

THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN POPULATION OF TRUMPETER SWANS: UPDATE AND CURRENT ISSUES™

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The Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) of Trumpeter Swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) is comprised of two breeding “groups”. One breeds throughout western Canada, and the other in the “Tristate” region (southwestern Montana, western Wyoming, and eastern Idaho).

These swans overwinter primarily in the Tristate area. Canadian birds, and some local breeding swans, migrate along the East Front or through the Flathead valley in Montana. Total numbers and annual production are estimated during biannual surveys in the Tristate region. A September survey estimates the size and age ratio of the Tristate segment, and a February survey allows managers to estimate Canadian flock size and annual production. Over the past three decades Canadian flocks have increased. One hundred and eighty-six Canadian Trumpeter Swans were present in February 1975, and 3494 were counted in February 2001. Although considerable variation occurred between years, the Tristate segment increased from 70 birds in 1932 to 641 in 1958. It has since declined to 481 Trumpeter Swans in 2001. Management issues have remained basically the same since the 1980s. There is some question as to how genetically distinct the two population segments are and if any interbreeding occurs. Extensive banding from the 1960s-1980s did not document any interchange of breeders, but this *may* have changed with increased flock size. Concentration of about 40 percent of the RMP on 1-2 primary wintering sites has led to habitat degradation and high risk of mortality due to disease or extreme weather events. Since 1990 considerable effort has been made to haze or translocate swans away from these major sites with limited success. Current management efforts are centered on a diverse group of stakeholders developing a Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan (TSIP). The TSIP will concentrate on defining tasks designed to improve water management on Henry's Fork of the Snake River, manage winter distribution, improve U.S. nesting habitat and recruitment, and refine population monitoring. Conflicts with Tundra Swan hunting in Utah remains a major impediment to solving current RMP Trumpeter Swan management problems, and has implications for Trumpeter Swan restoration elsewhere.