



# News Release

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## **Service Determines Bald Eagle in the Sonoran Desert Does Not Warrant Protection under List of Endangered and Threatened Species**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced the results of a revised 12-month finding on a petition to list the Sonoran Desert Area population of bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). After review of the scientific and commercial information used in its previous determination, the Service has found that the Sonoran Desert Area population of bald eagle does not qualify as a distinct population segment (DPS) and listing the Sonoran Desert Area population of bald eagle is not warranted at this time.

Pursuant to a November 30, 2011, court order, the Service drafted a new 12-month finding on the petition to list the Sonoran Desert Area population of bald eagle as a DPS. The court ordered the Service to base this new 12-month finding on the information that was used to reach the February 25, 2010, 12-month finding that this population was not a listable entity under the ESA.

To determine if a DPS designation is appropriate, the Service has a three-step evaluation process. First, the Service determines whether a vertebrate population is discrete and, if the population is discrete, then determines whether the population is significant. If the population is determined to be both discrete and significant, then the DPS policy requires the Service to determine if the species would meet the requirements for endangered or threatened under the ESA.

The Service determined that the Sonoran Desert Area population of bald eagle does meet the discreteness criteria under DPS policy. However, the Service determined that this population does not meet the significance requirement. After reviewing the 2010 information, as required by the court, the Service found no direct or indirect evidence that would indicate persistence in the Sonoran Desert Area is biologically or ecologically important to the taxon as a whole. The Service also found that: (1) loss of the population would not result in a significant gap in the range; (2) the population does not represent the only surviving natural occurrence of the bald eagle; (3) and the population's genetic characteristics do not differ markedly from those of other bald eagle populations.

The Service then went one step further to provide additional information about the Sonoran Desert Area population of bald eagle and conducted a threats assessment detailing the nature, scope, and

likely effect of the threats to the population and the species to determine if the species would meet the listing requirements for endangered or threatened under the ESA, were it a listable entity. Based on the best available information, none of these poses a significant threat at a population level. If the Sonoran Desert Area population of the bald eagle were a listable entity, listing would not be warranted.

The Sonoran Desert Area population includes all bald eagle territories within Arizona, the Copper Basin breeding area in California near the Colorado River, and the territories of interior Sonora, Mexico, that occur within the Sonoran Desert and adjacent transitional communities.

The Sonoran Desert population of bald eagles continues to be protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This finding will not affect the status of the Sonoran Desert population of the bald eagle under State laws or suspend any other legal protections provided by State law.

This finding will be available on the Internet at <http://www.regulations.gov> at Docket Number FWS–R2–ES–2008–0059, and <http://www.fws.gov/southwest>. Supporting documentation used in preparing this finding is available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southwest Regional Office, 500 Gold Ave SW, Room 6034, Albuquerque, NM 87102. Please submit any new information, materials, comments, or questions concerning this finding to the above address.

The Endangered Species Act provides a critical safety net for America’s native fish, wildlife and plants. This landmark conservation law has prevented the extinction of hundreds of imperiled species across the nation and promoted the recovery of many others.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov). Connect with our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/usfws](http://www.facebook.com/usfws), follow our tweets at [www.twitter.com/usfwshq](http://www.twitter.com/usfwshq), watch our YouTube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/usfws> and download photos from our Flickr page at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq>.

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