

BREEDING ECOLOGY OF COMMON LOONS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA

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Northwest Montana is home to the largest population of breeding Common Loons (*Gavia immer*) west of the Mississippi River. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' annual loon day surveys show that the population consists of ~150-200 adults, including breeding adults and non-nesting birds, which produce ~30 to 50 chicks annually. Montana's Common Loon population exists along the extreme southern fringe of the species range in the western United States. Recreational use and home building on loon nesting lakes in northwest Montana has increased significantly in the last decade. The potential impacts of these habitat change to Common Loon nest survival and chick survival are uncertain. To better understand how

human disturbance and natural habitat variability are affecting nest survival and chick survival we intensively monitored Common Loon nesting attempts during two consecutive field seasons. Most current loon research has focused on habitat aspects specific to nest sites and chick rearing areas. We collected physical habitat data and development/recreation data not only at the nest-level scale but also at the lake- and landscape-level scales. Results and their implications for management will be presented.