

Recovery for the Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Recovery Objective: DELIST the species once recovery criteria are met.

South Florida Contribution: South Florida's contribution to meeting this recovery objective will be achieved by maintaining or increasing the number of successful nests and the average annual productivity.

Recovery Criteria

The recovery objective for the bald eagle in South Florida is the recovery objective and criteria established for delisting the eagle in the southeastern U.S., as well as the continental U.S. Now that the eagle has been reclassified to threatened throughout the U.S., all but the southeastern states have established delisting criteria. Efforts have only recently been initiated to develop delisting criteria for bald eagles in the southeast. The 1995-96 breeding season documented 879 occupied territories for the State of Florida. Of this total, approximately 400 (45.5 percent) were located in South Florida.

The objective for South Florida's contribution to the recovery of the bald eagle will be achieved when: at least 45.5 percent of the total of occupied territories throughout the State of Florida are protected in South Florida; these territories are managed or enhanced (i.e., removal of exotic vegetation, elimination of human disturbance, etc.) to increase productivity; average productivity for occupied territories is greater than or equal to 1.13 chicks over a consecutive 10-year period.

The percentage of active territories located in South Florida may change if the balance of the state's bald eagle population increases or decreases at a different rate than South Florida. It is possible that South Florida has reached saturation with respect to bald eagle territories and further increases, based on the human development pressures, will be small or non-existent. In this case, the objective should be modified to maintain the number of territories found in South Florida in the 1996-97 nesting season.

Species-level Recovery Actions

- S1. **Determine distribution of the bald eagle in South Florida.** This task is covered by the bald eagle monitoring program performed by GFC described in task 4.0 (species-level recovery actions).
- S2. **Protect and manage bald eagle populations in South Florida.**
 - S2.1. **Prevent or mitigate the effects of behavioral degradation.** Behavioral degradation is the modification of normal eagle activity by any disturbance which reduces an area's ability to support eagles. These disturbances may result in increased energy expenditures, decreased feeding efficiencies, reduced reproductive potential, or decreased habituation by eagles.

- S2.2.7. Prevent poisoning mortality due to secondary ingestion of euthanized domestic animals.** Educate veterinarians and municipalities of the dangers of depositing euthanized domestic animals in landfills. Develop landfill management recommendations to reduce likelihood of secondary ingestion of barbiturates.
- S3. ~~Continue to monitor bald eagle nesting activities in South Florida.~~** Population monitoring is necessary in order to determine the status and distribution of the species. The GFC currently monitors eagle nests twice per nesting season, this activity should be continued and expanded, as necessary, to provide important information on nesting success and the success of the habitat management guidelines in addition to providing essential information on the population status throughout the state. If the bald eagle is to be delisted in the future, this information is essential to ensuring delisting criteria, once developed, are met.
- S4. Develop public information and education materials to inform the public of the recovery needs of the bald eagle in South Florida.** Public information programs should provide updated, accurate information on the status and needs of eagles and the relationship between eagle recovery and the well-being of man. While support must be evoked from the general public, specific problems such as indiscriminate shooting of eagles must be resolved by focusing efforts at specific user groups.
- S4.1. Continue to use permanently incapacitated eagles for educational presentations.** Exhibiting disabled eagles during lectures is an effective method of teaching. Such activities should, however, be carefully limited to qualified, permitted, individuals and employ only eagles which may not be returned to the wild.
- S4.2. Prepare general informational brochures for distribution in South Florida.** This should include life history information relative to the southeast since many general accounts depict only characteristics of northern populations. This brochure should present accurate status information as well as recovery needs. It should also give sources for additional informational materials.
- S4.3. Develop and distribute information to pilots concerning the potential for disturbance of nesting eagles by aircraft.** A poster should be developed and distributed to all public, private, and military airports. Information on eagle and eagle nest protection should also be included in the Airman's Information Manual in the section on bird strike hazard.
- S6. Develop delisting criteria for the bald eagle in South Florida.** Delisting criteria for the bald eagle will be developed on a regional basis by the Southeastern Bald Eagle Recovery Team. South Florida recovery staff will participate in the development of the criteria.

Habitat-level Recovery Actions

- H1. Prevent further loss and degradation of bald eagle habitat in South Florida.** Despite the amount of habitat loss and degradation throughout South Florida, the number of bald eagles with breeding territories in South Florida has increased. Nevertheless, the continued loss and degradation of bald eagle habitat in South Florida is expected to cause population declines in the long-term if it continues unabated or unmitigated. In the long-term the persistence of bald eagles in South Florida will require protection of their nests, foraging areas, migratory corridors, and juvenile dispersal areas.

- H1.2.3.** Protect eagle habitat through cooperative agreements, easements, acquisition or other appropriate means. Funding for habitat management should be sought from a multitude of sources including federal, state, local, and private sources.
 - H1.2.4.** Identify and incorporate important bald eagle habitat in land use plans and planning. Identify important habitat in order to ensure that accurate information is available for the development of land use plans.
 - H1.2.5.** Use section 7 of the ESA to protect bald eagles and their habitats. Interagency consultations on permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits issued pursuant to section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act and section 404 of the Clean Water Act are important for the conservation of bald eagles in South Florida. With the human population in South Florida expected to almost double over the next fifteen years, these interagency consultations will become increasingly important to prevent bald eagles in South Florida from declining.
 - H1.3.** Prevent or mitigate the degradation of eagle habitat from environmental contaminants. Mercury occurs throughout South Florida and may reduce recovery opportunities for eagles in South Florida. The numbers, nesting effort and fecundity of bald eagles that nest in areas where high levels of mercury are known or suspected should be monitored to detect possible mercury contamination. Similarly, addled bald eagle eggs, carcasses and prey from areas where high levels of mercury are known or suspected should be tested for mercury contamination.
- H2.** ~~Develop methods to restore previously occupied habitat or to establish new territories.~~ In South Florida, an increasing number of bald eagles territories occur in areas that are being cleared for residential housing or for industrial sites. In some instances, individuals have applied for permits to take bald eagles incidental to land clearing for residential housing. At the same time, several managers of wetland mitigation banks have included bald eagles as beneficiaries of their mitigation banks without demonstrating opportunities to restore or enhance the value of bald eagle territories. In the past, the FWS and GFC have had no information on opportunities to restore previously occupied bald eagle territories or to establish new territories. This information, which would require some experimentation, would help establish measures to minimize or mitigate the effects of habitat loss or degradation on bald eagles associated with land clearing for residential housing construction in South Florida.
- H5.** Increase public awareness of habitat-related issues that affect the recovery of the bald eagle in South Florida.
 - H5.1.** Produce an information brochure for landowners. Land management information and guidelines should be prepared for landowners including information on where to obtain additional professional assistance. State foresters should be included in this effort since they provide silvicultural expertise to private landowners.
 - H5.2.** Establish displays at public boat landings to provide information on laws, penalties, rewards and identification of eagles. Many boaters utilize public landings for access to aquatic habitat used by eagles. This includes use by hunters and fishermen as well as by recreational and commercial boaters. These user groups should be provided with information on identification and legal protection of eagles. Local phone numbers where violations may be reported should also be included.