
Lesser Scaup

Aythya affinis

Aves — Anseriformes — Anatidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide:	Secure (G5)
Statewide:	Vulnerable (S3)
ESA:	No status
USFS:	Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM:	No status
IDFG:	Game bird

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Rangewide declining population trend.

TAXONOMY

The lesser scaup is monotypic with no geographic variation and no recognized subspecies (Austin et al. 1998). Most closely related to the greater scaup, a species that is primarily a transient in Idaho although there are some birds that winter in the Panhandle and south–central part of the state (Stephens and Sturts 1997).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The lesser scaup breeds throughout much of interior Alaska and Canada and locally in the western U.S. south to California, Nevada, Colorado, South Dakota, and Minnesota (Austin et al. 1998). In the western U.S. specifically, this species breeds in northeastern Washington, and possibly along Puget Sound, WA, and commonly in the Klamath marshes of southern Oregon and northern California. The breeding range also extends from extreme northern Idaho east across northern portions of Montana and North Dakota to extreme northeastern Minnesota, south through the eastern Dakotas to northeastern South Dakota, and south through central Montana to southeastern Idaho, and western and southern Wyoming (Austin et al. 1998). The lesser scaup winters throughout the southern U.S. and along both Pacific and Atlantic coasts, south through Mexico and Central America to northern South America. In Idaho, this species is a year–round resident in the Panhandle and south–central regions with additional birds spending the winter scattered along the Snake River Plain (Stephens and Sturts 1997, Austin et al. 1998). The average number of scaup (both species combined) in Idaho detected on mid–winter waterfowl surveys during the 20–year period 1983–2003 is approximately 6000 birds (Hemker 2004a). In general, knowledge of population size, trends, and to some extent geographic distribution, is confounded by the inability to distinguish between lesser and greater scaup on surveys.

POPULATION TREND

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate population declines for the lesser scaup in Idaho for the long–term period 1966–2004 (–4.0% per year), and statistically significant declines for the more recent short–term period 1980–2004 (–4.0% per year) (Sauer et

al. 2005). Throughout the western BBS region population trends also appear to be declining (but not significantly so for any analysis period), whereas in the U.S. as a whole, numbers of lesser scaup are apparently stable. Sample sizes are low for most 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 lesser scaup should be treated with caution. Breeding population survey data confirm declining population trends suggested by the BBS with current population numbers continent-wide approximately 35% below the 1955–2004 average (Wilkins and Otto 2005).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Pairs and broods of this species are typically associated with fresh to moderately brackish, seasonal and semipermanent wetlands and lakes with emergent vegetation, such as bulrush and cattail (Austin et al. 1998). In contrast to the greater scaup, the lesser scaup prefers smaller bodies of water (Burleigh 1972). Nests on dry ground, usually close to water, such as in the wet-meadow zone of wetlands, but also in tracts of native prairie, hayfields, or even sparse shrub patches (Burleigh 1972, Austin et al. 1998). During migration and when not breeding, the lesser scaup is found along coasts and sheltered bays, estuaries, marshes, or on inland lakes, ponds, and rivers (Groves et al. 1997a).

ISSUES

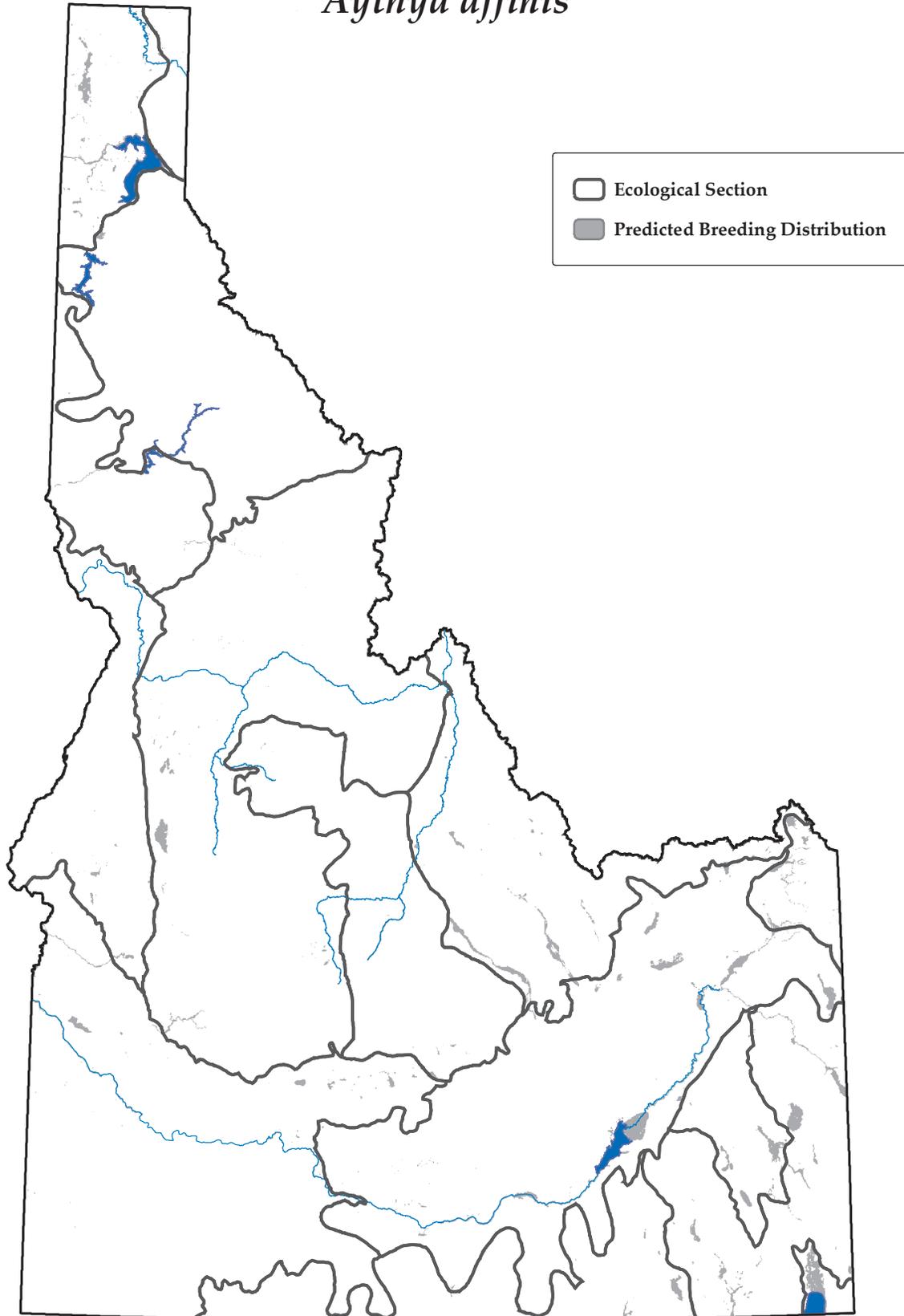
Many threats faced by the lesser scaup elsewhere throughout its range do not apply in Idaho (e.g., over-harvest by hunters, oil spills, organochlorine contamination, mercury and lead poisoning, getting caught in fishing nets). Degradation of habitat is a potential issue, however, and has been shown to alter migration routes and use of breeding and wintering areas in other part of this species' range (Austin et al. 1998). Loss or degradation of wetlands due to drainage and conversion to agriculture, dredging and filling, modification of water levels, levee construction, changes in salinity, siltation, and introduction of exotic plants are all potential issues of concern that may impact both breeding and wintering habitats for this species.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

With activities coordinated through the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP [Anonymous 1986]), primary actions should continue to focus on restoring wetlands through cooperative joint ventures of federal, state, and provincial resource agencies, private organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and state waterfowl associations, and private landowners (Austin et al. 1998). Management activities could follow recommendations made by Idaho Partners in Flight (IDPIF 2000) or the Idaho Steering Committee of the Intermountain West Joint Venture (IWJV 2005) for wetland restoration. Better information on causes for population declines in the state, and the West in general, also is needed. Monitoring scaup population numbers as part of Idaho's coordinated, statewide all-bird monitoring program (Idaho Bird Inventory and Survey [IBIS]) is recommended.

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Map created on September 19, 2005
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.
Sources: 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).

