Red-naped Sapsucker (*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*)

NMPIF level: Species Conservation Concern Level 2 (SC2)

NMPIF assessment score: 14

NM stewardship responsibility: Low

National PIF status: Stewardship, Intermountain West

New Mexico BCRs: 16, 34, 35

Primary breeding habitat(s): Mixed Conifer Forest (including aspen)

Other habitats used: Spruce-Fir Forest, Ponderosa Pine Forest (including aspen)

Summary of Concern

Red-naped Sapsucker is a species of high forests of the Rocky Mountain region. Populations appear stable, but the species is sensitive to long-term changes in forest configurations, particularly loss or alteration of aspen woodland. New Mexico population trends are not well known.

Associated Species

Blue Grouse (BC2), Sharp-shinned Hawk, Band-tailed Pigeon (SC2), Broad-tailed Hummingbird (SC2), Cordilleran Flycatcher (SC2), Warbling Vireo (SC2), Tree Swallow, Violet-green Swallow, Mountain Chickadee, House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Mountain Bluebird (SC2), Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Orange-crowned Warbler

Distribution

Red-naped Sapsucker is predominantly a species of the Rocky Mountains. It breeds from central British Columbia and Alberta south to central Arizona and New Mexico, and from the mountains of central Washington and Oregon east to the Great Plains. The winter range includes southern portions of Arizona and New Mexico and extends south to central Mexico (Walters et al. 2002).

In New Mexico, Red-naped Sapsucker is present in summer in northern and central mountain ranges south to the Mogollons, Sacramentos and Guadalupes (Hubbard 1978). It may occur at lower elevations statewide in migration and winter, but is more common in the south (Parmeter et al. 2002).

Ecology and Habitat Requirements

Until 1983, Red-naped Sapsucker was considered conspecific with Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Red-breasted Sapsucker. In New Mexico, Red-naped Sapsuckers breed in higher montane forests and mixed woodlands, particularly aspen groves. It avoids woodland edges (Dobkin et al. 1995). In breeding areas, this species drills sap wells in conifers, aspen or willow, and defends a constantly maintained network of wells from other species and other sapsuckers (Walters et al. 2002). It also forages for insects, particularly ants, when feeding young.

Most breeding activity takes place in May and June. Typically, a single brood is raised, but the species will re-nest following nest failure. Cavity nests are placed in either live or dead trees. Aspens are highly favored for nest locations, but sapsuckers will also nest in areas where aspens are not present (Li and Martin 1991, Daily 1993). Dead trees are more often used in coniferous forests (McClelland and McClelland 2000). In several studies, all or almost all nest trees were infected with heartwood decay fungus (Crocket and Hadow 1975, Daily 1993, Walters et al. 2002). Larger-diameter trees are favored for nesting. The same nest-cavity may be re-used from year to year, but more commonly a new cavity is excavated in the same nest tree, often higher up as fungal infection spreads (Walters et al. 2002). In winter and during migration, Red-naped Sapsuckers may be found in a variety of lower-elevation habitats, including orchards and pine-oak and pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Conservation Status

Species Assessment

DISTRIBUTION	3
THREATS	3
GLOBAL POPULATION SIZE	3
LOCAL POPULATION TREND	3
IMPORTANCE OF NEW MEXICO TO BREEDING	2
COMBINED SCORE	**14**

Red-naped Sapsucker is a Species Conservation Concern, Level Two species for New Mexico, with a total assessment score of 14. It has no single vulnerability score higher than a 3, indicating a moderate level of concern and/or uncertainty regarding status and trends. PIF classifies Red-naped Sapsucker as a Stewardship species, with a high percentage of its population in the Intermountain West Avifaunal

Biome. Red-naped Woodpecker is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (2002) national Bird of Conservation Concern.

Population Size

PIF estimates a species population of 2,200,000, and that New Mexico holds 2.3% of the species population, or about 50,000 birds.

Population Trend

BBS data for the sapsucker superspecies indicate mostly stable trends, with some localized declines. This species is not well sampled by BBS in New Mexico and state trends are uncertain. BBS data for 1966-2004 are:

	Annual Trend (%)	P-value	Number of Routes
New Mexico	6.0	0.14	10
FWS Region 2	4.4	0.06	13
Western BBS	0.1	0.94	475

Threats

Preference for aspen habitat and avoidance of woodland edges makes Red-naped Sapsucker vulnerable to any processes resulting in fragmentation or decline of aspen patches. In Nevada, this species disappeared for over a decade from the Toiyabe Range due to aspen cutting and extensive road-building for logging (Dobkin and Wilcox 1986). Degradation of woodland and montane riparian areas over the past decades due to livestock grazing and fire suppression has reduced available habitat (Dobkin et al. 1995).

Management Issues and Recommendations

Management for Red-naped Sapsuckers in New Mexico should focus on maintaining a matrix of coniferous forest configurations including large patches of aspen woodland with standing snags.

NMPIF Recommendations

- Maintain taller trees in ponderosa and mixed conifer forest.
- Manage forests and logging operations to leave intact large aspen patches and medium- to large-diameter dead snags.
- Maintain the presence of fire and/or silvicultural techniques in montane coniferous forests to ensure continued aspen regeneration throughout forests in the state
- Monitor ungulate use of aspen stands after large fires. Large scale browsing may have a deleterious effect on aspen regeneration and other components of appropriate Red-naped Sapsucker habitats. Fencing of young aspen stands may be required.

Species Conservation Objectives

PIF Objectives

The PIF North American Landbird Conservation Plan places Red-naped Sapsucker in the conservation action category Long-term Planning and Responsibility. It sets a population objective of maintaining the current population over the next 30 years.

NMPIF Objectives

- Maintain or increase breeding populations in forests from the Sacramentos and Mogollons north.
- Seek to gather improved information on species breeding densities, habitat extent and population trends.
- Develop and run enough BBS routes to determine a trend in New Mexico.

Sources of Information

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