
Rock Squirrel

Spermophilus variegatus

Mammalia — Rodentia — Sciuridae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Critically imperiled (S1)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: Watch list (Type 5)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Habitat threats and lack of trend data in Idaho.

TAXONOMY

Eight subspecies are recognized. The northern-most subspecies, *utah*, occurs in Idaho (Groves et al. 1988).

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The rock squirrel occurs from eastern Nevada and extreme southeastern California eastward through Utah and Colorado, and from Idaho south to central Mexico. Populations in Idaho represent the northern periphery of the range. In Idaho, the species occurs in several canyons in Oneida, Franklin, and Bear Lake counties (Groves et al. 1988).

POPULATION TREND

There are no trend data for Idaho.

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

This species occupies rocky areas, such as talus slopes, canyons, and rocky hillsides in xeric shrub and woodland habitats. In Idaho populations occur in sagebrush-dominated habitat and in association with limestone outcrops adjacent to creeks with bigtooth maple, box elder or cottonwood overstory. Females produce 1 litter per year. The species hibernates underground in individual burrows for up to 6 months. The rock squirrel is an opportunistic forager, changing diet throughout the season as foods become available; this species has the propensity to consume reproductive parts of plants, such as seeds and fruits, as opposed to vegetative parts.

ISSUES

Habitat loss is the primary threat to this species. Some areas of habitat are vulnerable to inundation from reservoir development.

Human persecution is also a threat to this species. This species is vulnerable to rodent poisoning where this species occurs near crops. Recreational shooting of ground

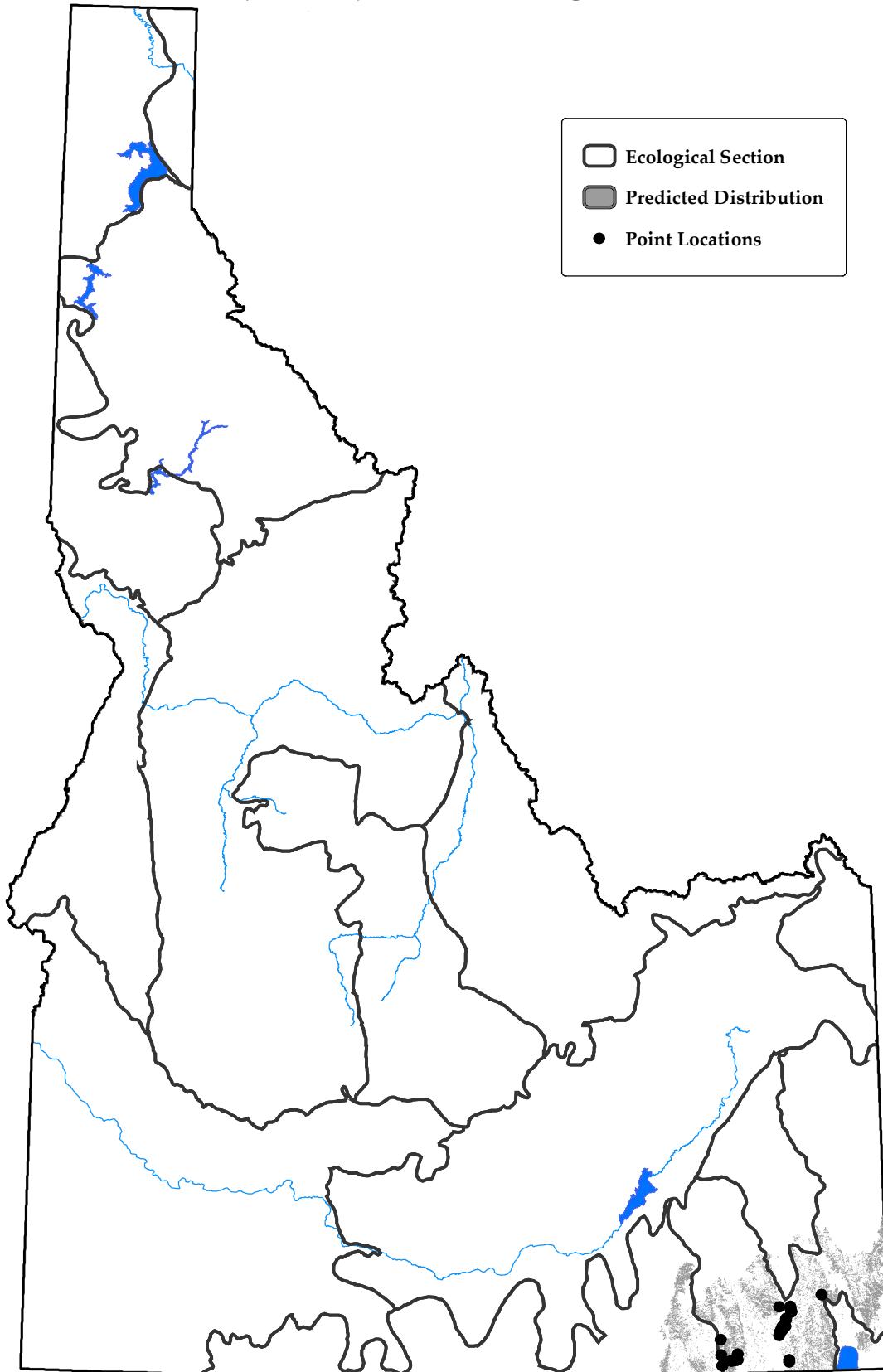
squirrels may be an important source of mortality, particularly in areas where populations are small.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Surveys are needed to determine the current distribution and status of this species. A statewide effort is particularly needed to monitor population trends for native ground squirrels. Habitat protection and restoration efforts may be needed where populations are small or declining. Monitor recreational shooting of ground squirrels within the range of this species. Public education and enforcement of these regulations is needed.

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Map created on September 23, 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).

