Yellow Rail (*Coturnicops noveboracensis*)

(2 subspecies; both within plan area)

**Conservation Concern Category:**

*High Concern*

**Population Trend (PT)**

*C. noveboracensis noveboracensis*—stable

(Delany and Scott 2002: WCA 2001 (Denver workshop))

*C. noveboracensis goldmani*—unknown (Delany and Scott 2002)

“southern boundary of breeding area has moved northward in twentieth century…” (Bookhout 1995)

“breeding range has decreased during the 20th century: it formerly bred in California, and possibly also in ne USA, s to about 40° N, and in the 19th century it was described as resident in Florida and s Louisiana…the race *golmani* is known only from Mexico where it was formerly a local resident in upper Rio Lerma Valley; it has not been seen since 1964…” (Taylor 1998)

“recent California records indicate species may still breed in far N and NE…intensive surveys in Oregon have established that this species is a fairly widespread breeding species in south central portion of state where found at 27 sites in Wood River Valley and Klamath Marsh NWR…” (R. Russell, pers.comm.)

There is no reason to believe that the species is increasing anywhere in the global range. There is ample evidence showing that the species’ habitat has declined and is still declining throughout the southern range. In the remaining portion of its range, the Hudson/James Bay region, it may also be declining in certain areas (Alvo and Robert 1999).

The species is no longer present in certain areas along the Hudson Bay coastline (La Pérouse Bay area) where it was regularly observed 30 years ago (K. Abraham-OMNR, pers. comm.), presumably because of habitat degradation due to Snow Goose overgrazing.

BBS trend not reliable for this species (R. Bazin, pers.comm.)

**PT FACTOR SCORE=4**

**Population Size (PS)**

*C. noveboracensis noveboracensis*—10,000-25,000 total individuals (Delany and Scott 2002: WCA 2001 (Denver workshop))

*C. noveboracensis goldmani*—unknown (Delany and Scott 2002; last record 1964)

“densities: 65 calling rails in 1620 ha habitat (Oregon); 1 calling rail per 25-86 ha (Michigan)…” (Bookhout 1995)

**PS FACTOR SCORE=3**

**Threats to Breeding Populations (TB)**

“loss of wetlands to human activity is probably the most serious factor affecting populations…water levels appear to influence numbers present…encroachment of woody vegetation decreases quality of breeding habitat…” (Bookhout 1995)

“ditching and draining for agricultural development…grazing by cattle affects marsh-edge…mowing may help perpetuate breeding habitat by preventing the usual vegetative succession…periodic burning removes invading wood vegetation…” (Taylor 1998)

Wetland loss by agriculture and human development. Habitat degradation in coastal Hudson/James bay region because of overgrazing by the enormous Snow Goose population (D. Hussell and K. Ross, pers. comm. in Alvo and Robert 1999).

Overgrazing in Hudson/James bay coastal marshes occurs mainly during spring migration where geese feed annually on emergent vegetation causing important habitat changes (K. Abraham, pers. comm.; Abraham et al. 2005; Jefferies et al. 2006).

Oil and gas development in Alberta. Human disturbance caused by birders (Alvo and Robert 1999)

**TB FACTOR SCORE=4**

**Threats to Non-breeding Populations (TN)**

“*noveboracensis* is widespread but locally distributed within its breeding range…it may be more abundant than existing records indicate…” (Taylor 1998)

Range of estimated breeding pairs in North America is estimated between 5,160 to 13,450 with a median of 9,255 (Mattsson 2001, unpublished).

Alvo and Robert (1999) estimated the global north American population to be around 5,000-6,000 pairs: a few thousand pairs in the Hudson/James bay coastal regions, 2,000 pairs in continental Canada and 600-750 pairs in the U.S. The total North American population would be around 10,000-12,000 individuals.
“some rails lost to machinery during hay cutting and baling on wintering grounds...some strike TV towers or other structures during nocturnal migration...” (Bookhout 1995)

“mowing seems beneficial for staging and moultng areas...manipulation of water levels to benefit migratory waterfowl could adversely affect YERA...” (Taylor 1998)

Habitat loss for wintering Yellow Rails has been so extensive in the U.S. that the wintering range may no longer be contiguous (T. Bookout, pers. comm. in Alvo and Robert 1999).

Rice harvesting may cause Yellow Rail casualties (Cardiff and Smalley 1989 in Alvo and Robert 1999)

Concentration of YERA during non-breeding results in significant threat (Marshbird Workshop 2005)

Global Range (Taylor 1998; entire range within plan area)

Breeding Distribution (BD)

*C. noveboracensis noveboracensis*—SC & SE Canada to NE USA, NW USA (Delany and Scott 2002)

*C. noveboracensis goldmani*—Marshes of R Lema, C Mexico (Delany and Scott 2002)

Non-breeding Distribution (ND)

*C. noveboracensis noveboracensis*—SE & S USA (Delany and Scott 2002)

*C. noveboracensis goldmani*—Marshes of R Lema, C Mexico (Delany and Scott 2002)

1,641,000 km² (plan area distribution; estimated from range maps)

Range extension in the northwest portion of its range: Yellow Rails have been recently recorded in the Northwest territories in the Nahanni National Park Reserve of Canada near the Yukon border (Craig Machtans, CWS-PN; pers. comm.)

BD FACTOR SCORE=3

1,968,800 km² (plan area distribution; estimated from range maps)

ND FACTOR SCORE=4

Literature Cited:


Yellow Rail Status Assessment Revision 2013

• New references since 2006:


  – [http://climatechangesensitivity.org/node/561](http://climatechangesensitivity.org/node/561) and similar
Yellow Rail Species Status Assessment Revision 2013

Population Trend
Still no reliable information... “anecdotal reports of local declines, together with evidence of declines from atlas data, local reports, and localized habitat loss along Hudson and James Bay, suggest the population may have declined in the past decade, albeit probably by less than 30%.” (COSEWIC 2009)

The number of Yellow Rails observed during Christmas Bird Counts has increased significantly for the period 1966-2010 (linear regression, number per party-hour = 0.0004 * year – 0.82, F1,44 = 10, r2 = 0.17, p = 0.003; Figure 7). However, given the widespread loss of wetlands across its range, it is most likely that this trend is due to increasing observer experience in locating wintering Yellow Rails rather than a population increase. (Butler et al. 2013)

Population Size
“Taken together, the population size is unknown, but Alvo and Robert’s (1999) previous estimate of 5,000-6,000 breeding pairs (10,000-12,000 mature individuals) remains plausible.” (COSEWIC 2009)

Threats to Breeding and Nonbreeding
Same threats; habitat loss and degradation in wintering range more sever due to concentration.

Breeding and Nonbreeding Distributions
Use newest Natureserve Map
“There is also an isolated breeding population in south-central Oregon and northern California (Taylor 1998, Popper and Stern 2000, Sterling 2008). Recently, Yellow Rails have been found in northeastern British Columbia during the breeding season (British Columbia Breeding Bird Atlas 2008).” (In Butler et al.2013 ) Extant in Mexico (pers. comm.. Oscar Ballesteros).

NOTE: Assessment is at species level; small disjunct populations require heightened attention.