

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## BALD EAGLE, THE NATIONAL SYMBOL, PROPOSED FOR ENDANGERED LIST

The bald eagle, symbol of the Nation, representative of courage, strength, and independence, has been proposed for listing as endangered in 43 States and as threatened in five others, Keith M. Schreiner, Associate Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced.

"It is ironic and particularly disturbing to me that at the time of the Bicentennial the living embodiment of the spirit of America is in such a predicament," Schreiner said. "The action we are taking today will help ensure that this magnificent bird will be around for the tricentennial."

Many people believe the bald eagle is already listed as endangered. The species is protected by the Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940, but only the southern subspecies is listed as endangered. The proposal, published in the July 12 Federal Register, would provide maximum protection for the species by extending the coverage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to all bald eagles in the continental United States. (Bald eagles do not occur in Hawaii, and their population in Alaska is considered healthy.) The 1973 Act prohibits any Federal agency from authorizing, funding, or carrying out any action that would jeopardize the existence of listed species.

Endangered species receive complete Federal protection. None can be killed, placed into commerce, or possessed without a special permit. Permits are given only for scientific purposes or to enhance the propagation or survival of the animal. Threatened species regulations can be as stringent as endangered species controls, or more relaxed.

For the convenience of wildlife managers, bald eagles have been arbitrarily separated into two subspecies with 40 degrees north latitude dividing the northern and southern breeding populations. The southern subspecies was listed as endangered when the first list was compiled in 1967, with the northern subspecies remaining unlisted. However, confusion has resulted, since the two populations have overlapping ranges. The current rulemaking resolves this problem by simply listing the species, Haliaeetus leucocephalus, as endangered in the "lower" 48 States except in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Oregon, and Washington where it would be listed as threatened.

The proposed listing of the bald eagle as endangered in some States and threatened in others expresses the biological conditions in these respective areas. While the outlook for the species is not bad in every State, and some regions have even experienced encouraging increases, existing populations are believed to be depleted enough to warrant the additional protection of the Endangered Species Act. A provision of this law would help slow further deterioration of this species' critical habitat.

(over)

"As we pause and reflect about the progress this country has made in the last two centuries, many of us in the wildlife field find that the plight of the bald eagle is common to many other forms of wildlife in America." Schreiner said. "Civilization has drastically reduced the available habitat for these creatures and it is precisely this loss of living space that is the major threat to wildlife today. Losses of eagle habitat have been particularly severe in the lower Great Lakes region, New York, and New England.

"In addition, in some areas of the country, the noble bird can't even hatch its own eggs. Pesticide residues have so contaminated its body that egg shells become thin and break when it tries to hatch them. Only a single nesting pair of bald eagles remains in New York State where they used to be common...and this pair didn't produce any offspring last year. The 33 pairs in Maine produced only 14 offspring."

Shooting continues to be the leading cause of premature death among adult and immature bald eagles and accounts for 40 to 50 percent of birds picked up by field personnel. Some people misidentify them for other species while hunting and others deliberately kill them because of an ingrained prejudice against all birds of prey.

There is still much hope for the bald eagle, however. While in the entire "lower 48" there are only about 700 active nests, the population in Alaska is thriving with an estimated 10,000 nesting pairs. In the upper Great Lakes region and on the Pacific Coast, eagle populations currently appear to be maintaining themselves. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists working with State game and fish agencies have for the last 2 years successfully transplanted bald eagle eggs from healthy nests in Wisconsin and Minnesota to nests in Maine where eagles are riddled with pesticides. The species has also benefited from programs such as captive breeding, monitoring, and other research conducted at State and Federal facilities around the Nation.

"No single organization or governmental action can save a species by itself," said Schreiner, "because it takes the concerted effort and determination of individuals and governmental agencies at all levels to make a lasting impact. But it has been done--with the Key deer, with the American alligator, and other species. Fortunately for the bald eagle, we have this support, so I am confident it will survive, too.

"But I am more concerned about the many other species, each equally important in the ecosystem which nobody hears or cares about. Time's running out for them. We should make this listing of the bald eagle symbolic in another sense; it should stand for our resolve to save all species which have been so much a part of our wildlife heritage over the last 200 years."

Interested persons may participate in this rulemaking by submitting written comments to the Director (FWS/LE), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 19183, Washington, D.C. 20036. The record will be kept open for comments through September 10, 1976.