors and forests located within 1.6 km (1 mi) of suitable brood habitat (Dugger et al. 1994). Monitoring of hooded merganser populations as part of Idaho's coordinated, statewide all-bird monitoring program (Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey [IBIS]) is recommended. Aquatic management goals could include the restoration and/or preservation of water quality and natural hydrology (Dugger et al. 1994).

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Map created on September 20, 2005
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.
Sources: Point data are from Idaho Conservation Data Center,
Idaho Department of Fish and Game (2005). Predicted distribution
is from the Wildlife Habitat Relationships Models (WHR),
A Gap Analysis of Idaho: Final Report. Idaho Cooperative Fish
and Wildlife Research Unit, Moscow, ID (Scott et al. 2002).
Predicted distribution is approximate (for more information, go to
http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap_report.asp).

