

# Middle Madison Valley Trumpeter Swan Restoration Project

## Background:

In 2002, the Pacific Flyway Council issued its *Rocky Mountain Population Trumpeter Swan Implementation Plan (TSIP)* that includes a goal to increase the number of breeding pairs of trumpeter swans in suitable habitats. With the U.S. portion of the Rocky Mountain Population of trumpeters in continual decline, state conservation agencies in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho agreed that increased efforts to restore these birds was needed. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MTFWP) as the primary agency responsible to implement the TSIP for Montana, worked to develop suitable breeding areas and partnerships to implement TSIP restoration efforts.

In 2011 MTFWP Region 3, in collaboration with the Montana Wetlands Legacy Partnership, through its wetland restoration efforts in the Madison Valley, SW Montana, proposed to increase the geographic extent of the Montana Trumpeter swan restoration program by beginning to release captive-reared swans in the middle Madison. Through extensive evaluations of the valley's wetland complexes it was determined, and proposed, that the initial release site would be the O'Dell Creek Headwaters, an 4,000-acre area of wetlands, spring creeks, and streams on the east side of the Madison River south of Ennis.

Since 2005, over 1,000 acres of wetlands have been restored or created in this area along with 11 miles of spring creek channels. Primary funding for this restoration has been provided by Northwestern Energy through the Madison/Missouri Wildlife Protection, Mitigation and Enhancement Program. In addition, significant areas of the O'Dell Creek Headwaters have been enrolled in U.S. Department of Agriculture programs. Additional restoration funds have been provided by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Migratory Bird Stamp and In-Lieu Fee Mitigation Program, Audubon, and many others. This broad partnership of Madison Valley landowners and partners has been nationally recognized for providing quality wetland habitat that offers the potential to increase swan production in the region and to enhance connectivity between flocks breeding in the Centennial, Blackfoot, and Flathead Valleys.

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## Objectives:

Restore breeding Trumpeter swans to their historic breeding range in the Upper Missouri watershed.

Release 5 birds annually, with the goal of establishing a breeding flock of 5 nesting pairs within a 5-10 year time frame.

Encourage other swans to select the Middle Madison as a nesting location.

Increase the geographic extent of MT Trumpeter swan flock and connect areas in MT, ID, WY and Yellowstone National Park

Engage the community in swan conservation and encourage reporting of Trumpeter swan observations and marked birds.





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### **2012 Release**

#### ***Five 70-day old cygnets from Wyoming Wetland Society***

- Released into a temporary enclosure which was removed once birds could fly.
- Released with a surrogate adult bird to teach natural behavior.
- Utilized ~ 3 miles up and down the Madison Valley – using almost all of wetlands/ponds on the O'Dell creek restoration site.
- Overwintered in the Madison Valley, often joining with an unmarked adult bird.
- Two of the five birds survived the first winter.



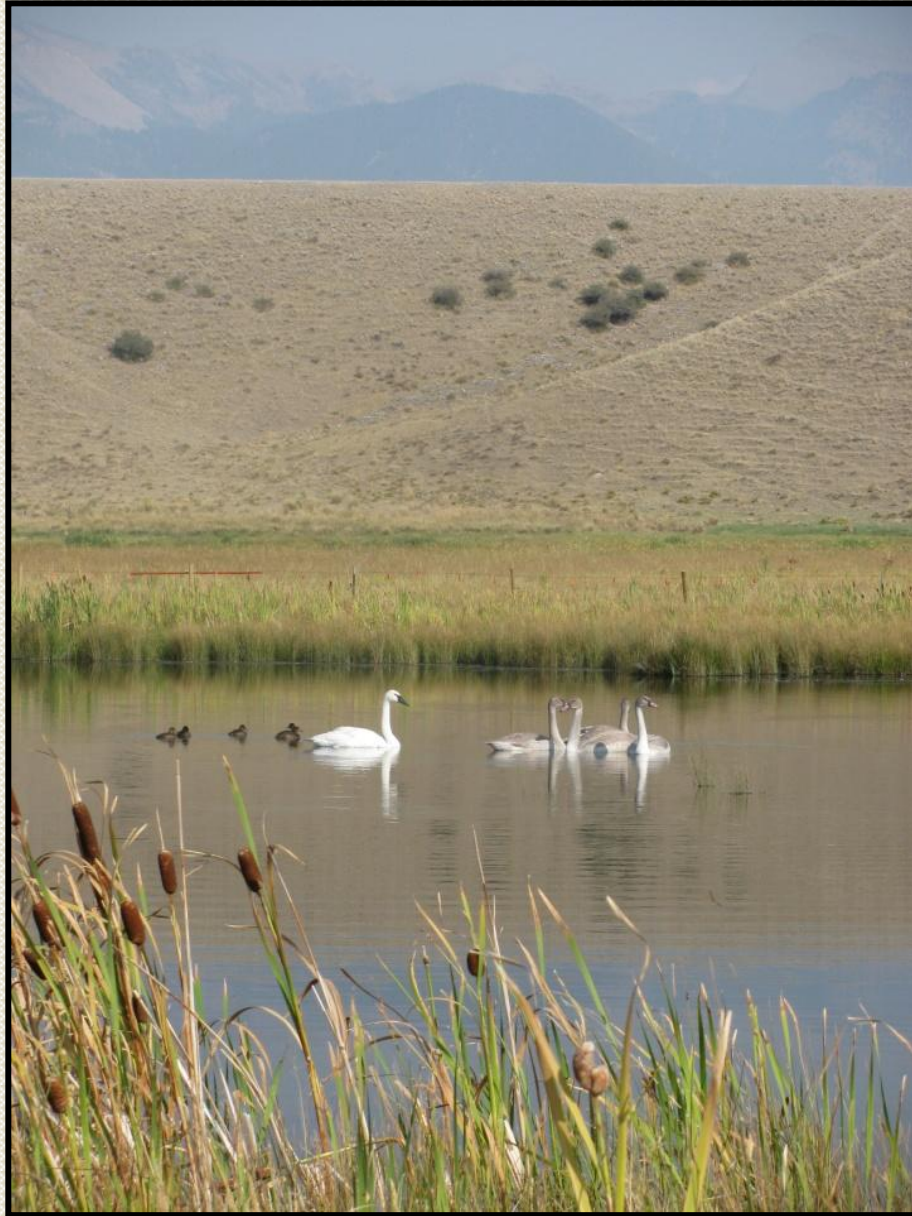
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### **2013, 2014, 2015 Releases**

#### ***Five yearlings (2013) and five cygnets (2014, 2015) from the Wyoming Wetlands Society***

- Soft released into the same pond as 2012
- Numerous birds (released birds and unmarked adults) are using the entire O'Dell wetland complex throughout the year; appears as though released birds are acting as decoys and attracting unmarked adults to the wetland complex, as we had hoped!





#### **2016 Release and beyond**

- On occasion 30-50 swans (marked and unmarked) have been observed near restoration area during winter; approximately 10 in early summer; no nesting to date, but birds have been seen in pairs in the spring.
- We will continue to release birds in the Madison Valley until we have established 5 nesting pairs; 5 cygnets are scheduled to be released August 2015 at O'Dell creek.
- We will continue to monitor swan success and spatial use within the Madison Valley. We will also continue to work with vegetation ecologists to evaluate habitat conditions and availability of swan forage – to date this work has been an integral part of the restoration project.
- Possibly establish other release sites in the Madison drainage to provide connectivity to other restoration projects in MT, to other states, and to Yellowstone National Park.
- Work closely with partner projects in Montana (Blackfoot Valley, Flathead), Idaho (Teton Basin) and Wyoming (YNP).
- Continue to work with the community – From the inception; local volunteers have been invaluable to make this work a success.



***With Thanks to:***

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Montana Natural Heritage Program

Montana Audubon and the Sacajawea Chapter of Montana Audubon

Madison River Foundation

Tara Luna, Vegetation Ecologist

Private Donors



For questions, and/or to report a marked bird please call Claire Gower, Wildlife Biologist, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Regional Headquarters, Bozeman at 406 994 5953 /cgower@mt.gov.



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**