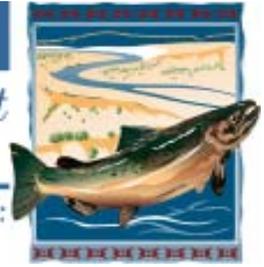


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

*Hanford Reach National Monument
Saddle Mountain National Wildlife Refuge*

... protecting the last of the free-flowing Columbia River.



February 25, 2005

Tallying Up the Eagles

Wintering Bald Eagles are in abundance along the Columbia River and Hanford Reach National Monument biologists are conducting annual surveys of eagles and water birds. Two surveys have been completed so far with one more planned during March. A survey of the Hanford Reach for eagles is conducted by boat approximately monthly throughout the winter. The boat is a 22' inboard jet boat with a cover. The boat is run at a steady rate of approximately 20-25 mph, and two observers are used to scan either side of the river using binoculars, from the boat. The route covers 45 miles of river, from Snyder boat launch to Vernita Bridge. Adult eagles and immature eagles are noted and distinguished by their plumage. The river route is run the same way each survey, in approximately the same amount of time to standardize the survey. This type of survey is not an

absolute count, but, because the survey is run in this manner, an index of eagle abundance can be developed. This index can be used to measure trends in eagle abundance over time, and from year to year.



Both counts this year have recorded 17 Bald Eagles, as compared to an average of 18 for last years survey. Interestingly, the mid-winter count was down this year as compared to 28 eagles counted during January in 2004. It is speculated that due to mild winter temperatures, the eagles may be dispersed as there is more open water available for fishing. Numerous white pelicans, herons, shorebirds and waterfowl have also been observed.

Northwest Public Radio's Rachel McDonald, joined us for a recent survey to record a broadcast. Wildlife Biologist Heidi Newsome provided dialogue during the trip and gave an interview on survey results and eagle biology. The outreach broadcast was well received and enlightened the local community to the methods Service biologists use to study wintering Bald Eagles.

