

Ways Watercraft Affect Loons

Canoes slip quietly into nesting areas and can startle loons off nests. **Fishing Boats**, especially bass and pike anglers, spend lots of time in waters perfect for nest sites. **Speedboats** send waves crashing into the shoreline. **Personal Watercraft** can speed in shallow water and may run over chicks.

**PLEASE OBEY
ALL LOON
NESTING
SIGNS!**



Most loon lakes are signed warning that a nest is near. Loons give a warning too. Their distress call sounds like a laugh. Listen for and heed this call. It means: **“Please move away!”**

If you see a loon “dancing” by raising its chest up out of the water and slapping the water with its wings, it is **URGENT** that you move away. You are in their territory!

What Everyone Can Do

Enjoy loons from a distance. Listen to their lovely, haunting calls. Enjoy the solitude of Montana. Loons need this solitude to breed and raise their chicks. If the loons are gone, your solitude might be slipping away, too.

The Montana Loon Society

The Montana Loon Society is a non-profit organization concerned about the Common Loon in Montana. An increase in human recreational pressures on lakes, as well as shoreline development and springtime angling in nesting areas has caused this concern.

THE MONTANA LOON SOCIETY'S PURPOSE IS TO:

Monitor Common Loon populations in Montana.

Increase public knowledge and awareness about loons.

Protect and enhance critical loon habitat and welfare.

Identify management or research needs and obtain funds for same.

Facilitate cooperation between government agencies, lakeshore owners, and the general public to accomplish these goals.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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Montana has many treasures, including its beautiful mountain lakes.

The Common Loon, known for its haunting calls and striking black and white breeding plumage, use a number of these lakes for their summer nesting grounds.

Watercraft operators are naturally drawn to these lakes and often come into close contact with loons. Responsible watercraft use will help ensure that both humans and loons continue to share Montana's lakes.

The Common Loon

Common Loons are large, goose-size, black and white diving birds that spend their summer on open fresh-water lakes and winter on the coast. They feed mostly on fish. They are 2-3 feet long, weigh 8-12 pounds and have a wingspan of 4 – 5 feet.

Approximate Range of the Common Loon in the Pacific Northwest



The Common Loon is not as common in the Western States as the name implies. Breeding pairs are found in only four states west of the Mississippi River. Montana has the largest population with approximately 200 birds. Most of these nest north of Missoula and west of the Continental Divide.

Montana's Nesting Loons

Of the 60 pairs that attempt to nest, only about 30 successfully hatch and raise 1 – 2 chicks each year. Nests are usually on small islands in marshy areas such as bays, coves, inlets or backwaters.

The nesting season in May and June is the loon's most **CRITICAL TIME**, and loons aren't like ducks and geese that have large broods. Loons only lay 2 eggs, which both parents take turns incubating for 28-29 days.

Boat Traffic Can Cause Loss of Eggs.

- ❖ **Loon parents leave** if watercraft come within 150 yards of the nest (the length of 1½ football fields) leaving the eggs without warmth or protection.
- ❖ **If disturbed often, loons abandon the nest.** A pair may renest if it isn't too late in the season, but they only have two chances. If two loons are together near inlets, marshy shorelines or backwaters in May or June, a nest site may have been disturbed.

Nursery Room

Loon chicks rest, feed, and grow in and around their territory during the months of June, July and August. Look for them in backwaters and along the shoreline.

Boat Traffic Can Cause Loss of Chicks.

- ❖ **Young chicks are not waterproof.** They need to be able to climb up on their parent's backs to stay warm and dry. When watercraft comes close, parents leave their chicks to defend their territory.
- ❖ **Young chicks are very buoyant** and can't dive quickly to get out of the way. They can be run over.
- ❖ **Chicks tire easily.** The presence of watercraft causes them to keep swimming instead of feeding and resting. This can weaken them affecting their ability to survive.

