

2021 Fall Rocky Mountain Population of Trumpeter Swan Survey – Oregon Segment

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Introduction

Summering (breeding) trumpeter swans can be found in Klamath, Lake, Harney, and Crook Counties. These swans are believed to all have originated from restoration efforts at Malheur NWR (former) or Summer Lake Wildlife Area (ongoing). At this time, nearly all swans summering in Oregon are swans that were released at Summer Lake Wildlife Area after 2008, or their progeny. The summering flock associated with Malheur NWR has now declined to just two individuals.

Survey Area

Potential swan habitats in Klamath, Lake, Harney, and portions of Crook County

Methods

Typically, this survey is conducted from fixed wing aircraft, piloted by the Oregon State Police, with an ODFW observer on board. However, when aerial surveys are not possible, ground counts or records of marked swans known to be alive during the survey period are substituted.

Results

Due to schedule conflicts and unforeseen events, we were not able to use Oregon State Police aircraft and pilots to complete all portions of the survey. However, one flight was completed in portions of Crook and Harney Counties on September 21st, with Marty St. Louis observing. Four white swans were observed during this flight, two on the South Fork Crooked River (wetlands and reservoirs associated with the GI Ranch) and two at Malheur NWR (south Blitzen Valley). A flight could not be scheduled to survey habitats in Klamath and Lake County. Therefore, ground surveys at Summer Lake Wildlife Area and observations of uniquely marked swans at Summer Lake Wildlife Area from September 14 – October 22 were substituted.

Weekly Roadside Survey Results – Summer Lake Wildlife Area staff conduct weekly roadside waterfowl surveys at the wildlife area during September – January. On September 29th, staff tallied 27 swans (all white) on or adjacent to Summer Lake Wildlife Area.

Minimum Count of Unique Marked Trumpeter Swans – Nearly all trumpeter swans summering in Oregon are marked with alpha numeric coded neck collars and ODFW staff maintain a database of neck collar observations. Examination of the database reveal 27 uniquely marked swans (all white) were observed on or adjacent to Summer Lake Wildlife Area from September 14th through October 22nd. Additionally, one uncollared swan (with a metal federal band) was also observed associating with a collared swan prior to and during this period, for a total of 28 white swans.

Discussion

It is possible some of the uniquely marked swans we recorded were not present at Summer Lake Wildlife Area during the designated RMP survey week of September 27th. However, we do not believe these swans could have been observed during surveys in other areas of the state or broader RMP range. Although the marker codes of the four swans observed in Crook and Harney Counties were not confirmed during the survey, observation records of marked swans in these areas suggest the swans associated with aerial observations do not use Summer Lake Wildlife until later in the fall, if at all.

Because observers conducting roadside surveys cannot view all possible habitats swans could use at Summer Lake Wildlife Area, these counts should not be interpreted as the total number of swans present during a given survey. Additionally, due to visibility and time constraints, observers cannot record neck collars of all swans observed during a roadside survey. However, comparison of totals from neck collar observation records from September 14th through October 22nd and the September 29th roadside survey suggest most, if not all swans using the wildlife area were observed on September 29th. Because we do not believe the swans observed during the aerial survey in Crook and Malheur counties were present at Summer Lake anytime during September 14th – October 22nd, we suggest the total number of swans at Summer Lake Wildlife Area in late September was 28 (tally of 27 unique neck collars, plus one unmarked bird associating with a collared swan).

Summary

Surveys and monitoring from September through October 22 indicate a **minimum of 32 adult trumpeter swans** resided in Lake, Harney, and Crook counties in early fall 2021.

- 28 white swans at Summer Lake Wildlife Area
- 2 white swans at Malheur NWR
- 2 white swans at GI Ranch (South Fork Crooked River)

No surveys occurred in Klamath county, where swan occurrence in September is sporadic. Additionally, not all swan habitats in Lake County were surveyed, and it is possible a few swans were missed in these areas. There were no gray swans observed during this survey and monitoring during the late-spring and summer did not document any evidence of successful swan nesting in Oregon during 2021.