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## **MOUNTAIN PLOVER POPULATION TRENDS IN 3 MONTANA AREAS**

Craig J. Knowles\*, FaunaWest Wildlife Consultants, Townsend, MT

Pamela G. Knowles, FaunaWest Wildlife Consultants, Townsend, MT

Permanent point count transects were established in 1992 in central, northeastern and southwestern Montana to monitor mountain plover population trends in these areas. At the time, these were considered to be Montana's 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> largest mountain plover populations. During the 23 year period from 1992 to 2014, these transects were surveyed during 10 different years with the last counts for the Central and Northeastern Montana Study Areas occurring in 2014, and the last count for the Southwestern Montana Study area occurring in 2004. The count of adult mountain plovers in the Central Study Area declined from 103 adult birds in 1992 to 13 birds in 2014. In the Northeastern Study Area, mountain plover started at 17 in 1992, peaked at 36 in 1996, dipped to 12 in 2004, and ended with a final count of 17 in 2014. Mountain plover numbers in the Southwestern Study Area progressively declined from a high of 33 adult birds in 1992 to no birds found in the Study Area in 2004. Cause of mountain plover decline in the Central Study Area was attributed to conversion of native grasslands to cultivated cropland and introduced grasses, a drastic decline in domestic sheep numbers, and an overall reduction in livestock grazing. In the Southwestern study area, the collapse of the mountain plover population was attributed to a housing development, a log home factory, prairie dog poisoning, and the lack of livestock grazing. The Northeastern Study Area was almost entirely public lands with relatively stable habitat conditions.