

Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*)

Status: NSS3; NatureServe G5 S3B S4N

Abundance: Uncommon

Introduction: The primary breeding range extends southeast from central Alaska to Hudson Bay and south to northern Wyoming and Central Minnesota. The species will occasionally breed as far south as northeastern California, Colorado, and Nebraska. In Wyoming, lesser scaup breed in south and western regions of the state. Winters from Mid-Atlantic States to the West Indies and Columbia and along the west coast from British Columbia to Mexico. The species is common across the state during fall and spring migration. Spring surveys indicate that the combined populations of greater and lesser scaup declined dramatically from 1984 through 2003. Most of the decline has been recorded in the western Canadian boreal forest. The combined populations are 27 percent below the long-term average. In Wyoming, lesser scaup are less common during the breeding season than during migration. The lesser scaup has low abundance in Wyoming and is considered an uncommon summer resident. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD) classifies the lesser scaup as a Species of Special Concern with a Native Species Status of 3 (NSS3) because its breeding population is declining, habitat is restricted and vulnerable but no recent or on-going significant loss.

Habitat:

- Characterized as particularly demanding of specific environmental characteristics and as the least adaptable waterfowl species in relation to changes in reproductive habitat conditions;
- Omnivorous, although feeds primarily and at times almost exclusively, on aquatic invertebrates. Amphipods have been identified as the most important food for migrating and breeding scaup and for ducklings;
- Food availability is more limiting to the population than cover availability;
- Preferred breeding habitat are permanent, intermittently exposed, and semipermanent wetlands \geq 2 acres in size;
- Alkali wetlands are relatively poor for production due to the lack of vegetative cover along the shoreline;
- The primary brood habitat is permanent or semipermanent wetlands with emergent vegetation. However, broods tend to use expansive areas of open water for security and escape cover;
- Decreased water levels result in increased predation and decreased habitat quality due to intensified livestock grazing and encroachment of haying activities;
- Nest in uplands, usually close to the water's edge;
- Has a fairly wide breeding range in both forest and grassland habitats;
- Scaup are strongly philopatric to breeding, migration and wintering areas; and
- Select breeding sites near water bodies that harbor no fish.

Problems:

- Oil spills on wintering and migration areas and the bioaccumulation of agricultural and industrial pollutants in prey items may be contributing to population decline;
- Research indicates that females are losing body condition in the upper Midwest during the spring migration;
- Introduction of fish into previous fishless wetlands resulting in a reduction of amphipods;

- Adult female survival and productivity may be declining;
- Switch in diet dominated by zebra mussels (*Dreissena polymorpha*). This species is a bioaccumulator; and
- Great Lake female were found to have selenium levels above the level at which reproductive impairment could be expected.

Conservation Actions:

- Protection and creation of islands;
- Do not introduce fish into fishless breeding and migratory areas;
- Manage all current and historic nesting and spring staging sites to minimize the potential for degradation and conflicts with development;
- Manage nesting areas to minimize human disturbance during the breeding season;
- Maintain good water quality;
- Document and prioritize historic and current breeding locations; and
- Identify potential breeding and spring staging sites that may become attractive to female lesser scaup following habitat management.

References and Additional Reading:

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Lesser Scaup Breeding and Summer Distribution

