

Bald Eagles

of Wolf Lodge Bay

Coeur d'Alene Field Office

BLM



Contents

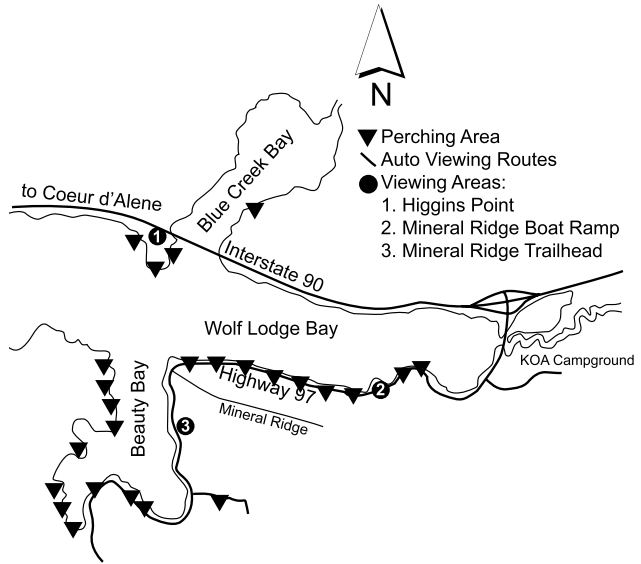


PHOTO: BLM



Wolf Lodge Bay Eagle Viewing Areas _____	ii
Fierce, Majestic, Powerful and in Peril _____	1
Winter Refuge at Wolf Lodge Bay _____	3
Physical Features _____	5
Seasonal Movements _____	7
Daily Activities _____	8
Feeding _____	9
Perching and Soaring _____	10
Habitat Protection _____	11
Eagle Viewing _____	14

Eagle Viewing Areas



Safety and Viewing Tips



Avoid disturbing the birds. Do not approach them on foot.



Stay as far away from the birds as possible. Binoculars are essential.



Stay in your vehicle if viewing nearby birds. Park off the main road. Suggested viewing areas are Higgins Point, Mineral Ridge Boat Ramp and the Mineral Ridge Trailhead.



Do not stop on the road or look for eagles while driving. Interstate 90 and Highway 97 are heavily traveled. Remember, it is illegal to stop in any traffic lane.


Fierce, Majestic, Powerful and in Peril

Bald eagles evoke images that are matched by few other animals. At the apex of flight, serenely perched on a tree or boldly diving toward prey, they are at once fierce, majestic, powerful and independent. Their choice as our nation's emblem is obvious.

Bald eagles are found along four major flyways: (1) the Pacific Flyway from Alaska to California; (2) the Rocky Mountain Flyway from Canada to Arizona and New Mexico; (3) the Mississippi Flyway from the Great Lakes Region to the Gulf Coast; and (4) the Atlantic Flyway from Newfoundland to Florida. Their population drastically declined during the last century, but has recovered in recent years.

Photo: Spokesman-Review





Humans are the biggest threat to bald eagles. Much of the bald eagles' habitat was lost, many of the birds were shot, and they were exposed to widespread contaminants. Between 1917 and 1952, for example, a bounty was placed on bald eagles in Alaska. Fishermen believed the birds competed with them for salmon. Although this belief was unfounded, more than 100,000 birds were killed during the 35 years the bounty was in effect.

2

In 1940, Congress passed the Bald Eagle Protection Act that prohibited the killing, possessing, and transporting of bald eagles without permits, except in Alaska. The law was later amended to include Alaska and golden eagles. Still, populations continued to fall.

Fish, the preferred prey of bald eagles, were killed by water pollution. Persistent pesticides such as DDT, which disrupts a bald eagle's reproduction system, lingered in the environment. By 1974, only 791 breeding pairs were counted in the 48 contiguous states.

In 1978, the bald eagle was designated as an endangered species in 43 states and a threatened species in five states under authority of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). In 1995, bald eagles were reclassified as threatened species throughout the lower 48 states (not so in Alaska and Hawaii). In Idaho, the number of bald eagle nests has grown from 11 in 1979 to 234 in 2007, when bald eagles no longer needed protection from the ESA.

Winter Refuge

Bald eagles pair for life. They remain aloof from other pairs in their northern nesting areas, raising their young and feeding on fish. Prey disappears as Canadian winters bring deep snows and sub-zero temperatures to eagle habitat. Each fall, the birds leave their nesting areas and migrate south to milder climates where they spend the winter. As they migrate, bald eagles become more social, often congregating at winter grounds.

Wolf Lodge Bay along Coeur d'Alene Lake in northern Idaho is one of many wintering grounds along the eagles' annual migration route. Steep mountains covered with western larch, Douglas-fir, ponderosa pine and grand fir rise from the lakeshore.

Northern Idaho's average winter temperature of 22°F and average annual snowfall of 60 inches is mild compared to the frozen country that lies to the north. Wolf Lodge Bay's rocky shores, submerged gravel beds and unique water ecology lures many eagles. It provides ideal habitat for kokanee salmon—a primary winter food source for bald eagles. Wolf Lodge Bay harbors an abundant supply of these small, landlocked salmon. The blend of rugged topography, dense tree growth, mild climate and ample food draws eagles to Wolf Lodge Bay each winter.



Wolf Lodge Bay is seven miles southeast of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and is bordered by Interstate 90 to the north and Idaho Route 97 to the east and south. This makes the area surprisingly close and easily accessible to 500,000 people in Kootenai County, Idaho and Spokane County, Washington.



4

PHOTO: Tim Sommers

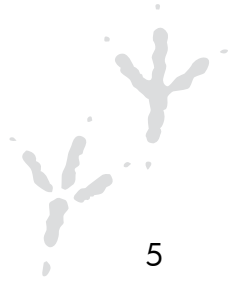


Physical Features

Eagles have a beauty and grace fitting their status as our national emblem. As with most birds of prey, the female eagle is larger and heavier than the male. They weigh an average of 12 pounds with a maximum wingspan of seven feet and a body length of nearly three feet. Bald eagles are lighter than they appear. The bulk of an eagle is its feathers; its bones are hollow and much lighter than the bones of mammals.

Adult eagles are easily detected by their brilliant white heads and tail feathers and chocolate brown bodies and wings. They have black talons and yellow eyes, beaks and feet. The majority of the eagles at Wolf Lodge Bay are adults, but you may see several dark, mottled juvenile eagles. Immature eagles do not obtain their adult colors until they are about five years old.

In captivity, bald eagles have a life expectancy of up to 50 years. In their natural environment, the chance of bald eagles reaching such an age is slim because of environmental hazards and stresses. In the wild, almost 80 percent of young eagles die during their first year, and many of the remaining 20 percent die before reaching maturity. Bald eagle productivity is naturally low, as with most other long-lived species. Excessive mortality to these birds is much more serious than in species with higher rates of reproduction.



The eyes of eagles give them a hunting advantage. Eagles' eyes are three to four times more powerful and sharper than human eyes and contain many times the number of color-sensitive cones. Their eyes are located on the side of the head, giving them a wide field of view. Although they have relatively poor night vision, during the day they can pinpoint their prey in vivid detail from great distances. Their eyesight enables them to easily detect floating fish at Wolf Lodge Bay.

6

Bald eagles have large wings compared to other birds, allowing them to soar and hunt vast areas with minimal effort. During migration they can travel 400 to 500 miles a day. While not as quick and maneuverable as other birds, bald eagles have proven themselves to be skilled and agile hunters. Bald eagles have large, sharp talons and strong feet. As they swoop down on prey, their two-inch talons, or claws, easily sink into the flesh of the fish. Once settled on a perch to feed, you may also notice how adept they are at using their hooked beaks to rip the flesh from the fish.

PHOTO: Idaho Fish and Game

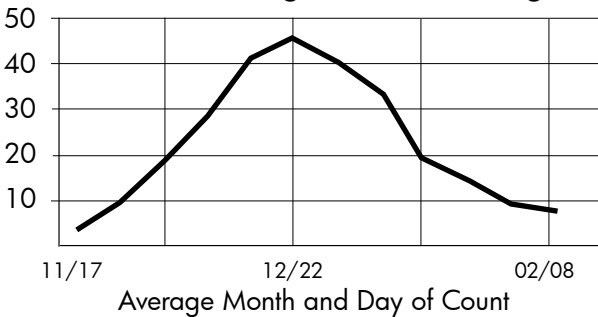


Seasonal Movements

During November, the kokanee salmon of Coeur d'Alene Lake begin to spawn and die. Coinciding with this event is the arrival of the bald eagles at Wolf Lodge Bay. The eagles are lured by the plentiful supply of spawned-out kokanee. A plentiful supply of fish is available to sustain the eagles through the winter.

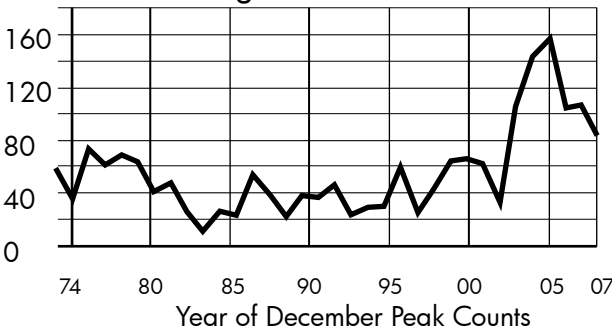


1974-2007 / Average Number of Eagles



Populations fluctuate with the number of floating dead and dying kokanee. Numbers increase through December and peak generally by Christmas. During the month of January the salmon supply dwindles and most eagles have dispersed. The number of eagles observed from year-to-year varies from 10 to 156, with an average of 54.

1974-2007 / Eagle Count



Only a few eagles remain in the area through February. Most depart to more southerly destinations along their migration route. They later return to their traditional nesting sites. Nesting occurs in northern Idaho, but not in Wolf Lodge Bay.

Daily Activities

Bird watching at Wolf Lodge Bay has become increasingly popular over recent years and for good reasons. It's a place where you can see our national bird in its natural environment, close enough to observe it soaring, hunting or perched on a tree. Eagles circle above the water or peer down from the rugged limb of a tall tree. Studies of their daily activities reveal the complexity and magnificence of bald eagles' behavior and their role in the delicate balance of nature.



BLM

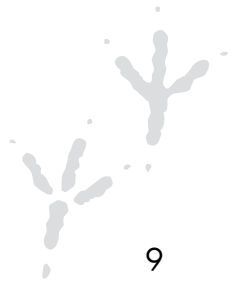
Feeding

Kokanee salmon were introduced into Coeur d'Alene Lake in 1937, and bald eagles started inhabiting the area soon afterwards. These salmon mature in about three years and reach a length of about 11 inches. Their three-year life cycle ends in November as females lay eggs and males fertilize the eggs. After spawning, the fish die and float to the surface of the water, creating an abundant food source for the eagles.

Although most of the eagles' fishing takes place during the early morning, some feeding may occur throughout the daylight hours. Dawn finds the eagles arriving at the fishing area from their communal night roost. As they arrive, they position themselves on perches in trees near the water's edge. From these vantage points, they scan the water in search of dead or dying salmon.

Upon sighting their prey, the eagles glide from their perches, circle above the floating salmon, and in a descending spiral motion snatch the fish from the water. With the salmon firmly grasped in their talons, they return to nearby perches to feed.

Eagles that arrive in the fall before the salmon have begun to spawn or those that remain in the area past January when the salmon supply has diminished must find another source of



food. Ducks become their main prey. The impact on the waterfowl population is small though. Waterfowl killed are usually sick or injured ducks.

Pellets of indigestible duck feathers can often be found under the perch trees of eagles. Ground beneath the perch trees where eagles feed is often littered with remains of partially eaten salmon. This seemingly wasted fish is actually an important food source for crows and ravens as well as fertilizer for the lake.

Perching and Soaring

As mid-morning approaches, eagles begin to limit their feeding activity and settle on perches. They seem to prefer certain trees and even favorite limbs. The preferred perches are usually the taller trees with open branches close to the water. If weather conditions are inclement, the eagles are likely to spend the rest of the day perched on branches of their favorite conifers.

On windy days, eagles take advantage of turbulent air currents and soar high above the water. As wind speed increases, so do the soaring activities. During these times, eagles spend less time feeding and perching and more time flying. Eagles have been observed gliding in graceful, almost motionless flight for several hours at a time.

Habitat Protection

Of utmost importance to the eagle's future use of Wolf Lodge Bay is the continued, unaltered spawning of kokanee salmon along the shores of the bay. Without abundant spawned-out kokanee, the large concentration of eagles would not exist here. Also important is protection of the daytime perching areas.

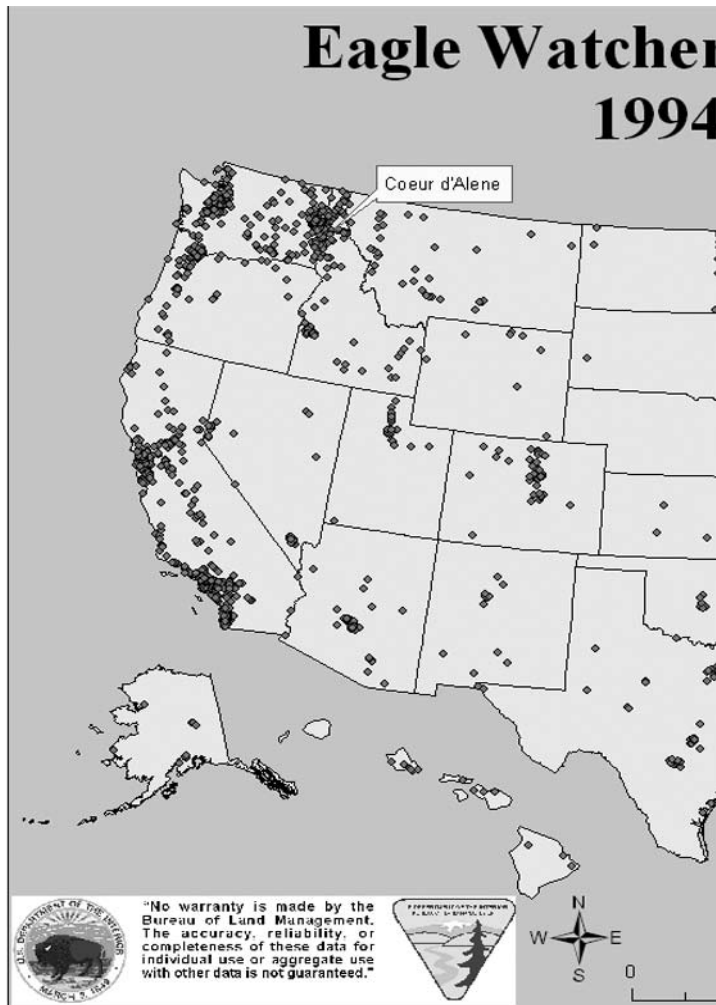
The eagle habitat at Wolf Lodge Bay includes Bureau of Land Management (BLM), private, state and National Forest lands. Several years ago, the BLM developed a cooperative bald eagle habitat protection plan to ensure preservation of this winter sanctuary. The plan calls for maintenance of habitat and an ongoing monitoring effort focusing on the 332-acre BLM Bald Eagle Management Area along Wolf Lodge Bay and Beauty Bay.

Photo: Spokesman-Review



As part of this effort, BLM biologists annually monitor the eagle population. Observations indicate two significant changes: during recent years the number of visitors viewing the birds has risen dramatically, and eagles are shifting from their daytime perch sites on Mineral Ridge to more remote perches on Wolf Point. The eagles are apparently abandoning their traditional perch sites as a result of disturbance by visitors to the area.

12

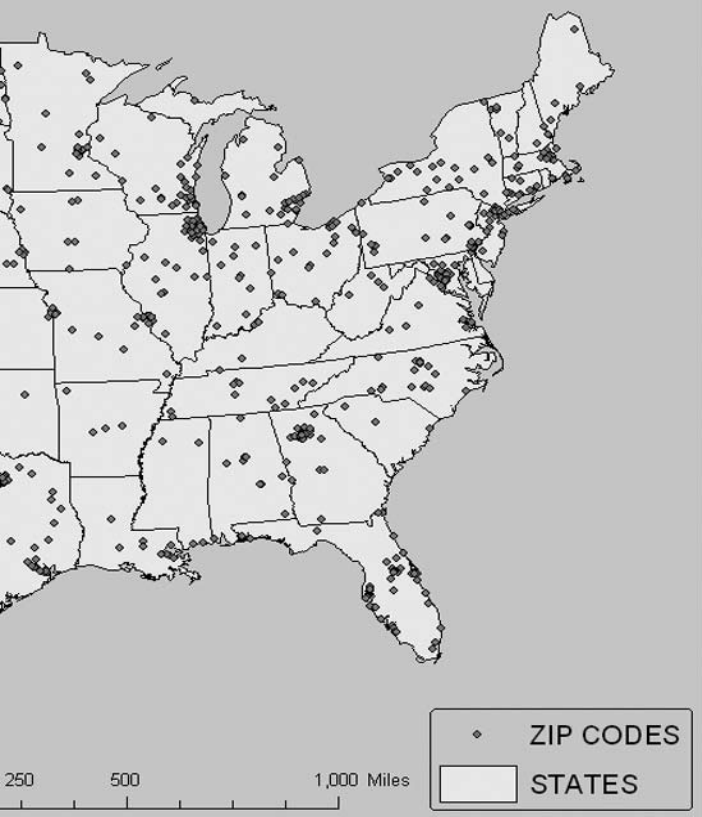


Studies at Wolf Lodge Bay show that the eagles have some tolerance to humans, but the extent is unknown. Visitors need to limit their activities, such as walking along the road or approaching the eagles as they perch. Otherwise, they could cause these wild birds to fly away from the immediate area, and spoil the opportunity for other people to watch them. To avoid disturbing the eagles and for your own safety, please view the eagles from the BLM boat ramp or Mineral Ridge Trail head.



rs' Home Town

-2007



Eagle Viewing

With help from the Forest Service, Idaho Fish and Game, Audubon Society, and volunteers, the Bureau of Land Management has hosted the annual Coeur d'Alene Eagle Watch Week between December 26 and January 1 since 1991. Educational displays and telescopes are available for the viewing public to enjoy the eagles.

14

Eagle watchers have been asked to record their zip codes since 1994. Since then, nearly 52,000 people have watched eagles during these designated weeks. Although 70% of eagle watchers were from a three hour driving distance, the other 30% were from all 50 American states, Washington D.C., 2 military zip codes, 2 U.S. Territories and 36 foreign countries. Many of these out-of-area people are visiting family and friends in the local area, while others are on skiing vacations or are exchange students.

PHOTO: BLM





U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Coeur d'Alene Field Office
3815 North Schrieber Way
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83815
(208)769-5000

BLM/ID/GI-91/012+4350 REV. 08