



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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BALD EAGLE NUMBERS SHOW DRAMATIC GROWTH; NATION'S SYMBOL EYED FOR RECLASSIFICATION UNDER ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT

The Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced it will undertake a comprehensive review of American bald eagle populations to determine if the species may warrant reclassification from "endangered" to the less critical "threatened" category under the Endangered Species Act.

In making the announcement, Service Director John Turner said, "The dramatic growth of eagle populations in recent years leads us to think the species may no longer be in danger of becoming extinct. It is possible a reclassification to threatened may reflect more accurately the species' actual biological status. I want to emphasize the Service is not considering removing the bald eagle from the protection of the Endangered Species Act. A reclassification to threatened, should we decide that is warranted, would continue to offer the full protection of the Endangered Species Act."

Turner added, "It is important to note that reclassification would in no way indicate a lessening of concern for the future of the Nation's symbol. The Service will continue to actively seek full recovery by working cooperatively with the public and private sectors on activities to further increase eagle populations."

Under the Act, the term "endangered" means a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. "Threatened" defines a species likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future. No consideration is being given to completely removing any bald eagle population from the Endangered Species List.

Before proposing any change in the bald eagle's status under the Act, the Service wants to be sure that it has the most up-to-date information available. Consequently, a notice of intent published in the February 7, 1990, Federal Register solicits information about the biological status of the eagle. "The Service will review the results of the 1990 bald eagle

(over)

breeding season nationwide before deciding whether to propose reclassifying the bald eagle to threatened status," said Turner.

Currently, bald eagles are listed as endangered in 43 of the conterminous states and threatened in Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The bald eagle has never been listed in Alaska, where populations have continued to thrive and now number approximately 30,000. Bald eagles do not occur in Hawaii.

Widespread application of the organochlorine pesticide DDT in the 1940's, 50's, and 60's caused reproductive impairment in bald eagles. DDT contributed to dramatic population declines and prompted the Service to include them on the very first endangered species list in 1967. In 1972, the Environmental Protection Agency cancelled the use of DDT in the United States. Subsequently, bald eagle populations gradually began to recover. From estimates as low as 400 nesting pairs in the early 1960's, their numbers improved to a minimum of 2,660 nesting pairs in the conterminous states in 1989.

The recovery of the bald eagle is not entirely due to the ban on DDT, Turner noted. Bald eagles have benefitted from a concerted, cooperative recovery program. Federal, state, and private agencies and the academic community have combined forces to improve habitat protection and management, research, surveys and monitoring, public education, and law enforcement. These efforts have resulted not only in a growing number of bald eagles but also increased preservation of eagle habitat and heightened awareness by the public of the need to protect this species.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has five bald eagle recovery regions in the United States. Each region has a team of experts appointed by the Service and charged with preparing a recovery plan including specific goals and objectives to be achieved for recovery of the species. The recovery regions include the Pacific Northwest, Southwest, Northern states, Southeast, and Chesapeake Bay. With the exception of the Southeast, all of the recovery regions have reached the goals and objectives in their respective plans for reclassification of the bald eagle from endangered to threatened.

Comments concerning this notice are welcome and should be sent to the Endangered Species Coordinator, Fish and Wildlife Enhancement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Federal Building, Fort Snelling, Twin Cities, Minnesota 55111.