



News Release

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Northern Aplomado Falcons Will Return to Chihuahuan Desert Habitat

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today it has approved a rule reintroducing the rare northern aplomado falcon back into its historical range in New Mexico. Falcons born in captivity will be reintroduced in southern New Mexico and allowed to disperse into Arizona under a special provision in the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Reintroductions could begin as early as August. Under the rule, falcons would be released in groups of five to seven on private and public lands, with the total anticipated annual release not to exceed 150 birds.

The state lines of New Mexico and Arizona will form the boundaries for a new non-essential, experimental population of the endangered northern aplomado falcon. Falcons habitat includes Chihuahuan desert grasslands in both states.

The reintroduction is part of the plan to recover the rare bird. The falcon was listed as endangered in 1986. Under the non-essential experimental population designation, any birds in Arizona or New Mexico are no longer considered endangered, although they will continue to have some protections under the ESA. The designation allows greater flexibility for land managers where falcons occur.

The experimental, re-introduction program will be evaluated every five years.

Land within the falcon's preferred habitat area is both privately and publicly owned and comprises 28.6 million acres. The States of Arizona and New Mexico, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Department of Defense, National Park Service and the Service all manage lands in the area.

“Our goal is to establish a self-sustaining resident population. We will reintroduce up to 150 falcons annually in small groups to encourage socialization,” said Dr. Benjamin N. Tuggle, acting Southwest Regional Director. “To do this, we will be relying on the support and cooperation of many people.”

The falcons will come from The Peregrine Fund's captive propagation facility which also supplies birds for the Service's ongoing recovery efforts in Texas. The Peregrine Fund is an organization established to conserve birds of prey in nature.

Potential release sites include the following elements:

- Proximity to potentially suitable habitat such as open grasslands that have scattered trees/shrubs/yucca for nesting and perching,
- Available prey (insects, small to medium-sized birds, and rodents),
- Minimal natural and man-made hazards (i.e., predators, open-water tanks),
- Access for logistical support, and
- The extent of potentially suitable habitat surrounding a potential release site and its proximity to other similar habitats.

In partnership with The Peregrine Fund, more than 1,000 falcons have been released in Texas at national wildlife refuges or on private lands under safe harbor agreements, another provision allowed under the ESA. Private lands under agreements now encompass 1.8 million acres from western Texas to the Gulf Coast. To date, more than 244 young have successfully fledged. “We’ve had good success over the 20 years we’ve been putting birds in Texas,” said Tuggle. “I expect the same outcome in New Mexico and Arizona.”

The falcon has been seen sporadically over the years in the two states but has only successfully nested once since the 1950’s – a time when pesticide contamination and habitat alteration caused severe population declines.

The northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*) is a subspecies of the aplomado falcon, and a member of the falcon family (Falconidae). It is smaller than a prairie falcon, and larger than the American kestrel and merlin. The northern aplomado falcon is readily identified by its bold facial pattern with a distinctive white stripe above the eye, a strongly banded tail, and brown “vest.”

For a copy of the final rule and supporting documents visit our web site at <http://www.fws.gov/ifw2es/NewMexico/> or call (505) 346-2525 or write to New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office, 2105 Osuna Road NE, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87113.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Visit the Service’s website at <http://www.fws.gov>.