
HOARY MARMOT, WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN AND PIKA SURVEYS IN NORTHWEST MONTANA

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Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has long done survey and inventory of game species and largely within the past few decades has expanded the staff and program necessary to monitor non-game species, too. However, to date there has been little work done on three alpine species likely to be adversely impacted by climate change: the hoary marmot (*Marmota caligata*), white-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucurus*) and pika (*Ochotona princeps*). Prior to the 2010 field season, Montana Natural Heritage Program had only 31 hoary marmot, eight white-tailed ptarmigan, and 62 pika observations for northwest Montana outside of Glacier National Park. We discuss the beginning of focused survey and inventory effort for these three species in northwest Montana that include searching historical narratives, reaching out to other agencies and backcountry users, developing a species identification guide and sighting log for free distribution, and on-the-ground surveys. On one 4-day backpacking trip we saw or saw sign of 17 marmots in five “colonies” or local areas, 20 pikas and one ptarmigan as well as several other species. In addition to the current survey and inventory work we are outlining future more in-depth work including structured systematic surveys, future monitoring, research on marmot genetics and colony relatedness across the species range in Montana, and potential partners. We also discuss some new and novel approaches such as winter helicopter surveys and fecal DNA analysis for ptarmigan.