
Wyoming Ground Squirrel

Spermophilus elegans

Mammalia — Rodentia — Sciuridae

CONSERVATION STATUS / CLASSIFICATION

Rangewide: Secure (G5)
Statewide: Vulnerable (S3)
ESA: No status
USFS: Region 1: No status; Region 4: No status
BLM: Peripheral (Type 4)
IDFG: Protected nongame

BASIS FOR INCLUSION

Lack of essential information pertaining to Idaho; extirpation from portions of its range.

TAXONOMY

This species was formerly considered to be a subspecies of Richardson's ground squirrel. Three subspecies are recognized, 2 of which occur in Idaho. The subspecies *nevadensis* occurs in Nevada, Oregon, and Idaho. The subspecies *aureus* occurs in Idaho and Montana.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The Wyoming ground squirrel currently occurs in 3 geographically disjunct areas of the western U. S., including (1) north-central Nevada, southeastern Oregon, and southwestern Idaho, (2) east-central Idaho through southwestern Montana, and (3) southern Wyoming and extreme northeastern Utah through north-central and northwestern Colorado to extreme southwestern Nebraska (Zegers 1984). The species has apparently disappeared from the 2 previously documented locations in southeastern Oregon, and from locations in Owyhee Co., Idaho. A population in Twin Falls Co. (Yensen 1998) is the only extant population known in Idaho south of the Snake River. The status of populations in Lemhi, Custer, and surrounding counties is unknown.

POPULATION TREND

Populations have been extirpated from portions of the range in southwestern Idaho (i.e., populations of the subspecies *S. elegans nevadensis*). No records from adjacent areas in southeastern Oregon have been documented since 1927. Similarly, *nevadensis* no longer occurs at the 1 known locality in Owyhee Co., Idaho, or at 1 site in Nevada where they were once abundant (Yensen 1998).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY

The Wyoming ground squirrel occupies shrubland and grassland habitats across its range, often in relatively mesic or productive sites, including mid- to high-elevation montane meadows and valley bottoms. In some areas, local distribution may be limited

by interspecific competition with other ground squirrel species, such as Belding's ground squirrel or the Uinta ground squirrel. Hibernation and estivation can last up to 8 months.

ISSUES

Information regarding the distribution and status of this species is lacking throughout the Idaho range. Comprehensive surveys have not been conducted.

Habitat loss and degradation is of concern. Agricultural and residential development is prevalent throughout the range of this species. The structure and composition of shrub-dominated habitat has been widely affected by livestock grazing, invasive plants, and alteration of fire regimes. In some areas, changes in habitat have created conditions favorable to other ground squirrels, and the Wyoming ground squirrel has been replaced by Belding's ground squirrel in some areas.

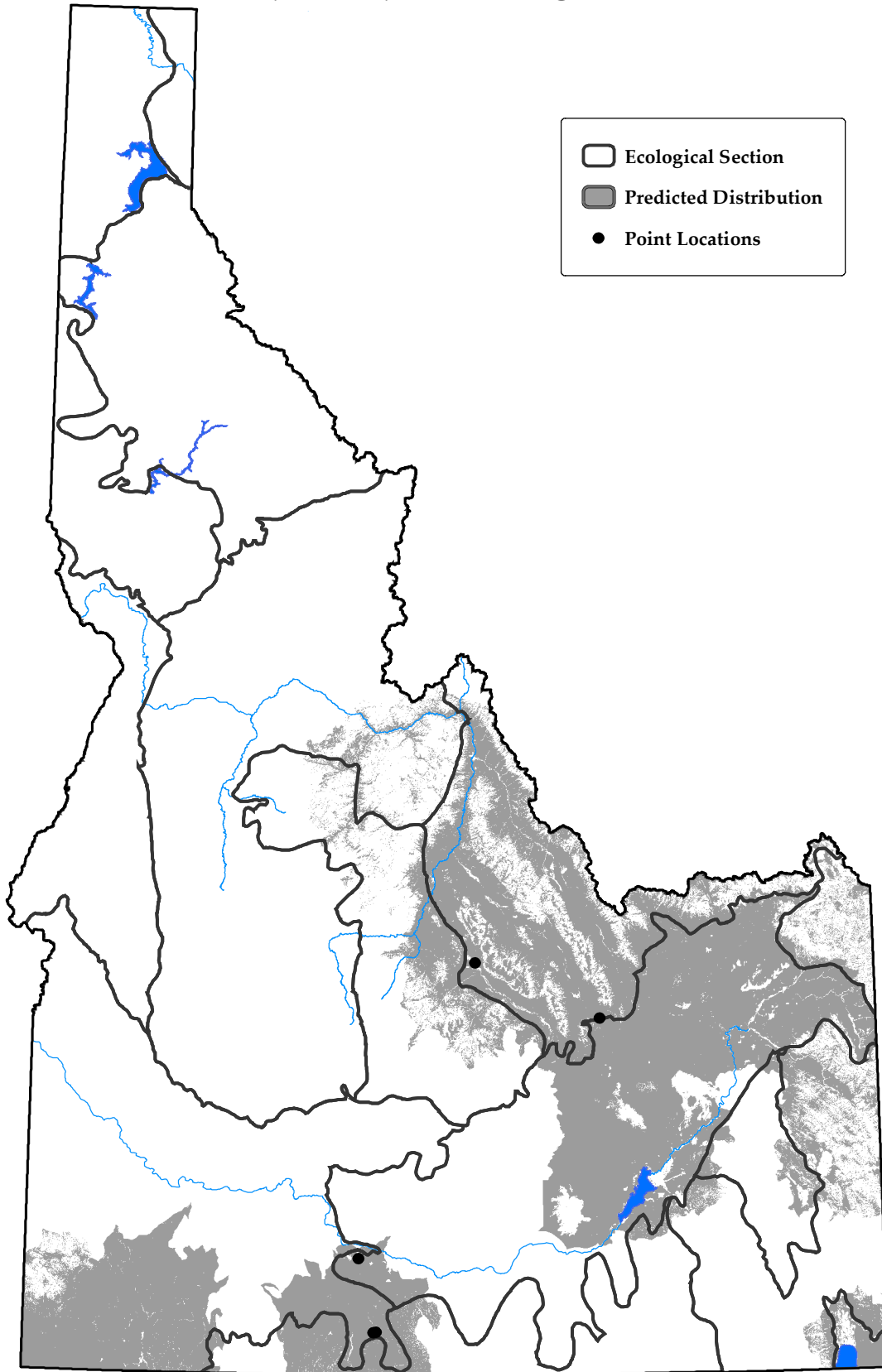
Human persecution is also a threat to this species. This species is vulnerable to rodent poisoning in response to crop depredation. Recreational shooting of ground squirrels may be an important source of mortality, particularly in areas where populations are small.

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, particularly in the range of the subspecies *S. elegans nevadensis* in the south-central and southwestern parts of the state. Monitor recreational shooting of ground squirrels within the range of the subspecies *S. elegans nevadensis*. 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).

