



Priority Habitats and Species

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Management Recommendations for Washington's Priority Species, Volume IV: Birds



Common Loon

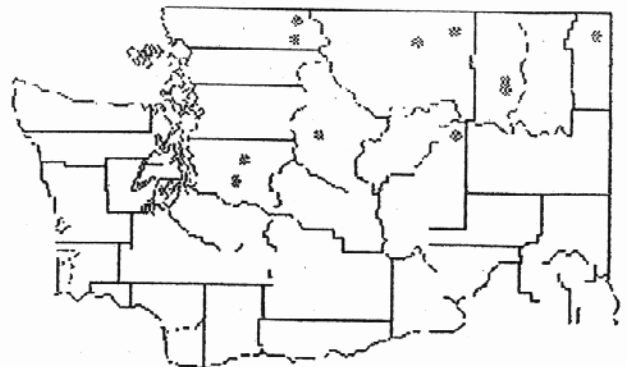
Gavia immer

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GENERAL RANGE AND WASHINGTON DISTRIBUTION

Common loons breed in North America from the Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea coasts, east throughout Canada and south to the northern tier of the lower 48 United States. In western North America, common loons winter along the Pacific coast from southern Alaska to Baja California.

Migrant loons arrive from the north to winter along Washington's coast, the Columbia and Snake rivers, and on lakes in northeastern Washington. Summer populations are very small. Single breeding pairs have been confirmed on lakes in King, Whatcom, Chelan, Ferry, and Okanogan counties.



Known breeding distribution of the common loon, *Gavia immer*, in Washington. Map derived from WDFW data files.

RATIONALE

The common loon is a State Candidate species. This species is vulnerable to shoreline alteration and development, fluctuation of water levels during nesting (e.g., reservoir draw downs and filling), human disturbance in the vicinity of nesting areas, and encroachment by logging and road building.

HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/hab/phs/vol4/comloon.htm>

4/24/2006

negatively affect loon reproductive success (Burger et al 1994, Scheuhammer and Blancher 1994, Meyer et al. 1995).

MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Protection of loons and their habitat during pair-bonding, egg laying, and initial brood rearing (1 April through 15 July) is important for reproductive success. Brood-rearing areas or nurseries are also important to protect after 15 July. Because common loons may re-use nests from year to year, protection of known nesting and brood-rearing areas is essential. Camping on islands can adversely affect loon productivity and may cause nest abandonment (Ream 1976). Campers and other visitors should be prevented from approaching within 150 m (492 ft) of nesting sites from 1 April through 15 July. A 150 m (492 ft) disturbance buffer is also recommended for brood-rearing areas (nursery pools) from 15 July to 1 September (R. Spencer, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, personal communication). Building within 150 m (492 ft) of a loon nest should be avoided year-round to maintain a permanent buffer around nests.

The absence of suitable nesting islands may limit the breeding activity of common loons. In areas where natural islands are unavailable, artificial islands can be provided. McIntyre and Mathisen (1977) created nesting islands by obtaining sedge mats from boggy lakes and binding the mats' edges with poles. Cedar log rafts were also found to be effective. Artificial nest sites have been used in Washington, primarily in reservoirs with fluctuating water levels (R. Spencer, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, personal communication). As breeding pairs of loons are not abundant in Washington, protection of all nest sites is important. Consequently, reservoirs where loons nest should maintain constant water levels when loons are laying and incubating eggs (a 30 day period).

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