

BALD EAGLE
(Haliaeetus leucocephalus)

STATUS: Removed from the list of Threatened and Endangered Species (72 FR 37346, July 9, 2007; 76 FR 54711, September 2, 2011). The bald eagle remains protected under The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (Eagle Act), which provides a definition of “disturb” (72 FR 31132, June 5, 2007) and permit regulations that authorize limited “take” of eagles (74 FR 46836, September 11, 2009) (<http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/baldeagle.htm>).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: Large bird of prey, 0.9 meter (3 feet) long with a 1.8-2.1 meter (6-7 feet) wingspan. At about 5-years old, bald eagles acquire adult plumage of a white head and tail, dark brownish-black body, and a yellow bill; plus unfeathered legs and feet. Immature bald eagles are mostly dark without the characteristic pure white head and tail (they may be confused with golden eagles). Young bald eagles typically have white mottling on their dark body/wing feathers and dark mottling on lighter heads and tails. Feeds primarily on fish, but waterfowl, small mammals, and carrion (dead animals) constitute a portion of the diet.

HABITAT: Nationally, eagles are usually found nesting in trees along sea coasts, lakes, and rivers. In Arizona, nests are typically placed in large deciduous or coniferous trees (alive and dead) and cliff ledges/pinnacles near creeks, rivers, and reservoirs with a commanding view of the area.

RANGE: Historical: Bald eagles ranged throughout the contiguous U.S., Canada, and northern Mexico, but the historical distribution within Arizona and New Mexico is not well known.

Current: The largest nesting populations occur in Alaska and Canada, as well as the Pacific Northwest, the Great Lakes, and the Southeast Coast. Nesting populations have increased throughout the lower 48 states in the U.S. to about 10,000 pairs. In Arizona, a small, primarily year-round resident breeding population of approximately 50 pairs nest in the central part of the state along the Salt, Verde, Gila, Bill Williams, and Agua Fria rivers; and Tonto, Oak, Beaver, Cibecue, Tangle, and Canyon creeks, and at higher elevations near Lake Mary, Woods Canyon, Canyon de Chelly, and along the San Francisco and Little Colorado rivers and Silver Creek. These areas occur in Apache, Coconino, Gila, Graham, La Paz, Maricopa, Mohave, Pinal, and Yavapai counties. Nesting bald eagles in Arizona typically lay eggs in January and February and fledge young in May and early June.

From about October through March, wintering, migrant bald eagles originating from northern states and unmated/immature Arizona hatched bald eagles can occur in Arizona, with at least 200 to 300 individuals observed each year. Migrant and unmated/immature bald eagles can be found in more unusual and diverse locations (i.e. adjacent to highways, grasslands, etc.). The greatest numbers of wintering eagles are found along the Mogollon Rim from Flagstaff east through the White Mountains.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: The known Arizona nesting population has nearly doubled over the last 20 years. Continued management in Arizona occurs as described in the Conservation Assessment and Strategy and associated MOU signed in 2007 by land managers (<http://www.swbemc.org/pdf/NGTR173%20BaldEagleConservationAgreement.pdf>).

NOTES: A Recovery Plan for the Southwest population was completed in September 1982 (<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Documents/SpeciesDocs/BaldEagle/SWBaldEagle.pdf>). The bald eagle was previously threatened and endangered due to reproductive failure caused by pesticide use, primarily DDT; unrestricted killing by humans; habitat loss, human encroachment on nesting sites; entanglement in fishing line; reduction in native fish species; illegal shooting; and heavy metals.

The bald eagle was reclassified to threatened nationwide in 1995 then proposed for removal from the list of Threatened and Endangered Species in 1999 and 2006. Nationally, the bald eagle was removed from the list in 2007. Its recovery is largely due to habitat protection and management actions.

From 2008 to 2010, the bald eagle in the Sonoran Desert Area of central Arizona was returned to the list of Threatened and Endangered Species, while the Service conducted a 12-month Status Review. On September 30, 2010, following the Service's determination that the bald eagle in the Sonoran Desert Area did not qualify as a Distinct Population Segment (75 FR 8601, Feb. 25, 2010), the U.S. District Court dissolved the injunction that led to the bald eagle being placed back on the list in 2008. A final rule published on September 2, 2011 (76 FR 54711) notified the public of the change in the bald eagle's Arizona status and officially revised the list of Threatened and Endangered Species.

Removal of the bald eagle in central Arizona from the list of Threatened and Endangered Species will not affect the protection provided under the Eagle Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and other Federal and state laws. More information on management and life history is available at <http://SWBEMC.org>.