

you don't have high blood pressure! Merry Christmas

Idaho swan plan concerns Wyoming

JACKSON, Wyo. (AP) — Wyoming wildlife officials say their efforts to protect the trumpeter swans in the Star Valley have been successful, but that endeavors by an Idaho group to protect the bird could hamper their program.

Wyoming's effort to help the swans recover by obtaining more winter habitat for the 1,750 birds in the so-called "tri-state" flock found in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming was started in 1988. The initial plan called for the wintering area to reach from the Star Valley into the upper Green River drainage.

In Idaho, the state chapter of the Wildlife Society is trying to have the trumpeter swan declared a threatened species.

"We are opposing the society's position, because we are getting things done now," said Dave Moody, state wildlife management coordinator for District 1.

"Although we still would be able to trap and transplant the birds, having them declared threatened only would create a lot of red tape that would hamper efforts now under way to help the bird," Moody said.

Also opposing the Idaho chapter's bid is the Wyoming chapter of the Wildlife Society and the Trumpeter Swan Society.

Moody said part of the idea behind the wintering area being established in Wyoming is to reduce the pressure trumpeter swans are putting on Island Park Reservoir in Idaho's Harriman State Park. Last winter about 50 of the swans died during a stretch of extremely cold weather.

"There is not enough water coming out of the reservoir in the winter to keep the water from freezing," said Moody.

"When the water freezes, the birds are forced to move because there is no forage for them. In the really cold weather, they are not strong enough to move, and, consequently, they will freeze to death."

The petition by the Idaho chapter of the Wildlife Society to have the swans declared threatened notes the continued restriction of usable winter habitat due to inadequate water flows.

Also, the petition notes the anticipated loss of nesting sites; loss of spring, summer and winter habitats due to

increasing human activity; the loss of wetlands; the high potential for significant disease losses among wintering flocks; the need for artificial feeding of about 25 percent of the flock; lead poisoning; collisions with aircraft; and accidental shootings.

Dave Lockman, waterfowl biologist with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and a member of the Trumpeter Swan Society, said the Idaho group is being overprotective.

"There is an over-reaction to the problem on Henry's Fork," he said.

Lockman did call for the state of Idaho and the U.S. Interior Department to place greater emphasis on purchasing more winter habitat for the swans.

"As far as I'm concerned, Idaho has never invested much time or money toward the trumpeter swan, and yet a greater percentage of the population is dependent on its habitats," he said.

"A 'threatened' or 'endangered' status might provide a hammer and might help Idaho in acquiring funds, but that is not a reason for listing a species."

Lockman also noted that the Wyoming Game and Fish Department recently approved a three-year project to fund monitoring needed for the habitat-expansion project.

"We are in the process of negotiating for mitigation of trumpeter swan values lost during repair of Jackson Lake dam," he said. "This will include winter-habitat development and 150 acres of production habitat development."

"We are annually achieving some wetland improvement acres for trumpeters on public and private lands. We have excellent public and private landowner support without a (threatened or endangered) hammer," said Lockman.

At one time thousands of swans, the largest waterfowl species in the world, wintered throughout the Midwestern states. But unrestricted hunting almost drove the species into extinction.

By 1900 the swans were found only in Alaska and the greater Yellowstone ecosystem. By 1931 only 60 swans were found.

Conservationists fight for trumpeter swans

Boise - statesman - 5/31/90
The Associated Press

IDAHO FALLS — The Idaho chapter of the Wildlife Society plans to challenge a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decision against listing the Rocky Mountain trumpeter swan as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

"We're putting together a real detailed letter for (Fish and Wildlife Director John) Turner," Jack Connelly of Blackfoot said.

The agency based its denial on an agreement between Fish and Wildlife, the Bureau of Reclamation and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to ensure a minimum winter stream flow of 500 cubic feet per second below the Buffalo River on the Henrys Fork of the Snake River.

The area is a major winter habitat for the swans.

"Since the service is committed to try and purchase the necessary water to maintain a minimum flow of 500 cfs during the winter, it is believed that the major threat to the population has been alleviated," the Department of Fish and Wildlife said in its official response.

The Wildlife Society had petitioned Fish and Wildlife in April 1989 to list the swan as a threatened species due to habitat curtailment, the need to provide artificial feed for the birds during the winter months and a freeze on the Henrys Fork that killed as many as 100 swans the previous winter.

"There really is no agreement," Connelly said. "There's nothing down on paper. The only thing they did was to sit down and talk about the flows they needed.

"We want to see a copy of the agreement," he said. "We want to know why they settled on 500 cfs."

Olin Bray of Fish and Wildlife's Denver office agreed there was no written agreement to protect the swans. Once biologists determined that 500 cfs was sufficient,

Fish and Wildlife Regional Director Marvin Plenert made a commitment to provide the funds for purchasing necessary water in low years.

"It appears from past years that most of the time there is water to buy," Bray said. "But that is a concern."

Connelly said swan experts contend 500 cfs will not break up winter ice jams on the river but would only keep the area "wet." The agency also failed to address such issues as disease and artificial feeding, he said.

There were 900 swans on artificial feed at Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge in Montana's Centennial Valley last winter, Connelly said. "That's about half the (tri-state) population. That was totally ignored in their response that was published in the Federal Register."

This year, trumpeter swans ate all their winter food in Island Park and were forced to fly to Red Rock Lakes for food before migrating north.