

Species at Risk

2012-13 Recovery Action Summary

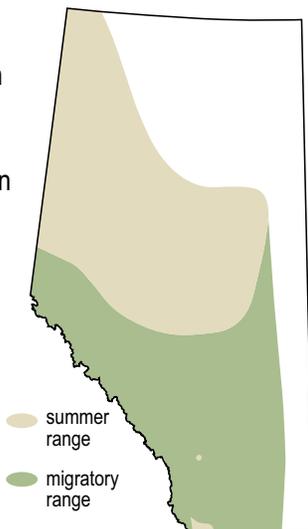


Trumpeter Swan



Background

The trumpeter swan is the largest species of native waterfowl in North America. Trumpeter swans were once found throughout Alberta and North America, until the 1900s when hunting and habitat destruction almost led them to extinction. In September 2001, the status of the trumpeter swan was reconfirmed as *Threatened* in Alberta based on the limited population, dependence on habitats for breeding that are vulnerable to human disturbance and land use activities, and concern for limited winter habitat.



The Alberta Trumpeter Swan Recovery Plan 2005-2010 was subsequently produced to guide the first five years of recovery actions.

Federally, the species is listed as *Not at Risk* under COSEWIC; In Alberta the current designation is still *Threatened* under the provincial *Wildlife Act*. A draft status report update has been prepared for the Scientific Subcommittee of the Endangered Species Conservation Committee (ESCC) and based on the population estimate from surveys in 2010, the breeding population in Alberta is estimated at 993 -1 433 mature individuals. A review of the species status in Alberta is targeted for late 2013.

Breeding trumpeter swans select wetland habitats with specific requirements and in Alberta they tend to be found in parts of the Boreal, Aspen Parkland and Lower Foothills ecoregions. Most swans breed in the Grande Prairie area but populations are rapidly expanding north and east. Distribution and population size has been monitored in the Grande Prairie area since 1953. Province-wide surveys are expected to continue every five years in Alberta but despite positive population growth trends, limiting factors such as shortage of quality winter habitat, continued loss of wetlands from anthropogenic activities, sensory disturbance and collisions with power lines remain.

Recovery Plan

The Alberta Trumpeter Swan Recovery Plan 2005-2010 guided recovery actions for trumpeter swans until the updated version of this plan, covering the years 2012-2017, was approved by the Minister in March 2013.

Recovery Goal

The primary recovery goal is to achieve a self-sustaining trumpeter swan population, well-distributed throughout suitable habitat within Alberta, such that the trumpeter swan is eventually removed from the list of provincially Threatened species.



Strategies

The following strategic areas will continue to guide actions needed to meet the trumpeter swan recovery goal and associated objectives:

1. Population Conservation and Management
2. Habitat Conservation and Management
3. Information and Outreach
4. Research and Monitoring

Actions

Several actions identified in the original recovery plan have been initiated or are underway, through partnerships with industry, academia, and other government departments. A short summary of progress on these actions is provided below, organized by the strategies.

1. Population Conservation and Management

Mortalities as a result of collisions with power lines continue to be tracked through public reports and internal databases. ESRD is working in partnership with electric utilities to reduce collision risk; successful mitigation through power line burial has been achieved at an important staging wetland near Cochrane. Further, while ESRD staff continue to work with industry on mitigation of collisions near Grande Prairie, permanent solutions to this problem area have not yet been achieved.

The goal of 10 successful breeding pairs in the Beaver Hills has not yet been achieved. Parks Canada continues with their annual census in the Beaver Hills and will continue to track breeding success.

Public activity closures on Police Outpost Lake in southwest Alberta continue.

2. Habitat Conservation and Management

Permanent securement of 2,549 acres of important trumpeter swan habitat has been achieved between 2000 and 2010 through the cooperative efforts of conservation organizations such as Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Nature Conservancy Canada, and the Alberta Conservation Association. Despite this, loss of permanent wetlands continues to be an issue in Alberta. A recent review showed that approximately 1,500 ha of permanent wetlands in the Beaver Hills were lost between 1997 and 2007. It is possible that continued wetland loss in this area will limit achievement of the goals of the reintroduction program.

The effectiveness of the current land use guidelines has been reviewed internally as well as through recent research at the University of Alberta. The internal review resulted in the recommendation to permit low impact seismic line cutting activity, outside of the breeding timing restrictions, to within 200 m of a breeding wetland. The preliminary results of the University of Alberta research supports the ESRD setbacks currently in place.

A major project to apply Protective Notations to breeding wetlands has been completed in the Lesser Slave Area.

Major updates to the provincial breeding site data base were recently completed as part of the EAP implementation.

3. Information and Outreach

Alberta Tourism, Parks, and Recreation, Friends of Saskatoon Island, Friends of Elk Island, ESRD, and Parks Canada continue to collaborate on public education extension activities identified in the recovery plan including the following:

- Production and distribution of a landowner stewardship brochure to the greater Grande Prairie area; brochure is also available on ESRD's website;
- Saskatoon Island Provincial Park is focusing on trumpeter swans for the Grade 5 wetland education program; and
- Development of a display poster for use at public gatherings on trumpeter swan biology, threats, and landowner stewardship.

4. Research

Parks Canada continues to conduct an annual total count census in the Beaver Hills. The next provincial survey of trumpeter swans is scheduled for 2015.

Upcoming

The updated recovery plan covering the years 2012-2017 was approved in March 2013. The updated status report has been drafted, and will be reviewed by the Scientific Subcommittee of the ESCC for their review and recommendation. For further information on recovery of the trumpeter swan, visit www.esrd.alberta.ca