

White-headed Woodpecker

Picoides albolarvatus



Photo by Steve Ting

Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Coniferous Forest	
Key Habitat Parameters •	
Plant Composition	Ponderosa, Jeffrey, sugar, and lodgepole pines, white fir, incense cedar, Douglas-fir ¹
Plant Density, Size, & Age	Prefers multi-storied forest with 50-70% canopy closure; high number of large trees (dbh > 53 cm [21 in]); 45 snags/ 40 ha with dbh > 58 cm [23 in] ¹ ; average tree spacing ~ 8.2 m [27 ft] ⁵
Mosaic	Older-aged, multi-canopied, multi-species forest with ample wood decay; understory not required ¹
Distance to Water	No known relationship
Response to Fragmentation	Probably sensitive ¹
Response to Vegetation Removal	Negative to tree/snag removal ^{E0}
Area Requirements •	
Minimum Patch Size	~ 500 ha [1,250 ac] ^{E0}
Recommended Patch Size	> 2,000 ha [5,000 ac] ^{E0}
Home Range	100 - 300 ha or more [250 - 750 ac] ¹

Conservation Profile

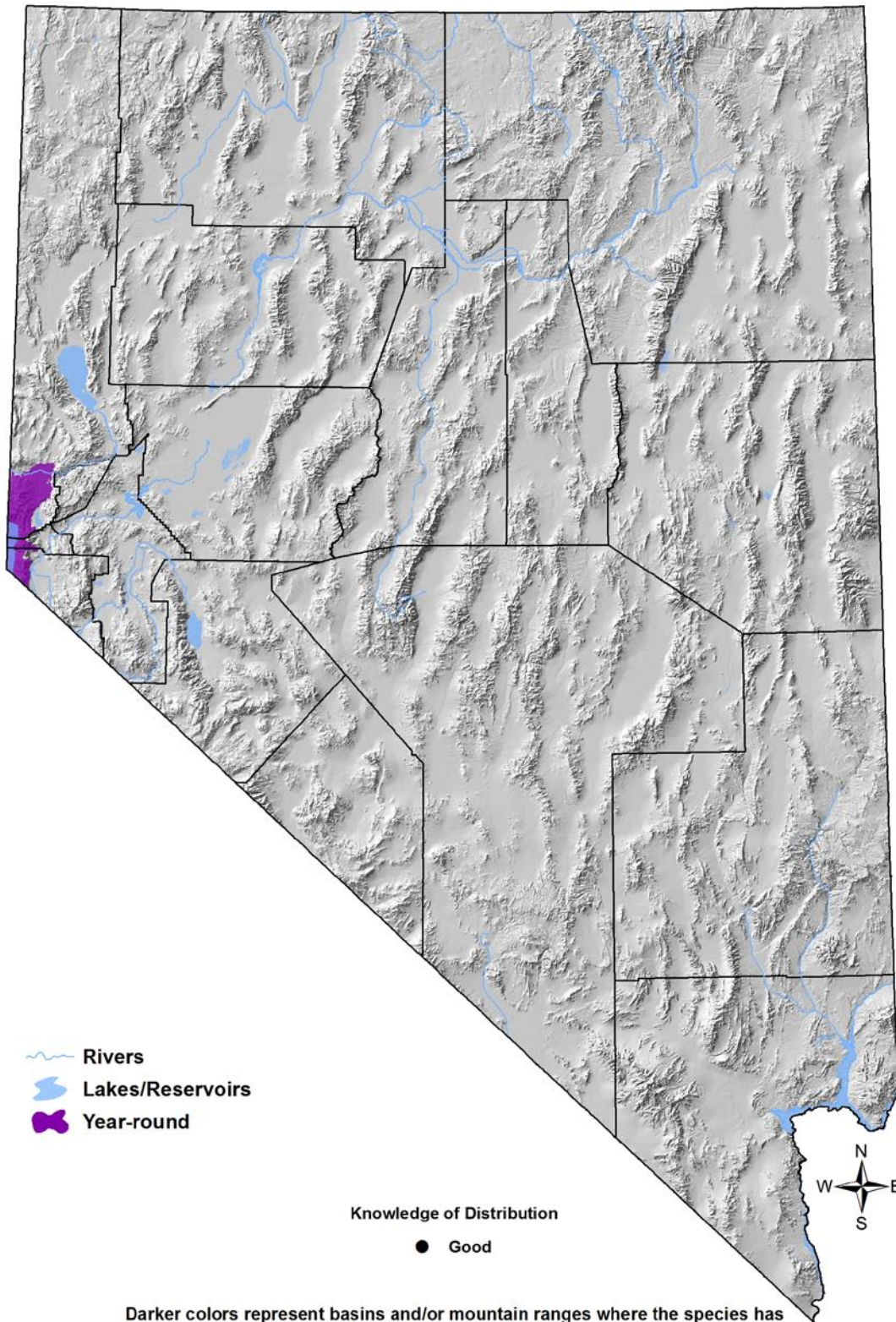
Priority Status	
Conservation Priority Species	
Species Concerns	
Small population size Restricted habitat	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	Watch List
Audubon Watchlist	Yellow
NV Natural Heritage	S2
USFWS	Bird of Conservation Concern, Migratory Bird
BLM	None
USFS	Sensitive Species
NDOW	Conservation Priority
Trends	
Historical ○	Unknown, declines suspected ¹
Recent ●	Stable ⁴
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada (NBC) ●	840
Global ●	72,000 ³
Percent of Global	1%
Population Objective	
Maintain ^{3, E0}	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	Nevada Bird Count
Coverage in NV	Good
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	Carson Range
Restoration	Carson Range

Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Year-round	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
May – mid-August ¹	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	Excavates cavity in large, decayed coniferous snag > 60 cm [24 in] dbh ^{1, 6, E0}
Site Fidelity	High for breeding territory ¹
Other	Usually excavates new cavity every year ¹
Food Habits	
Basic	Arboreal prober and gleaner
Primary Diet	Large pine seeds; bark insects while breeding ¹
Secondary Diet	n/a

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Overview

White-headed Woodpeckers are restricted to the Carson Range of far western Nevada, at the eastern edge of their core geographical range which runs through the Sierra Nevada - Cascade axis. This is strictly a bird of Coniferous Forest habitats, particularly those with large trees, older or mixed-age forest structure, mixed-species tree composition (as long as pines are present), and a high density of standing snags. Though this woodpecker is not typically associated with post-burn landscapes, it may respond positively to low-severity fire,¹ or even tolerate high-severity if snags are not removed.² A mosaic of burn severities across the landscape may, in fact, improve white-headed woodpecker habitat by opening forest canopies in the higher severity burn areas, while retaining decayed nags created before wildfire and live, cone-producing trees in unburned or low-severity burn areas.⁶

Traditional forestry practices that result in loss of large-diameter trees and snags may present a threat to this species, but such practices rarely occur in Nevada. The primary conservation strategies are management of forests to maintain patches of old-growth stands with moderate canopy closure, and continued population monitoring to confirm that numbers remain stable.

Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat

Birds / 40 ha on NBC Transects in the Carson Range

Primary Habitat at Transect	Transects Occupied	Birds/40 ha (95% C.I.)
Coniferous Forest	32% (6/19)	1.3 (0.7 – 1.9)

Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses

Landscape Associations (NBC data)

White-headed Woodpeckers occurred on eight NBC transects. Six were classified as Coniferous Forest habitat, one as Aspen habitat, and one as Montane Riparian habitat, but all eight transects contained > 60% cover of coniferous forest within their boundaries

Main Threats and Challenges

Habitat Threats

- Characteristic threats within other parts of the White-headed Woodpecker's geographical range (clear-cutting, even-age stand management, forest fragmentation) occur infrequently in the Carson Range

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- Possible threats in Nevada include changes in historical fire regimes and fuels reduction projects that result in removal of snags and/or simplification of forest structure and composition

Conservation Strategies

Habitat Strategies

- The Coniferous Forest (p. Hab-5-1) habitat conservation strategy benefits this species
- Design fuels reduction projects to retain older and mixed-age stands with moderate canopy closure at the recommended patch size
- Maintenance of large snags and large-diameter conifers (especially pines) is important for this species

Research, Planning, and Monitoring Strategies

- None identified

Public Outreach Strategies

- None identified

References: ¹Garrett et al. (1996); ²Hanson and North (2008); ³Rich et al. (2004); ⁴Sauer et al. (2008); ⁵Siegel and DeSante (2003); ⁶Wightman et al. (2010); ^{EO} Expert opinion