

News Release



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Improved Eagle Management Program Helps to Incorporate Scientific Data, Identify Information Gaps

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today announced a new program to issue two new types of permits that will be used to improve the management of bald and golden eagles under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. The two permits are designed to protect public safety and manage activities or projects that may disturb or otherwise incidentally “take” bald or golden eagles or their nests, while maintaining stable or increasing populations. Permits will only be granted when they are compatible with this goal.

When the bald eagle was listed under the Endangered Species Act, a permit was available to take eagles incidental to an otherwise lawful activity. But when the eagle was removed from Endangered Species Act protection in 2007, there were no provisions for issuing permits under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act for activities that could disturb or otherwise incidentally take either species of eagle. The growing population of bald eagles, in particular, could significantly curtail legal human activities if such permits were not available.

“Both bald and golden eagle populations will benefit from these new permits,” said Sam Hamilton, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “These two new permits will be based on sound science, help us improve our understanding of the species and ultimately our ability to successfully manage eagle populations. In addition, the new permits provide strong safeguards to ensure that permitted activities are consistent with the preservation of bald and golden eagles.”

The first new permit type may be issued only where the “take” – in this case referring to the disturbing, or harming of eagles – is associated with, but not the purpose of an activity, such as commercial or residential real estate development.

The second new type of permit governs removal of bald or golden eagle nests under limited circumstances, including removal of nests that create safety concerns on or near airports. Deliberate killing of eagles will not be allowed under either of these new permits.

“While the final rule establishing the new permit program covers the management of both bald eagles and golden eagles, the two species represent two very different management challenges,” said Paul Schmidt, the Service’s Assistant Director for Migratory Birds. “The bald eagle population has rebounded in the past decades, and its recovery poses the challenge of managing a healthy population still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. But unlike the bald eagle, the golden eagle population is not expanding, and may be in decline.”

Less scientific data is available to help understand the current population trend of the golden eagle. The final rule improves on prior management of golden eagles by providing a new framework to better identify data gaps and information needs pertaining to golden eagle populations – items of critical importance to the future management of golden eagles. Until the Service has further data to show that golden eagle populations can withstand additional take, it will only consider issuance of new golden eagle take permits for safety emergencies, through programmatic permits (designed to provide net benefits to eagles) and any other permits that will result in a reduction of ongoing take or a net take of zero.

During the 90-day public comment period for the permit system, the Service received substantive input from 35 commenters – input used to help revise the permit program. The Service later received 58 additional comments from the subsequent 30-day public comment period on the revised permit program. As part of this action, the Service also released a Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) outlining the science and rationale for both of the new permit types.

The rule will go into effect 60 days after its publication in the Federal Register.

The Final Rule and the FEA can be found online at: <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/>

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**.