

## **A Summary of Bald Eagle Information for Iowa.**

On August 8, 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the list of federal threatened species. Nationally, the number of nesting pairs has increased from 417 in 1963 to an estimated 9,789 in 2007. Because of this dramatic comeback the bald eagle no longer needs the protection of the Endangered Species Act.

The Bald Eagle gained federal protection under the 1940 Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. This law provided protection from shooting and destruction of nests, but a new threat emerged with the widespread use of DDT after World War II. DDT and similar persistent insecticides were found to accumulate in aquatic systems. When eagles fed on fish that had accumulated DDT, a metabolite of DDT interfered with the ability to deposit calcium in eggshells. Thinned eggshells cracked and broke easily and the number of fledged eagles dropped dramatically. The ban on use of DDT and similar pesticides in the 1970's allowed the bald eagle and other species to once again achieve normal reproduction. Protection under the Endangered Species Act and state regulations also helped with recovery by protecting habitat and educating the public about the needs of the bald eagle.

In Iowa the bald eagle was extirpated as a breeding species from about 1905 to 1977. At the time of European settlement the bald eagle was considered common and nested throughout the state. Records of nesting eagles continued until 1905 when the last reported nest was found in Jasper County. Loss of habitat and shooting of eagles caused the extirpation of the bald eagle as a breeding species in Iowa.

In 1977 an eagle nest was found in Allamakee County, the first known nesting attempt in over 70 years. Since 1977 there has been a steady increase in the number of nesting territories in the state. Between 1977 and 2009 394 nesting territories have been identified in 84 counties. The attached map presents the number of nesting territories reported by county since 1977. Not all territories have remained in use during that time but DNR staff with the help of other agency personnel and many dedicated volunteers has documented activity at 214 territories during the last two years. Because this is a sample rather than a total census of territories we estimate that there are over 200 nesting pairs of bald eagles in Iowa.

The 1983 Northern States Bald Eagle Recovery Plan listed Iowa's recovery goal as 10 nesting pairs by 2000. The recovery goal for the 24 states included in this plan was 1,200 nesting pairs. Currently, the estimated number of breeding pairs for the 24 states is over 4,400. In fact, Minnesota alone has exceeded the goal for all 24 states with 1,312 nests. The bald eagle population has greatly exceeded recovery goals established for delisting at the national level. Although no specific goal was set for state delisting, the bald eagle no longer meets the definition of a state endangered or threatened species. Because there is still a concern about exposure to lead by eagles, the bald eagle is proposed to be upgraded from endangered to special concern. Special concern status emphasizes the need for continued monitoring to ensure that the population remains stable or increases.

Bald eagles will still be protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. In fact, the federal act provides for civil and criminal penalties of up to \$5,000, while Iowa's penalty is \$1,000 for threatened or endangered animal species. In addition to protection from direct harm, the federal act also prohibits activities that disrupt eagles at nests, foraging areas, and important roosts because loss of these areas can disturb or kill eagles. These are the same protections that have been available under Iowa's threatened and endangered species law.

The goal of Iowa's threatened and endangered species law is to recover species to levels where protection under this section of the law is no longer necessary. The continuous improvement of the bald eagle population in Iowa during the last 30 years is proof the long-term survival of this species is secure. The recovery of our national symbol in Iowa has been the product of many individuals, organizations, and especially landowners who have provided habitat for breeding pairs of eagles. Upgrading from endangered to special concern is a reason to celebrate because the bald eagle no longer faces the threats that caused its extirpation from the state for over 70 years.