

A nationwide bald eagle survey by the Service and a number of other agencies and conservation groups in 1974 revealed that, in parts of the northern half of the lower 48 States, bald eagle populations and reproductive success were lower than in certain southern areas. In 1978, the Service listed the bald eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* (no subspecies referenced) throughout the lower 48 States as endangered except in Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Washington, and Oregon, where it was designated as threatened (43 FR 6233, February 14, 1978).

Restoring endangered and threatened animals and plants to the point where they are again viable, self-sustaining members of their ecosystems is the main goal of the Endangered Species Act. Thus, the Act contains recovery, as well as listing and protection, provisions. To effect recovery, section 4(f) of the Act provides for the development and implementation of recovery plans for listed species. According to the Act, a recovery plan is a plan for the conservation and survival of the species. It identifies, describes, and schedules the actions necessary to restore endangered and threatened species to a more secure biological condition.

In establishing a recovery program for the species in the mid-1970's, the Service divided the bald eagles of the lower 48 States into five recovery regions, based on geographic location. A recovery plan was prepared for each region by separate recovery teams composed of species experts in each geographic area. The teams set forth goals for recovery and identified tasks to achieve those goals. Coordination meetings were held regularly among the five teams to exchange data and other

information. The five recovery regions and the dates of their approved recovery plans are as follows: Chesapeake Bay (1982, revised 1990), Pacific (1986), Southeastern (1984, revised 1989), Northern States (1983), and Southwestern (1982). The Northern States plan is under revision and is expected to be available for public review within the next six months. Many of the tasks described within these recovery plans have been funded and carried out by the Service and other Federal, State, and private organizations. Annual expenditures for the recovery and protection of the bald eagle by public and private agencies have exceeded \$1 million each year for the past decade (Service files).

In the 17 years since it was listed throughout the conterminous 48 States, the bald eagle population has clearly increased in number and expanded in range. The improvement is a direct result of the banning of DDT and other persistent organochlorines, habitat protection, and from other recovery efforts. In 1963, a National Audubon Society survey reported only 417 active nests in the lower 48 States, with an average of 0.59 young produced per active nest. In 1994, about 4,450 occupied breeding areas were reported by the States with an estimated average young per occupied territory (for 4110 territories) of 1.17. Compared to 1974, the number of occupied breeding areas in the lower 48 States has increased by 462 percent, and since 1990, there has been a 47 percent increase. The species is doubling its breeding population every 6–7 years since the late 1970's.

TABLE 1.—NUMBER OF BALD EAGLE PAIRS COUNTED IN LOWER 48 STATES, 1963–1994

[Missing years indicate incomplete data]

Year	Number
1963	417
1974	791
1981	1188
1984	1757
1986	1875
1988	2475
1989	2680
1990	3020
1991	3391
1992	3747
1993	4016
1994	4452

The Act requires periodic review of the status of listed species. When the status of the bald eagle was reviewed the Service recognized the achievement of specific recovery plan reclassification goals. As a result of this review, the Service issued the proposed rule for reclassification to threatened status in all or portions of four recovery regions and proposed classification of those eagles in Mexico as endangered (59 FR 35584, July 12, 1994). The current action finalizes the reclassification to threatened for all five recovery regions where not already so listed but excludes the bald eagles of Mexico due to a recently imposed moratorium on new listings (PL 104–6, 109 Stat 73, April 10, 1995).

The five bald eagle recovery plans were first approved in the early 1980's. The biological basis for the recovery goals is described in each recovery plan. The five recovery regions are illustrated on the following map:

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