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For the First Time in a Century, California Condors Will Take Flight in the Pacific Northwest

Partners help the nation's largest land bird return to the northern portion of its historic range

For the first time in 100 years, the endangered California condor will return to the Pacific Northwest. Once on the brink of extinction, this iconic species has made significant steps towards recovery. Today, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and the Yurok Tribe announced a final rule that will help facilitate the creation of a new California condor release facility for the reintroduction of condors to Yurok Ancestral Territory and Redwood National Park, which is in the northern portion of the species' historic range. This facility will be operated by the Northern California Condor Restoration Program, a partnership between Redwood National Park and Yurok Tribe.

The rule will designate the condors affiliated with this program as a nonessential, experimental population under the Endangered Species Act. This status will provide needed flexibility in managing the reintroduced population, reduce the regulatory impact of reintroducing a federally listed species, and facilitate cooperative conservation.

“The California condor is a shining example of how a species can be brought back from the brink of extinction through the power of partnerships,” said Paul Souza, Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s California-Great Basin Region. “I would like to thank the Yurok Tribe, National Park Service, our state partners, and others, who were instrumental in this project. Together, we can help recover and conserve this magnificent species for future generations.”

With a wingspan of almost 10 feet, the California condor is the largest soaring land bird in North America. These massive vultures are essential members of their ecosystems and play a significant role in the spiritual and cultural beliefs of the Yurok Tribe, as well as many other Tribes, throughout northern California and the Pacific Northwest.

Over the past twelve years, the Yurok Tribe has led this reintroduction effort and completed a tremendous amount of legwork to prepare for the return of condors to the Pacific Northwest. Extensive environmental assessments, contaminant analyses, and community outreach were just

a few of the requisite tasks. The Tribe completed this endeavor because the condor is an irreplaceable part of a sacred cultural landscape. Pending completion of the condor release facility, the anticipated release of condors would be fall of 2021 or spring of 2022.

“For the last 20 years, the Yurok Tribe has been actively engaged in the restoration of the rivers, forests and prairies in our ancestral territory. The reintroduction of the condor is one component of this effort to reconstruct the diverse environmental conditions that once existed in our region. We are extremely proud of the fact that our future generations will not know a world without prey-go-neesh. We are excited to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Redwood National Park on the final stages of the project and beyond,” said Joseph L. James, Chairman of the Yurok Tribe.

California condors prehistorically ranged from California to Florida and, in contemporary times, from Western Canada to Northern Mexico. By the mid-20th century, condor populations drastically declined due to poaching and poisoning. In 1967, the California condor was listed as endangered. In 1982, only 23 condors survived worldwide. By 1987, all remaining wild condors were placed into a captive breeding program. Thus, began an intensive recovery program to save the species from extinction.

As a result of exemplary conservation partnerships, and intensive captive breeding and reintroduction efforts, there are now over 300 California condors in the wild in California, Arizona, Utah and Baja California. However, the bird is still listed as endangered and lead poisoning (largely caused by ingesting lead shot or fragments of lead bullets when feeding on carcasses) is listed as one of the species’ primary threats.

“The return of condors to the skies above Redwood National and State Parks is a critical step toward recovery of this majestic landscape,” said Steve Mietz, superintendent of Redwood National and State Parks. “Working with our friends and partners, the Yurok Tribe and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we will continue the unparalleled success story of condor recovery allowing all Americans to visit the tallest trees in the world while watching one of the largest birds in the world soar overhead.”

“We are excited for this opportunity to bring these iconic birds back to California habitat that has not been occupied for decades,” said Stafford Lehr, Deputy Director of Wildlife and Fisheries for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. “These birds are important to the biodiversity of the landscape and we are pleased with the collaboration amongst state and federal agencies, the Yurok Tribe, and private companies to conserve this species.”

The final rule exempts most incidental take of condors within the nonessential experimental population, provided the take is unintentional and not due to negligent conduct. Although the rule exempts most incidental take, certain activities are prohibited within 656 feet (200 meters) of an occupied nest.

These include habitat alteration (e.g., removing trees, erecting structures, altering the nest structure or perches near the nest) and significant visual or noise disturbance (e.g., tree felling, chainsaws, helicopter overflights, concrete cutters, fireworks or explosives). There are two

exemptions: emergency fuel treatment activities by federal, state, tribal, or local government agencies to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires and responses to wildfire or other emergencies.

The final rule will publish in the *Federal Register* on March 24, 2021. The document can be found on www.regulations.gov by searching under docket number FWS–R1–ES–2018–0033. More information is available here: <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=66364>

The Yurok Tribe, California's largest federally recognized tribe, exercises its inherent sovereignty in order to conserve, protect and restore Yurok natural resources and culture and the health and social well-being of existing and future Tribal members through its exercise of sovereign rights, culturally integrated methods and high quality scientific practices in coordination with the community, public agencies and private organizations. For more information about our work, visit <http://www.yuroktribe.org/> or connect with us via [Facebook](#).

The National Park Service Organic Act of 1916 established a single system of federally managed parks, monuments and reserved lands to promote and regulate their use and "...to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." For more information about the National Park Service, please visit [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Flickr](#). For more information regarding Redwood National Park visit <https://www.nps.gov/redw/index.htm>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information about our work and the people who make it happen, visit <https://www.fws.gov/cno/> or connect with us via [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Flickr](#).