

COMMON LOON BREEDING ECOLOGY AND POPULATION STATUS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA^{TWS}

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Approximately 200 adult common loons (*Gavia immer*) migrate to northwest Montana each spring from wintering grounds on the Pacific Ocean. They produce an average of 30-50 chicks each spring. Rapid increases in lakeshore development and recreation activity on many northwest Montana lakes prompted Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to list common loons as a sensitive species. Loons are habitat specialists, thus lakeshore development and recreation may be leading to decreased nesting opportunities and lower loon chick production on area lakes. Biologists and managers from state, federal, and private entities joined to form the Common Loon Working Group. Their goal was to coordinate population monitoring and guide research and management activities. State Wildlife Grant funding was awarded to fund research in an effort to better understand relationships between physical lake characteristics, human use factors, and loon nesting ecology. An ongoing loon-banding program has also been initiated in Montana. Preliminary results regarding nest success, chick survival, and lakes monitored were presented. Hypotheses concerning effects of development and recreation activity on nest success and chick survival were discussed. Significant observations from the loon banding project including breeding and wintering re-sightings as well as plans for future research in Montana were presented.