

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

The Brian Head Mountainsnail



Photo: Bill Bosworth,
Utah Division of Wildlife Resources

A MOUNTAINTOP SNAIL

The Brian Head Mountainsnail is found in only one place on earth—near the summit of Brian Head, in Iron County, southwestern Utah. It occupies a scant area on Brian Head Peak, which is likely less than six acres. Within the tiny range of this minute snail is a ski resort. Scientists warn that if the ski resort expands, this mountainsnail will go extinct. Other threats include sheep grazing and recreation. Without federal protection, we may lose this fragile mollusk forever.

A PRECARIOUS EXISTENCE

Being a fragile snail in alpine habitat that experiences heavy recreation and livestock grazing puts this creature's future in limbo. Scientists describe its habitat as "high, cold, and barren," but important alpine vegetation, such as currants, meadow rue, Indian paintbrush, and bristlecone pine, would benefit from protection for the Brian Head Mountainsnail. So too would other snails on the mountain peak, including the western glass-snail and other mountainsnails.

KNOW YOUR SNAIL

- **Wanted Alive:** while empty shells were likely found as early as 1935, living individuals of this species were not found until 1998.
- **Picky about its Home:** this snail is found only on limestone or basalt at nearly 11,000 feet and almost always among clumps of currants.
- **Possible Decline:** while this mountainsnail has been found at seven sites on Brian Head Peak, three of those sites had only empty shells and may be extirpated colonies.
- **The Solitary Sort:** this snail usually occurs alone, living under surface rocks, but has also been found in groups of up to four.

CLIMATE CHAOS

Warming temperatures could wipe the Brian Head Mountainsnail off the face of the earth. Already near a mountain summit, this fragile snail would have nowhere to go.

