

Snowy Egret

Egretta thula

Guidelines for Landowners Using Conservation Practices

Missouri Department of
Conservation

Common name ▪ Snowy Egret
Scientific name ▪ *Egretta thula*
State status ▪ Endangered
Federal status ▪ None

Ecology

Snowy egrets inhabit wetlands and shores of lakes, ponds and small rivers along the western, eastern and southern coastal states of the United States, as well as Missouri, Utah, Nevada, and other scattered, isolated populations. In Missouri, they use marshes and lowland forests in the southeastern corner of the state along the Mississippi River. Beginning in May, snowy egrets nest in colonies in trees or low-growing marsh plants. Their nests are typically 5 to 10 feet above the ground and are made of twigs and sticks. Snowy egrets are typically two feet in length with a wingspan of about 3 feet. Clutches have 3 to 6 eggs. Young hatch after approximately 18 days of incubation and are fed by both parents until they leave the nest in 20 to 25 days. Snowy egrets prey on a variety of foods, including earthworms, fish, small rodents, amphibians, reptiles and crayfish. This species usually forages in open wetlands and along edges of wetlands.

Reasons for Decline

Beginning in the late 1800s and continuing until the early 1900s, people began killing snowy egrets for the beautiful plume feathers the birds grow during the breeding season. Although they rebounded from this near catastrophe, snowy egrets now face new threats. Loss of suitable nesting sites and habitat due to destruction of wetlands and riparian corridors, human disturbances at nest sites and degradation of water quality in wetlands continue to threaten these birds.



Photo Credit: Missouri Department of Conservation

Recommendations

Snowy egrets are closely associated with riparian and wetland habitat with shrubs and robust emergent vegetation. Protection and restoration of quality wetland and riparian habitat are important for many species, including the snowy egrets.

Avoid project activities occurring within 100 feet along rivers, streams and wetland habitat within the range of this species between April 1 and October 1 since these birds stay near breeding habitat until migration. Erosion and sediment controls should be implemented, maintained and monitored for the duration of the project.

Refer to Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Wetlands and Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Streams and Rivers for additional guidelines.

Consider the balance between adverse and beneficial practices when determining the overall effect of a conservation practice.

Beneficial Practices

- Restore or maintain riparian habitats, bottomland forest, streambanks, streamside vegetation, wetlands, lakes, ponds, and marshes,
- Livestock exclusion from riparian, wetland and bottomland forest habitat.
- Controlling invasive plants in habitats where this species occurs.

- Establish wildlife-friendly vegetative buffers on the periphery of wetlands to reduce runoff and soil erosion.

Adverse Practices

- Destruction or degradation of lowland hardwood forests, riparian or wetland habitat from clearing, construction, timber harvest or other associated practices.
- Modifying natural water levels in wetlands where snowy egret are present.
- Unmanaged application of pesticides, animal waste or fertilizers that destroy or degrade habitats that support populations of this species.
- Construction of dams and other impoundments on rivers within the range of this species.
- Livestock grazing of wetlands, riparian and bottomland forest habitats.
- Establishing invasive vegetation, such as tall fescue or reed canary grass on a site or nearby where it could spread into the native plant community, and thus degrade or destroy habitat for this species.
- When prescribed burning, mowing, haying or other disturbances occur on wetland acres between April 1 and October 1 and more than 75% of the practice acres are disturbed.

Information Contacts

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 Telephone: 573-751-4115
<http://www.mdc.mo.gov/nathis/endangered/>

Missouri Department of Natural Resources
 Division of Environmental Quality
 P.O. Box 176
 Jefferson City, MO 65102-0176
 Telephone: 800-361-4827 / 573-751-1300
<http://www.dnr.mo.gov/env/index.html>

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
 Regulatory Branch
 700 Federal Building
 601 E. 12th Street
 Kansas City, MO 64106-2896
 Telephone: 816-389-3990

<http://www.nwk.usace.army.mil/>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
 Water, Wetlands, and Pesticides Division
 901 North 5th Street
 Kansas City, KS 66101
 Telephone: 913-551-7003 / 800-223-0425
<http://www.epa.gov/region7/>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
 Ecological Services Field Office
 101 Park DeVille Dr., Suite A
 Columbia, MO 65203
 Telephone: 573-234-2132
<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/partners/missouri.html>

Legal

The Missouri Department of Conservation prepared these guidelines for conservation practices with assistance from other state agencies, contractors, and others to provide guidance to those people who wish to voluntarily act to protect wildlife and habitat.

Compliance with these management guidelines is not required by the Missouri wildlife and forestry law or by any regulation of the Missouri Conservation Commission. Other federal, state or local laws may affect construction practices.

“State Endangered Status” is determined by the Missouri Conservation Commission under constitutional authority, and specific requirements for impacts to such species are expressed in the Missouri Wildlife Code, rule 3 CSR 10-4.111.