**Bald Eagle Sustainable Take Report**

**Questions and Answers**

**What is this technical report?**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is publishing a report titled *Update of bald eagle take limits for the Atlantic, Central, Mississippi, and Northern Pacific Eagle Management Units*. This report is a technical update of the scientific information for bald eagles published in the Service’s [Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement](https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/FINAL-PEIS-Permits-to-Incidentally-Take-Eagles.pdf) (PEIS), which was finalized in December 2016. In the PEIS, the Service committed to updating population size estimates and take limits for both bald and golden eagles no less than once every six years.

In March 2021, the Service published the report [*Bald Eagle Population Size: 2020 Update*](https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/bald-eagle-population-size-2020.pdf). In that technical update, the Service provided the newest estimates for the bald eagle population in the lower 48 states, totaling 316,700 individuals, which includes 71,467 occupied nests. This new population estimate shows that the bald eagle population has quadrupled in the lower 48 states since the last population estimate from 2009.

This subsequent report fulfills the commitment for estimating what the allowable level of take of bald eagles will be, as part of the permitting process under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The allowable take limit is the amount of take that is both biologically sustainable and consistent with the management objective of maintaining stable or increasing populations. The Service is mandated to permit unintentional take of bald eagles from lawful activities if the take maintains the preservation of the species as specified in the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and interpreted in the PEIS.

This report includes take estimates for bald eagle take in the coterminous United States for four of six eagle management units (EMU) – the Atlantic Flyway, Mississippi Flyway, Central Flyway, and Pacific Flyway North EMUs.

Published recently in the journal Ecological Applications, the updated 2021 population size estimate for [golden eagles](https://usfws.medium.com/get-the-latest-on-golden-eagles-ea165eba2e64) is for the interior western United States, which supports the majority of the population and has been surveyed by the Service regularly since 2006. The population estimate update for the interior western U.S. is 31,800, similar to the estimate in 2016. The total population size for the golden eagle throughout the United States in 2016 was estimated to be 40,000. Given the numbers for the interior western U.S. have remained stable, we believe that total population estimate is still relevant.

**How was this report created?**

To estimate the bald eagle population in the lower 48 states, Migratory Bird Program [pilot biologists](https://www.fws.gov/news/blog/index.cfm/2020/3/18/Conserving-Americas-Birds-by-Keeping-Our-Eyes-in-the-Sky) and observers from many Service regions, programs, and contract observers conducted aerial surveys over a two-year period in 2018 and 2019. The Service flew aerial surveys over high-density eagle nesting areas to generate accurate estimates and count occupied nesting territories.

To obtain information on the lower density eagle nesting areas, the agency worked with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to use eBird relative abundance data to acquire information on the areas that were not practical to fly as part of our aerial surveys. Based on those two major sets of data for this population estimate, the Service next created an integrated population model to expand the estimates of the number of occupied nests across the plot area to estimates of the entire population in the lower 48 states. Information on survival rates, productivity, and breeding rates provided the information needed to make this conclusion. The final result is an estimated population with 316,700 individual bald eagles now living in the lower 48 states.

Based on that new population estimate, the Service updated the take level model for bald eagles and added flexibility to the model to accommodate the type of density dependence that likely regulates bald eagle population size. The 2016 PEIS used a take rate of 0.06 of the population, which has been changed to 0.09 to reflect the updated biological information on bald eagles.

Although the Service allocates permits for the removal of nests or take of specific individuals, the number of allocated permits that are filled is not known, so actual take is much less than the number of permits allocated. For example, the actual number of bald eagles permitted for take was 490 eagles in 2020, which is approximately 2% of our estimated allowable take.

Given the relatively few requests for take permits and the continued rapid increase in the bald eagle population throughout most of the conterminous U.S., actual take of bald eagles is sustainable. These higher sustainable take limits will not in themselves lead to increased take.

**Why are there no numbers for the Pacific Flyway South area in the southwestern United States or for the Alaska area?**

The bald eagle population in the southwestern United States is comparatively small and patchily distributed. That population is carefully monitored by the Arizona Game and Fish Department and partners annually, and those monitoring data provide the best information on the status of this population. The broader surveys we conducted elsewhere across the coterminous United States are not practical in the southwest.

Similarly, due to the vast area and logistical complications, the survey method used in the lower 48 states was not implemented in Alaska. The take limits for these two management units will remain as specified in the 2016 PEIS.

**What laws protect bald eagles?**

Bald eagles are protected by two major federal laws: the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. In addition, state governments can enact state laws that afford more protection than federal laws to conserve wildlife species. Bald eagles may be protected by a state law such as a state endangered species law. Please contact your state fish and wildlife agency to see if your state has laws or management guidelines applicable to eagles.

**Where can I get more information?**

This technical report is the second in a series of reports that have been published on bald and golden eagles. For more information on bald eagle management and additional background, please visit: <https://www.fws.gov/birds/management/managed-species/eagle-management.php>.