

51-34. SNAKE RIVER AREA OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (IBA)

Boundaries and ownership:

Boundaries: South Fork from Palisades Dam to the confluence with the Henry's Fork, the Henry's Fork from the confluence to St. Anthony, and the main stem (Snake River) from the confluence south to Lewisville Knolls

Ownership: Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service, Private (many in conservation easements)

Focal species using the site and timing of use:

The Snake River ACEC produces over half of Idaho's Bald Eagles, one third of the Bald Eagles in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, supporting 23 nesting territories. It also supports the largest Bald Eagle winter roost in the GYE. Three Peregrine Falcon eyries have established along the South Fork since 1991. The main Snake River and the Henry's Fork are significant migration and wintering areas for thousands of swans, geese, and ducks (Mallard, Common Merganser, Northern Pintail, Wood Duck, American Goldeneye). Shorebirds (Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Wilson's Snipe), waterbirds (Double-crested Cormorant, Sandhill Crane, Sora, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron), and waterfowl are present during the summer and migration.

Colonies: Great Blue Heron (13 rookeries)

Location of type 1 and 2 habitat within the site:

Functional Group	Type 1 Habitat	Type 2 Habitat
waterbirds	open water & emergent vegetation	none
large waders	breeding colonies, emergent vegetation	rest of shoreline
waterfowl	open water, edges during breeding season	none
shorebirds	exposed mudflats and gravel bars	rest of shoreline
gulls and terns	all areas	none

Access to the type 1 and 2 habitat and visibility of the birds:

Difficult to access some areas because of private ownership and areas that are roadless. There are some access points (contact Karen Rice for details), and many parts of the site can be surveyed by boat. However, navigation problems likely exist (log jams, etc.). Visibility of waterbirds is quite good.

Conservation issues:

- Dams
- Irrigation diversions
- Levees
- Private resort, subdivision, and agricultural development
- Noxious weed invasion
- Excessive livestock grazing
- Increasing recreational use

All of which have fragmented and degraded this ecosystem

Conservation measures taken, in progress, or proposed:

- The use of federal land within the Snake River ACEC is managed under the Snake River Activity/Operations Plan which keys in on acceptable limits of recreation and livestock grazing; limits

riparian vegetation degradation, and protects wildlife habitat with emphasis on threatened and endangered species.

- Congress designated this area as a Land and Water Conservation Fund Project in 1992.
- To date 17 fee title acquisitions and 12 conservation easement acquisitions have been purchased by the BLM.
- In addition, BLM has worked with the IDFG and the BPA to acquire five river parcels in fee title. The acquisition of key parcels in the ecosystem from willing sellers preserves the integrity and ecological values of the rivers.
- The BLM participates with an interagency noxious weed control team, which has implemented an aggressive biological control program to abate noxious weed invasion.
- As a result of new cottonwood ecology research and the record flood of 1997, the Bureau of Reclamation has made an effort to release water to mimic pre-dam floods to facilitate cottonwood seedling establishment along the rivers to perpetuate valuable wildlife habitat.

Past and current surveys:

- Bald Eagle monitoring by BLM (breeding season) and IDFG (mid-winter aerial survey)
- Peregrine Falcon nest monitoring
- Aerial mid-winter survey for waterfowl by IDFG
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo monitoring is in planning

Potential survey methods

Description:

- a. Colony counts for nesting Great Blue Herons.
- b. Census for waterfowl on the open water using a boat and/or from access points along shoreline. Late summer or winter counts may be better than breeding season counts, as waterfowl are more easily detected during this period.
- c. Area searches for migrating shorebirds from observation points, or from a boat, near Type 1 habitat.

Selection bias: Access issues because of ownership may be a problem.

Measurement error and bias: N/A – very little, if any, emergent vegetation to hinder visibility.

Needed pilot studies: Determine how and where to survey as this is a very extensive area and access issues exist.

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