

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)**Status: NSS2; NatureServe G4 S3B S5N****Abundance:** Uncommon

Introduction: The Bald Eagle occurs throughout most of North America from Alaska to central Mexico, wintering generally throughout the breeding range except in the far north. It nests along major river drainages and lakes throughout Wyoming with the most significant concentrations in Teton, Sublette, and Carbon counties. Significant numbers also nest in Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks. The population in Wyoming increases during winter as individuals that breed farther north arrive. The Bald Eagle is considered an uncommon resident in Wyoming, although the number of nesting pairs in the state has increased from 20 in 1978 to over 100 in 2002. The Wyoming Game and Fish Department classifies it as a Species of Special Concern with a Native Species Status of 2 (NSS2) because breeding populations are restricted in numbers and distribution, there is ongoing significant loss of nesting habitat, and it is sensitive to human disturbance.

Habitat: The Bald Eagle nests near large lakes and rivers in forested habitat where adequate prey and old, large-diameter cottonwood or conifer trees are available for nesting. Highly productive nesting areas in the Greater Yellowstone Area were found to have open water available in winter, low severity of early spring weather, limited human activity, and high sinuosity and an abundance of islands, riffles, runs, and pools in the river. Migrating and wintering eagles congregate near open water areas where concentrations of prey are available, such as carcasses of ungulate species, and spawning areas for kokanee, trout, and other fish.

Problems:

- Human activity and development (residential and recreational) near rivers and lakes continues to escalate and is degrading Bald Eagle nesting habitat;
- Pioneering pairs of Bald Eagles often have difficulty becoming established in areas that are disjunct from other successful nesting pairs; and
- Bald Eagles are still accumulating organochlorines and relatively high levels of heavy metals, and may also be at risk from organophosphate or carbamate pesticides. These contaminants could affect production and survival.

Conservation Actions:

- Research and monitor Bald Eagle populations with emphasis on those that have become established either in urban areas or suboptimal natural habitats;
- Establish incentive programs, conservation easements, and special management agreements to protect Bald Eagle nesting habitats and core populations;
- Conduct research on issues that negatively impact the Bald Eagle's ability to expand or maintain stable populations;
- Continue to identify, monitor, and define Bald Eagle nesting populations and important habitats such as winter roosts and foraging areas;
- Continue to provide recommendations to agencies, private individuals, and groups that want to improve Bald Eagle habitat and minimize potential impacts of proposed land-use projects;
- Provide private landowners with information on the importance of maintaining optimum habitat for nesting eagles and the importance of their role as partners in managing it; and

- Manage Bald Eagle nesting areas to minimize conflicts with recreation and development and to minimize pesticide use.

References and Additional Reading:

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- Greater Yellowstone Bald Eagle Working Group. 1996. Greater Yellowstone Bald Eagle management plan: 1995 update. Lander: Greater Yellowstone Bald Eagle Working Group, Wyoming Game and Fish Department. 47 p.
- Harmata AR, Montopoli GJ, Oakleaf B, Harmata PJ, Restani M. 1999. Movements and survival of Bald Eagles banded in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. J Wildl Manage 63(3):781-93
- Harmata A, Oakleaf B. 1992. Bald Eagles in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem: an ecological study with emphasis on the Snake River, Wyoming. Cheyenne: Wyoming Game and Fish Department. 232 p.
- Oakleaf B, Cerovski AO, Luce B. 1996. Nongame bird and mammal plan: a plan for inventories and management of nongame birds and mammals in Wyoming. Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Nongame Program. 183 p.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service. 1986. Recovery plan for the Pacific Bald Eagle. Portland (OR): US Fish and Wildlife Service. 160 p.

Bald Eagle Nesting Distribution

