
Mountain Goat

Oreamnos americanus

Mammalia — Artiodactyla — Bovidae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Imperiled (S2)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: No status
IDFG: Big game animal

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Low, isolated populations; habitat threats.

TAXONOMY

The mountain goat is within the monotypic genus *Oreamnos*. The subspecies *O. americanus missoulae* occurs in Idaho.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The mountain goat occurs in the rugged mountain ranges of northwestern North America from southeastern Alaska south to Washington and Idaho. Populations have been widely introduced outside the historical range into Utah, Colorado, Oregon, South Dakota, and the Olympic Peninsula of Washington. In Idaho, populations are widely scattered from the panhandle south through central Idaho. A small population of goats has been introduced north of Palisades Reservoir near the Idaho-Wyoming divide. Idaho's mountain goat population was estimated to comprise 2590 individuals during 2004.

POPULATION TREND

The long-term trend is believed to be stable, although short-term population fluctuations occur regularly. The first statewide population estimate of mountain goats was 2785 individuals in 1955. Populations are believed to have peaked at 3090 individuals in 1990. Population estimates were relatively consistent through 2000, but declines were detected between 2000 and 2004. In spring of 2004 the mountain goat population was estimated to comprise 2590 individuals.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Mountain goats inhabit rugged landscapes characterized by steep, rocky cliffs, talus slopes, grassy ledges, and alpine meadows. Such inaccessible terrain offers unexploited food resources and protection from predators. Mountain goats are generalists with a diet that includes grasses, sedges, rushes, forbs, low growing shrubs, woody shrubs, conifers, mosses, and lichens depending on the season. Migration to wintering areas occurs along well-traveled corridors with the first heavy snowfall. Winter ranges are typically at lower-elevation cliff complexes with south and west aspects

where snow is less abundant and persistent (Rideout and Hoffmann 1975). During the winter, mountain goats depend on low energy expenditures for survival; therefore, winter ranges tend to be small and are used with high annual fidelity (Hayden et al. 1990).

Several aspects of mountain goat breeding ecology contribute to this species' relatively low reproductive potential. Nannies generally reach sexual maturity at age 2 and produce their first kid at age 3. Single births are most typical in Idaho. Males seek out isolated groups of females. This strategy generally requires more males to adequately breed receptive females. The percent of adult females producing young in a given year varies from 50% (Chadwick 1983) to 70-80% (Festa-Bianchet et al. 1994).

ISSUES

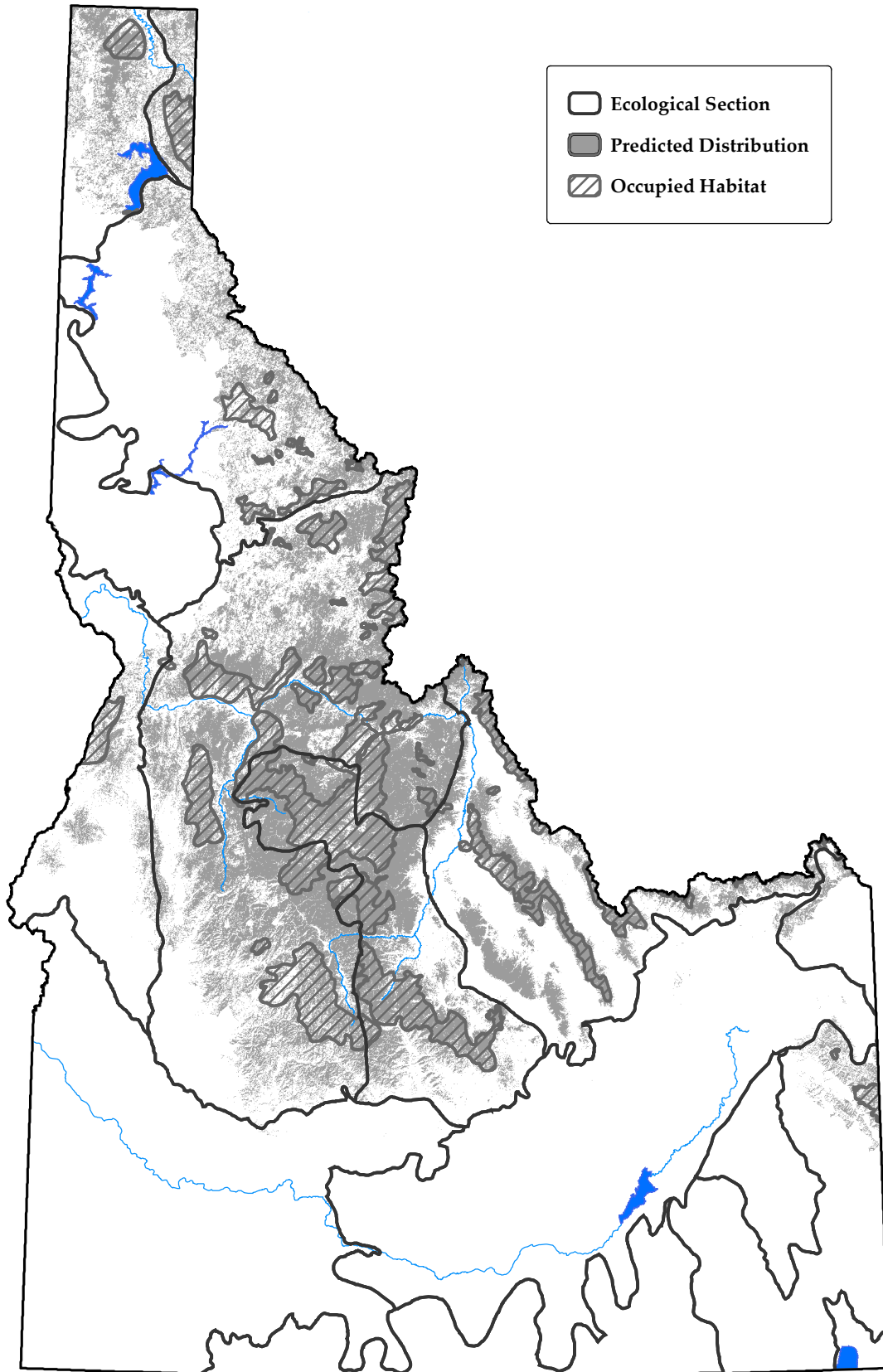
Human encroachment into mountain goat habitat is a threat. The proliferation of roads allowing easier human access into mountain goat habitat has been implicated in the overharvest of some goat subpopulations (Hayden et al. 1990). Several modes of backcountry recreation, including snowmobiling and heli-skiing, have the potential to disturb goats. Helicopters generate the disturbance of greatest concern, while fixed-wing aircraft generate less intense responses in goats (Wilson and Shackleton 2001). Repeated disturbance by helicopters, snowmobiles, logging, or road building can cause displacement from habitat, group dissolution, nanny-kid separations, and injury (Chadwick 1983). The effects of climate change on subalpine and alpine habitat is also of importance to the conservation of this species.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game's (IDFG) Mountain Goat Management Plan, 1991-1995 provides direction for managing the state's mountain goat populations. Management strategies emphasize conservative harvest, allowing hunting in areas having a minimum of 50 adult mountain goats, requiring that hunted units be inventoried at least once every 5 years, setting permit levels to not exceed 5% of the adults in any population, and directing hunters to select male goats. The plan also authorizes translocating mountain goats. Further information is needed to address potential disturbance conflicts caused by motorized recreation in mountain goat habitat, particularly during the winter. Efforts are also needed to inventory, characterize, and monitor alpine habitat and associated biota so that management activities for mountain goats can be conducted with consideration of landscape- and ecosystem-scale conditions.

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Map created on September 27, 2005
and prepared by Idaho Conservation Data Center.
Sources: Known distribution is from 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).

