Lewis's Woodpecker

Melanerpes lewis

Aves — Piciformes — Picidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide:	Apparently secure (G4)
Statewide:	Vulnerable breeding (S3B)
ESA:	No status
USFS:	Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM:	Regional/State imperiled (Type 3)
IDFG:	Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Declining populations trends.

TAXONOMY

No recognized subspecies (Tobalske 1997).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Lewis's woodpeckers primarily occur in western states and closely follow the distribution of ponderosa pine (Tobalske 1997). Lewis's woodpecker breeding ranges occur as far north as southern British Columbia and extend south through Washington state into California. From the west coast, the breeding range extends as far east as Colorado and the Black Hills, South Dakota (Tobalske 1997). Lewis's woodpeckers breed throughout Idaho except in the southeastern portion of the state (Tobalske 1997). This species exploits superabundant food sources and is generally considered to be nomadic (Bock 1970). Partly due to this nomadic nature, population sizes for this species are difficult to determine (Bock 1970, Tobalske 1997).

POPULATION TREND

Lewis's woodpeckers are undergoing population declines, but caution should be used when examining localized data since birds occur sporadically within their range (Bock 1970, Tobalske 1997). Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data between 1966–2004 indicate statistically significant declines at the level of the U.S. (-3.1% per year; Sauer et al. 2005). Declines in the western U.S. (-1.5 % per year), as well as in Idaho (-1.5% per year) are not statistically significant, but nevertheless follow the general trend noted at larger spatial scales (Sauer et al. 2005). Trend analyses indicate a decrease during the more recent period of 1980–2004 as compared with the period between 1966–1979 (Sauer et al. 2005).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Lewis's woodpeckers are a somewhat atypical picid (woodpecker) in that they flycatch during the breeding season and store mast (e.g., acorns and corn) during the winter (Bock 1970). Breeding sites generally occur in burned ponderosa pine forests, riparian forests, aspen groves, and oak woodlands (Tobalske 1997). This species appears to

prefer nesting in large diameter snags in relatively open forests with a well-developed understory (Vierling 1997, Saab and Vierling 2001). Large snags also are important for storage of mast during the winter months (Vierling 1997).

ISSUES

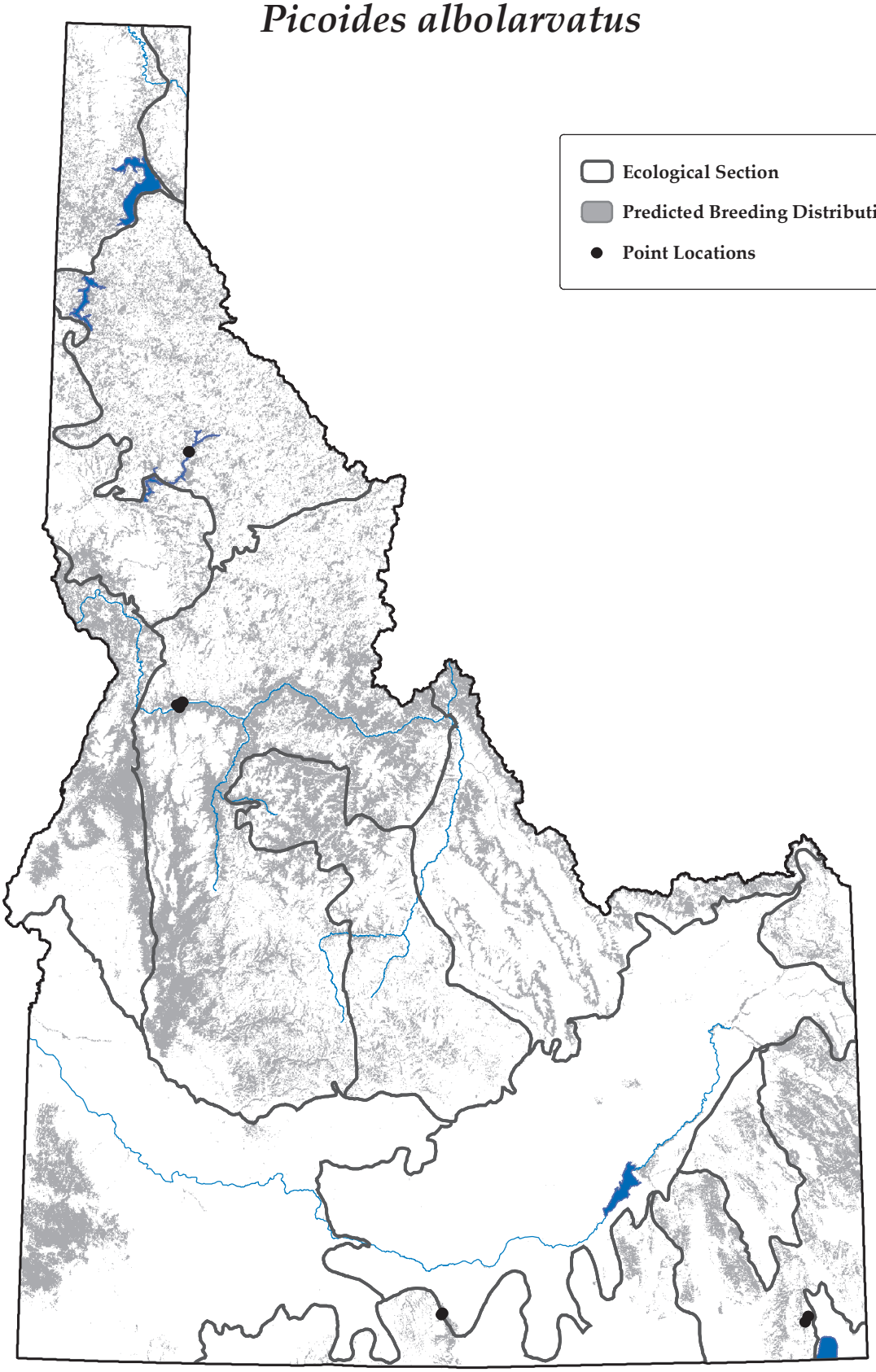
Habitat loss and degradation are the 2 major issues of concern for this species. Declines of up to 90% of the historic pine forests and deciduous riparian habitats in western states have been estimated (Noss et al. 1995), and these are 2 of the major breeding habitats for Lewis's woodpeckers. Fire suppression in pine forests has promoted forests that support high densities of small diameter trees, which are unsuitable for this species since the birds rely on large snags (average = 46.7 cm [18.4 in] in ponderosa pine sites in Idaho) in relatively open habitats (Saab and Vierling 2001). In general, a reduction of large snags in breeding habitats may limit reproduction (Tobalske 1997). A reduction of large snags also may affect winter storage of mast since birds rely on large snags for cache trees (Vierling 1997). Very little is known about the winter ecology of these birds, but any reduction or degradation of oak woodland and/or sources of mast will likely negatively affect this species. Lewis's woodpeckers' sensitivity to human disturbance is not well understood; some individuals nest in heavily urbanized settings while others abandon nests when disturbed in the immediate vicinity of the nest (Tobalske 1997).

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Actions which result in open forests with large snags and a well-developed understory will likely benefit this species. In ponderosa pine forests, fire suppression has likely decreased suitable habitat for this species (Saab and Vierling 2001). While a combination of stand-replacing fires and low-intensity fires will likely create forest mosaics that will benefit Lewis's woodpecker, the use of mechanical thinning also might be used to promote open forests in conjunction with fires. Postfire habitats typically have high arthropod populations that attract aerial and ground insectivores (Apfelbaum and Haney 1981), and mechanical thinning combined with fire might create the openings necessary for flycatching as well as providing for the productive understory necessary for the support of high arthropod numbers. Similar management actions in other forest types may benefit Lewis's woodpeckers as long as the actions emphasize the retention of large snags and relatively open forest structures (Tobalske 1997).

Lewis's Woodpecker

Picoides albolarvatus



Map created on September 22, 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).

0 20 40 80 Kilometers

0 20 40 80 Miles