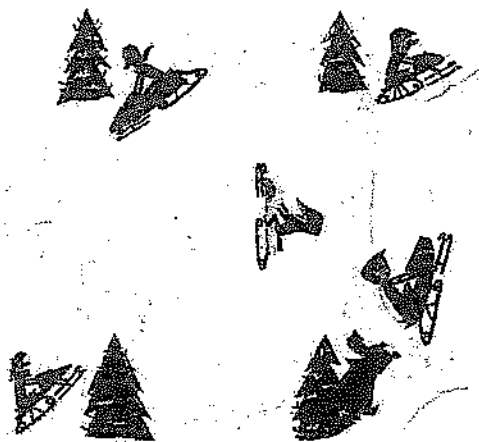


OUTDOORS REPORT



4,000 Miles of groomed snowmobile trails in Montana.

Waterfowl up, other birds down

The latest report on U.S. bird populations offers a tale of two trends, one hopeful, one dire. Published by 33 leading science and conservation organizations and agencies, the "2022 U.S. State of the Birds Report" is the first comprehensive look at the nation's birds since a landmark 2019 study showed the loss of nearly 3 billion birds in the United States and Canada in 50 years. Key findings from the new report:

- Waterbirds and ducks in the U.S. have increased by 18 percent and 34 percent, respectively, since 1970.
- U.S. grassland birds are among the fastest declining, with a 34 percent loss during the same period.
- Over half of U.S. bird species are declining. The report advises that meeting declining birds' needs will require a strategic combination of partnerships, incentives, science-based solutions, and public will to dramatically scale up the conservation of fast-disappearing bird habitats such as native grasslands.



Peak migration is usually the last week of March. But check the Freezout web page before you

WILDLIFE WATCHING

FWP web page updates Freezout waterfowl count

Each year in late winter, photographers and bird watchers thrill to the sight of snow goose "tornadoes" rising up from Freezout Lake, about 20 miles northwest of Great Falls. But the spectacle is witnessed only by those who show up on the right days.

Tens of thousands of migrating ducks, geese, tundra swans, and other birds pass through this area on their way to northern nesting grounds. The lake and surrounding barley fields provide an essential pitstop for resting and refueling during the long journey.

Because the birds stay only a few weeks, visitors need to know what stage the migration is in before making the drive to Freezout Lake

Wildlife Management Area (WMA). On average, the last week of March sees the large number of migrating waterfowl, but that can change due to storms and other weather.

FWP has a new web page that includes daily Freezout Lake updates during spring and fall migrations. The page also includes information on the WMA's history and management, as well as hunting, wildlife watching, and trapping opportunities and a detailed map.

To view the page, visit fwp.mt.gov and click on the Conservation tab at the top. From the menu on the left, select "WMAs," then scroll for "Freezout Lake WMA." On the Freezout Lake WMA page, click on the "Freezout Lake WMA Story Map" link under the photo. ■

CLIMATE

State climatologist predicts even warmer days ahead

Dr. Kelsey Jencso, state climatologist with the Montana Climate Office, believes that by 2069, some areas of Montana can expect up to five more weeks of above-90-degree days each year.

During a Zoom conference on climate change this past November, Jencso explained his prediction by pointing out that, over the past 65 years, the state's temperature has increased 0.42 degree per decade while the national average is 0.26 per decade. That's an increase of 2.7 degrees in the past 65 years, which is also above the national average.

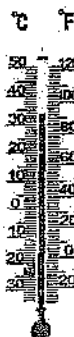
The greater rate of change is due to Montana's higher altitude, making it more sensitive to temperature

fluctuations, Jencso told the conference, organized by the Montana League of Women Voters. He also said:

- Total precipitation from spring rains increased by 1.3-2 inches per year in east Montana and declined by 0.9 inch in western Montana.

- By mid-century, computer models predict a 5-degree temperature increase in eastern and north-central Montana and a 4-degree increase in central and western Montana.

- Also by mid-century, eastern Montana is expected to have 39 more days above 90 degrees each year and western Montana will see 115 additional days of 90-degree-plus temperatures. ■



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