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# Wilson's Phalarope

## *Phalaropus tricolor*

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Aves — Charadriiformes — Scolopacidae

### CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)  
Statewide: Vulnerable breeding (S3B)  
ESA: No status  
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status  
BLM: Watch list (Type 5)  
IDFG: Protected nongame

### BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Regional threats.

### TAXONOMY

There is no known subspecies. Wilson's phalaropes are considered the most primitive of the 3 phalarope species (red phalarope, *P. fulicaria*; red-necked phalarope, *P. lobatus*) (Colwell and Jehl 1994).

### DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Wilson's phalaropes breed in wetland habitats from the southern Yukon Territories through British Columbia, south-central Alberta and southern Manitoba, south to central California, southern Nevada and Colorado, northern New Mexico and Texas, and east to central Kansas, and northwestern Iowa and Minnesota (Dechant et al. 2003a). The majority of the population stages at saline lakes in the Intermountain West region (e.g., Great Salt Lake; Colwell and Jehl 1994). Based on fall migration counts, Jehl (1988) estimated the North American population to be 1.5 million birds. The Idaho breeding population size is unknown, although this species nests in isolated wetlands throughout the state.

### POPULATION TREND

This species appears to be relatively stable rangewide. Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) data indicate no population change in the U.S. during the period 1966–2004, but increases in the western BBS region (+1.7% per year) and in Idaho (+8.0% per year; not statistically significant; Sauer et al. 2005). BBS data also indicate sharp declines in the U.S. (-7.1% per year) during the period 1966–1979, and increases in the western BBS region (+2.4% per year;  $P = 0.07$ ), no change in the U.S. and Idaho, during the period 1980–2004 (Sauer et al. 2005).

### HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

Like the other 2 phalarope species, Wilson's phalaropes exhibit a reversed sex-role mating system, where the male incubates the eggs and raises the young. As the most terrestrial of the 3 phalaropes, Wilson's phalaropes nest in marshes and idle, hayed, and grazed grasslands/wet meadows <100 m (309 ft) of a wetland (Hohn 1967, Howe

1975, Murray 1983, Colwell and Jehl 1994). This species also will move to deeper, more permanent wetlands during dry years (Colwell 1991). Although habitat selection by Wilson's phalaropes has been studied in many parts of its range, and has been found to vary by region, this aspect of their ecology has not been studied in Idaho.

## **ISSUES**

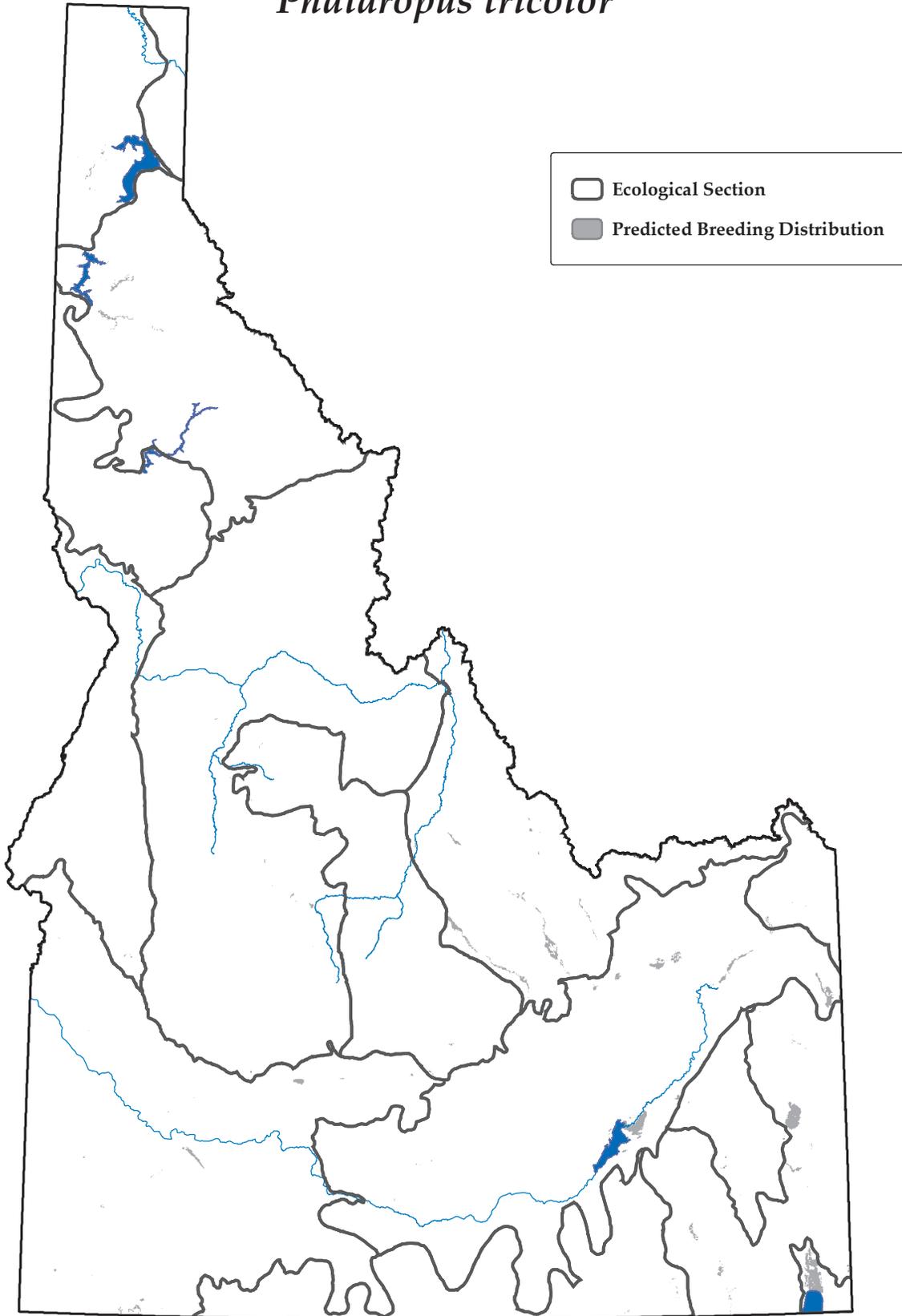
The greatest threat to Wilson's phalaropes, and shorebirds in general, in the Intermountain West is loss of high-quality fresh water habitat (Oring et al. 2000). In addition, collisions with power transmission lines over wetlands, particularly during migration, have been documented as a threat in neighboring Montana (Malcom 1982). Selenium leaching from agricultural fields and pesticides also may pose a threat to this species during the breeding season (Dechant et al. 2003a).

## **RECOMMENDED ACTIONS**

Burning (Eldridge 1992) and mowing (Kantrud 1981) may improve upland nesting habitat for this species. Grazing may potentially improve nesting habitat, however cattle should not be present in the area during the breeding season (Dechant et al. 2003a). Because Wilson's phalaropes move to deeper, more permanent wetlands in dry years, and likely discover new habitats quickly (Colwell and Jehl 1994), wetland complexes that include both seasonal and semi-permanent wetlands should be protected and/or restored (Dechant et al. 2003a). Breeding areas should not be disturbed (i.e., mowed, burned, grazed) during the breeding season (late April through late July; Dechant et al. 2003a).

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Map created on September 21, 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](http://www.wildlife.uidaho.edu/idgap/idgap_report.asp)).

