
Western Grebe Recovery Plan

Summary of Public Response

On December 2, 2018 the draft *Western Grebe Recovery Plan* was posted online and the public was invited to participate in an online survey. The survey closed January 2, 2019.

The online survey had 24 submissions. We would like to thank all the people that provided their input. It was very useful in developing the final *Western Grebe Recovery Plan*.

A summary of what we heard and how it was used to redraft the plan is provided the table below.

What We Asked	What We Heard	What We did
Have the primary threats to the western grebe been adequately identified and assessed?	<p>18 of 24 respondents (75%) agreed, whereas three (12.5%) were unsure and three (12.5%) disagreed.</p> <p>Two comments were submitted by those who disagreed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. One indicated that disturbance to nesting areas by boats is a continuing problem.2. One indicated “there is no literature to suggest this”. <p>The three “unsure” responses acknowledged a lack of awareness of the issues or too quick of a read, rather than inadequacy in document.</p> <p>There were no comments elsewhere in the survey that would suggest that any threats were overlooked, but several comments that suggested our understanding of the magnitude of threat needs improvement, or that the threats need more immediate action that the Plan describes.</p>	<p>No action taken. The Plan clearly recognizes disturbance by boats to nesting grebes in many places. The comment does not appear to be a criticism that the threat has not been identified, but that the threat has not been addressed to date. Addressing this, and other threats, is the purpose of the recovery plan.</p> <p>No action taken. Not clear what specific literature is being referred to. We are confident that the Plan contains the most current and relevant references to threats facing western grebes in Alberta and elsewhere.</p> <p>No action taken.</p> <p>Addressed below.</p>

What We Asked	What We Heard	What We did
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Do you think that the recovery goals and associated objectives are appropriate?

19 of 24 respondents (79.2%) agreed, whereas two (8.3%) disagreed and three (12.5%) were unsure.

Two comments were provided by those who disagreed:

1. Comment directed towards more protection being needed on one major colony on Cold Lake.
2. Comment that anthropogenic loss needs to be better defined and quantified, and that there should be specific regulations proposed for oil and gas activities.

The three “unsure” comments appreciated the listing of priority lakes, and indicated that there might be more emphasis placed on liaising with municipalities. One questioned the “maintenance” rather than recovery goal.

No changes made. The Plan acknowledges that some colonies in Alberta will require strong protection against disturbance, such as the use of “Seasonal Sanctuary”. However, our knowledge of current threats to known colonies must be more properly quantified before the appropriate level of protection can be applied. This is one of the most important actions listed in the Plan (see Section 6.2), and will be a major focus of attention following Plan approval. As such, the comment does not appear to disagree with the goals and objectives of the overall Plan, but rather that specific location did not receive particular mention.

No changes made. Defining anthropogenic loss is a broad topic and beyond the scope of this Plan. The Plan focuses on the protection of nesting areas from all forms of anthropogenic disturbance that impact grebes. Specific oil/gas regulations are not part of this Plan, as the industry has not been identified as a threat to grebes (other than the potential for oil spills).

We strongly agree that linking to municipal land-use planning is essential, and have added specific mention of local governments in Sections 3.6, 6.4, and Tables 2 and 3.

The concept of a “maintenance” goal is used because grebe populations are now known to be more abundant than previously thought, and that perceived declines are at least partly attributable to periodic shifts in population due to water conditions. A “maintenance” goal does not diminish the need to address threats to the population.

Do you think that the proposed recovery actions are adequate and will help address the threats to western grebes?

8 of 24 (33%) agreed, whereas seven (29.2%) disagreed and nine (37.5%) were unsure.

All six of the comments provided by the “no” group focused on the idea that stronger protection for western grebe colonies, and shorelines in general, is needed in Alberta.

The Plan recognizes that there are threats to shorelines in Alberta and that many western grebe breeding areas require stronger protection than currently occurs. Therefore, the comments do not appear to be criticisms of the Plan. The Plan lays out a process for identifying and prioritizing areas that require protection (see Section 6.1 and 6.2), and will lead to protective measures being applied to breeding areas in the coming years.

What We Asked**What We Heard****What We did**

The nine “unsure” comments fall into two general categories:

1. Lack of quantitative data on population size, distribution and long-term trends.
2. Lack of confidence in public outreach as a protective measure, and lack of resources for enforcement.

These inadequacies were recognized when the species was listed in 2014. Since that time, strides have been made to develop appropriate survey techniques and to better estimate population size and distribution (published in 2017 and repeated in 2018). More work on this front is specifically mentioned in the Plan (e.g., Sections 6.1 and 6.3), as is the need to support additional research (Section 6.6).

The Plan recognizes that there are a suite of protective tools ranging from public education and engagement to strict legislative approaches (establishment of Sanctuaries and ensuing enforcement). A major outcome of the Plan will apply the appropriate level of protection to each major breeding area, and most likely a combination of approaches will be most appropriate. This is an ambitious goal, and the lack of confidence on the part of reviewers is reasonable.

Additional comments

Nine comments were received. No new issues were presented here. At least four focused on the need for strong habitat protection at the expense of recreational use, two speculated on the impact of minor threats listed in the Plan (pesticides and invasive plants), four focused on lack of population and other data and the need to encourage more research, one stressed the need to focus on lake-specific rather than a broad approach, and at least two expressed skepticism of the will/resources of government to implement the Plan.

No disagreement with any comments, but no changes to Plan suggested or required.
