Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)
Conservation Status Rank Summary

January 23, 2025

For details on assessment and ranking methodology, see: *Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species*

Rarity and Trends

Rank Factor	Date Assessed	Value	Score	Data Source	Comments
Rarity					
Range Extent	2024-12-03	S: 204303.9 km²	4.710	MTNHP Range Maps	None
Area of Occupancy	2024-12-03	2213 | 4km² cells	4.130	MTNHP Modeling	None
Number of Occurrences	2025-01-23	[6, 10]	1.380	MTNHP Data	approximately 6-10 discreete breeding areas
Population Size			-		**Factor not used in ranking.**
# of Occurrences in Good Condition			-		**Factor not used in ranking.**
% of Area Occupied in Good Condition			-		**Factor not used in ranking.**
Environmental Specificity	2011-12-21	Narrow	-	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	**Factor not used in ranking.** Narrow specialist. Species nests in large trees in riparian and Ponderosa pine forests. | Methodology: NS (2003) | Original Score: B
Rarity is calculated by averaging weighted factor scores: **((4.71 × 1) + (4.13 × 2) + (1.38 × 1)) / 4 = 3.59**					
Trends					
Short-term Trend	2023-12-20	4.1%	0.000	IMBCR	IMBCR trend in population estimates for Bird Conservation Region 17. "-Point Estimate"
Long-term Trend	2011-12-21	*	0.000	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	Over past 200 years this species has undergone large fluctuations in abundance though to be caused by the availability of key food resources and habitat alteration. Riparian areas and forests that the species rely on have been impacted since European arrival, but within Montana the species is probably stable within +/-25%. | Methodology: NS (2003) | Original Score: E
Trends score is calculated by summing weighted short and long-term trend scores: **((0.00 × 2) + (0.00 × 1)) = 0.00**					

Threats

Rank Factor	Date Assessed	Value	Score	Data Source	Comments
Threats					
Overall Threat Impact		High	1.830		Habitat loss, altered hydrology, and timber harvest are probably the greatest threats to the species. Species was historically shot for brilliant red plumage and because they were considered an agricultural pest and did damage to utility poles. Vehicle
Intrinsic Vulnerability	2011-12-21	Not intrinsically vulnerable	-	MTNHP Species Rank Data Table	**Factor not used in ranking.** Not Intrinsically Vulnerable. Species matures quickly, reproduces frequently, and/or has a high fecundity such that populations recover quickly (5 years or 2 generations) from decreases in abundance. Species has good dispersal capabilities such that extirpated populations generally become reestablished through natural recolonization. | Methodology: NS (2003) | Original Score: C
Threat score is calculated from Overall Threat Impact when available or Intrinsic Vulnerability if not: **(1.83) = 1.83**					

Individual Threats Data

Threat Category	Date Assessed	Impact Score	Scope	Severity	Immediacy	Comments
Residential & Commercial Development	2026-03-26	Low	Restricted	Slight	High	Encroachment of development into floodplains of large rivers and streams constricts lateral channel migration that leads to reduced floodplain processes that create and maintain cottonwood forests important for this species. Removal of injured, dead, and dying large-diameter trees and dead branches on private properties in river bottoms and in forested areas removes important nest trees and foraging resources.
Agriculture & Aquaculture	None	Medium	Restricted	Serious	High	Multiple Level 2 threats - see Additional Threat Details below.
Biological Resource Use	2026-03-26	Medium	Restricted	Serious	High	Post-fire salvage logging removes nesting and forage trees. Encroachment of trees into open savannah habitat may reduce habitat quality
Natural System Modifications	None	Low	Restricted	Moderate	High	Multiple Level 2 threats - see Additional Threat Details below.
Pollution	2026-03-26	Medium	Large	Moderate	High	Use of pesticides and herbicides reduces prey base (i.e., invertebrates).

Climate Change & Severe Weather	None	Medium	Pervasive	Moderate	High	Multiple Level 2 threats - see Additional Threat Details below.
Threat Tally: 0 - Very High, 0 - High, 4 - Medium, 2 - Low Overall Threat Impact* = High						

*See Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species for calculation of Overall Threat Impact based on the number and impact of individual threats.

Conservation Status Rank Calculation

Raw score

Rarity: (3.59 × 70%) + Threats: (1.83 × 30%) + Trends: (0.00) = 3.06

Calculated Rank: S3

Accepted Rank	S3B
Date Approved	2001-08-01
Approval Authority	Montana Species of Concern Committee
Rank Justification	Species is uncommon across eastern Montana in forested environments. It appears stable but it facing threats from habitat loss due to fire and conversion of riparian forest to agriculture.

Supplementary Information

Montana Natural Heritage Program. 2021. Conservation Status Assessment Definitions, Process, Rank Factors, and Calculation of State Ranks for Montana Species. 18 p.
https://mtnhp.mt.gov/docs/Montana_State_Rank_Criteria_20211201.pdf

Montana Field Guide Species Account:
https://fieldguide.mt.gov/speciesDetail.aspx?elcode=ABNYF04040

Predicted Suitable Habitat Model:
https://mtnhp.mt.gov/resources/models/?elcode=ABNYF04040

Information Needs

Information needs are assessed by considering the availability of factors used to assess species status as well as the quality of these assessments. Current information availability and quality to inform Conservation Status Rank for this species are highlighted.

Rank Factor	Assessment Category	Value	Criteria
General Status	Status Quality	Adequate	Calculated rank has low uncertainty and is represented by a single rank (e.g. S3); accepted rank may be adjusted to a range rank (e.g. S2S3)
		Poor	Rank assessed as SU or calculated rank has notable uncertainty and corresponds to a range rank with 2 or more values (e.g. S2?, S1S3, or S4S5)
Rarity	Range Quality	Adequate	Range polygon adequately represents area of probable occupancy and does not include substantial unoccupied areas; range may be adequately defined and still include areas of unsuitable habitat (e.g. mountain ranges for plains species)
		Marginal	Range polygon defined, but may include or exclude notable areas where the species may or may not occur on the landscape
		Poor	Range polygon not defined
	Habitat Quality	Adequate	Species-habitat relationship is well-defined (e.g. relevant literature or robust habitat model available)
		Marginal	Understanding of species-habitat relationship is adequate among some but not all habitats (e.g. literature covers similar habitats outside of Montana or habitat model performance is only somewhat adequate)
		Poor	Species-habitat relationship is not well understood
Threats	Threat Quality	Adequate	Threat Impact is a single value (including "Unthreatened")
		Marginal	Threat Impact assessed at more than one value (e.g. "High - Medium")
		Poor	Threat Impact is Unknown but Intrinsic Vulnerability is assessed
		Unknown	Threat Impact is Unknown and Intrinsic Vulnerability is not assessed
Trends	Recency	Current	Short-term Trend assessment date less than 10 years old
		Out of Date but Adequate	Short-term Trend assessment date is more than 10 years old or Unknown, but species is Unthreatened
		Out of Date	Short-term Trend assessment date more than 10 years old
		Not Available	Short-term Trend data are not available
	Trend Quality	Sufficient	Short-term Trend assessed at a single value or multiple values with a minimum trend greater than -10% (stable or increasing)
		Unknown but Sufficient	Short-term Trend is Unknown, but species is Unthreatened
		Poor	Short-term Trend is less than -10% (in decline) with two or more values selected
		Unknown	Short-term Trend is Unknown

Summary of Information Availability

Information to assess status is available

Summary of Information Needs

No further information is needed

Additional Threat Details

The table below contains the complete threats assessment for this species. While the Conservation Status Rank Calculation is based on cumulative, broadly categorized (Level 1) threats data, threats are assessed and tracked for more specifically categorized (Level 2) threats when available.

Threat Category	Date Assessed	Assessed By	Data Source	Scope	Severity	Imme-diacy	Comments
Residential & Commercial Development - 1.1 - Housing & Urban Areas	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Restricted	Slight	High	Encroachment of development into floodplains of large rivers and streams constricts lateral channel migration that leads to reduced floodplain processes that create and maintain cottonwood forests important for this species. Removal of injured, dead, and dying large-diameter trees and dead branches on private properties in river bottoms and in forested areas removes important nest trees and foraging resources.
Agriculture & Aquaculture - 2.1 - Annual & Perennial Non-Timber Crops	2025-01-23	None	Expert Opinion	Restricted	Serious	High	Habitat loss due to conversion of riparian forest to agriculture.
Agriculture & Aquaculture - 2.3 - Livestock Farming & Ranching	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Restricted	Moderate	High	Removal of injured, dead, and dying large-diameter trees on private properties to maintain open rangelands removes important nesting and foraging trees. Overgrazing of riparian areas can limit establishment and growth of cottonwood trees used for nesting and foraging.
Biological Resource Use - 5.3 - Logging & Wood Harvesting	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Restricted	Serious	High	Post-fire salvage logging removes nesting and forage trees. Encroachment of trees into open savannah habitat may reduce habitat quality
Natural System Modifications - 7.1 - Fire & Fire Suppression	2025-01-23	Dan Bachen	Expert Opinion	Restricted	Moderate	High	Although fire at low to moderate severity may benefit the species through creation of snags, high intensity fires in southeast Montana have eliminated forests in some areas and regeneration is slow to occur if it occurs at all.
Natural System Modifications - 7.2 - Dams & Water Management/Use	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Restricted	Moderate	High	Lack of flood-related disturbance regimes in dammed large river systems reduces floodplain processes critical for establishment of important deciduous tree species for woodpeckers (e.g., cottonwoods).
Natural System Modifications - 7.3 - Other Ecosystem Modifications	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Restricted	Moderate	Moderate	Lack of floodplain connection across large swaths of streams and rivers results in drying out of floodplains which may allow fires to burn at high intensity in valley bottoms and through riparian areas. Causes of stream degradation include historical logging practices that have resulted in fewer older trees available to fall into stream channels, purposeful stream channel manipulation (e.g., ditching, re-

							routing), and loss of beavers from areas of their historical range.
Pollution - 9.3 - Agricultural & Forestry Effluents	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Large	Moderate	High	Use of pesticides and herbicides reduces prey base (i.e., invertebrates).
Climate Change & Severe Weather - 11.1 - Habitat Shifting & Alteration	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Restricted	Moderate	High	Widespread stream incision and over-widening results in shifts to upland vegetation communities in perched floodplains that diminish important processes for creating and maintaining streamside woody vegetation, out-compete woody riparian vegetation that can get established, and/or allow for disturbances to function outside of their normal range of variation in the floodplain (e.g., wildfires).
Climate Change & Severe Weather - 11.4 - Storms & Flooding	2026-03-26	Dan Bachen	SWAP Assessment	Pervasive	Moderate	Moderate	Reduced snowpack and spring/summer precipitation leads to diminished flows which lead to less water available within stream systems to cause erosion and deposition that leads to recruitment of cottonwoods used for nesting and foraging. Audubonâ€™s Survival by Degrees project predicts a severe reduction in species breeding habitat with warming of 1.5C