

Bald Eagle Fact Sheet

Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) are very large, brown raptors that utilize the mature, forested areas along the major river systems in Nebraska. Nests are typically built near rivers, lakes and reservoirs and are most often in large cottonwood trees. Nests are constructed with large sticks and can become 8 feet across and 12 feet deep. A breeding pair will often return to the same nest and add new material each year.



Adult Bald Eagle



Bald Eagle in Flight



Bald Eagle Nest

The bald eagle gained protection under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act in the Federal Register on June 8, 1940. This Act prohibits anyone, without a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior, from "taking" bald eagles, including their parts, nests, or eggs. The Act provides criminal penalties for persons who "take, possess, sell, purchase, barter, offer to sell, purchase or barter, transport, export or import, at any time or any manner, any bald eagle ... [or any golden eagle], alive or dead, or any part, nest, or egg thereof." The Act defines "take" as "pursue, shoot, shoot at, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest or disturb."

Golden Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

Order: *Accipitriformes*

Family: *Accipitridae*

Status: Protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act

Description: L 35" W 80". Sexes similar, but females are about 25% larger than males. Adults readily identified by white head and tail, large yellow bill. Feet are also yellow. Juveniles are mostly dark, with blotchy white patches. Require four or five years to reach full adult plumage.

Habitat: Wooded river corridors and larger lakes/sandpits with the presence of large cottonwoods for nesting/roosting. Solitary trees have been used for nesting, but are associated with prime fishing locations. Eagles may establish winter roosts miles from foraging areas. In Nebraska, some communal roost sites can have as many as 100 eagles.

Status/Range: Bald eagles can be found statewide in Nebraska, and are present throughout the year as they both breed and winter here. Wintering eagle numbers fluctuate, as there are often few locations that provide adequate resources for eagles during winter.

Call: Weak staccato of chirping whistles, "kleek kik ik ik ik".

Similar Species: Immature bald eagles can be mistaken for golden eagles or turkey vultures.

Bald Eagle Survey Protocol Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Background

Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) utilize the mature, forested areas along the major river systems in Nebraska. Eagles are present throughout the year in Nebraska as they both breed and winter in Nebraska. Nest building activity may begin as early as December. Nests are typically built near rivers, lakes and reservoirs and in Nebraska are most often in large cottonwood trees, although bald eagles use other types of trees nationwide. The nests are constructed with large sticks and lined with leaves and grasses. A breeding pair will often return to the same nest and add new material each year. Nests can become 8 feet across and 12 feet deep. Nesting activities begin with egg laying which occurs as early as February. Fledging takes place when the young are approximately 10 – 11 weeks old, however the young remain near the nest and are dependent on the adults for food for at least another 6 weeks. In Nebraska, the nesting season continues through August.

The bald eagle southward migration begins as early as October and the wintering period extends from December through March. Breeding pairs may stay at their nest site year round if food is available. Eagles are often most numerous from late February through early March, when wintering numbers are supplemented by migrants that wintered further south. All migrants that breed elsewhere typically leave by late March. Wintering eagle numbers fluctuate from year to year, but birds typically concentrate in areas with large open water where food is available and form winter roosts. In Nebraska, there are often few locations that provide adequate resources for eagles during the winter. Protection of these areas is important, as relocation during the winter may impact survival. Roosts may be in deciduous or coniferous trees, but in Nebraska, most are in cottonwood trees. Eagles may establish winter roosts miles from the foraging areas (Keister et al. 1985). Winter roosting may assist with finding resources (Knight and Knight 1983) and pair bond formation. In Nebraska, some communal roost sites can have as many as 100 eagles (Nebraska Game and Parks Commission 1993).

Purpose

Eagle surveys are designed to ensure awareness and resolution to any potential conflicts between bald eagle and potentially disruptive human activities. To document the presence or absence of bald eagles and their activities, two types of surveys are recommended: nest surveys and winter roost surveys. These should be considered when a disturbance will occur within 0.5 miles of areas of suitable habitat for bald eagles.

Nest Surveys

Bald eagle nests are usually conspicuous and distinctive, but it must be stressed that nests can be well concealed and very difficult to see, particularly when trees have foliage. Nest surveys should complete a full inspection of potential trees for bald eagle nests within 0.5 miles of the project in areas considered suitable habitat. Transects should be recorded using GPS. In addition to nests, any bald eagles observed during the survey and their behavior should be noted. Potential nests should be observed from a distant location that does not disturb the eagles to confirm the presence or absence of eagles. Nest surveys are to be conducted by a qualified

biologist. Results of surveys and transect locations should be sent to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and US Fish and Wildlife Service.

If construction will begin between February 1 and April 15, a nest survey must be completed at least 1 but not more than 14 days prior to construction. If construction will begin between April 15 and October 1, a nest survey completed in March is sufficient, as nests will likely already be constructed if nesting will occur that year. However a nest survey may be completed anytime during this timeframe, as long as it is completed prior to construction. If bald eagles are nesting in the area, consultation with NGPC and USFWS will be required, so it is in the project proponent's best interest to complete the survey and notify the agencies as early as possible.

(See timing diagram page 3)

Winter Roost Surveys:

For the purposes of avoiding adverse impacts to wintering bald eagles, two types of roosts are defined. *Transitory roosts* are defined as 3 or more eagles, within 100 meters of each other, for at least 2 nights in an area with no previous knowledge of winter communal roosting. *Communal roosts* are defined as 6 or more eagles in a small area for extended periods of time or used for multiple years. Communal roosts in Nebraska are monitored, so typically their existence will be known and conservation measures established prior to construction.

If construction will be occurring in an area near suitable habitat (near open water with large trees present) where there is no prior knowledge of a communal roost site and construction will be occurring between October 1 and January 31 winter roost surveys are necessary. Winter roost surveys should begin at least 1 day prior to the first date of construction. Winter roost surveys should be conducted daily at dawn as the eagles are likely to leave the roost to forage within the first hour of daylight (depending on weather conditions). These surveys need only be conducted in the area of active construction, not the entire project area. Surveys may be completed by a trained individual using appropriate binoculars or spotting scope. Survey reports should be submitted weekly to the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and US Fish and Wildlife Service. Evidence of a roost should be reported immediately.

Please note, eagles seen soaring over a construction site should be watched to observe potential nesting or roosting, but construction does not need to terminate due to soaring behavior.

(See timing diagram page 3)

References

Buehler, D.A. 2000. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), In The Birds of North America, No. 506 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

Keister, G. P., Jr., R. G. Anthony and H. R. Holbo. A model of energy consumption in bald eagles: An evaluation of night communal roosting. The Wilson Bulletin. 97(2): 148-160

Knight, S. K. and R. L. Night. 1983. Aspects of food finding by wintering bald eagles. The Auk 100: 477-484.

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. 1993. Nebraska's threatened and endangered species: Bald eagle. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Updated 12/9/2014

Bald Eagle Survey Recommendations
 Timing Diagram
 Standard Protocol prepared by NE Game and Parks Commission
 January-07

| | December | January | February | March | April | May | June | July | August | September | October | November | December |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------|----------------------------------|-----|-------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|-------------------|----------|
| Bald Eagle Activity | Nest building | | Hatching and rearing young | | | | Winter activities | | | | nest building | | |
| | Winter Activities | Egg laying and incubation | | | Fledging Young | | | Winter activities | | | | winter activities | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Required Surveys | C) Daily surveys for winter roosts | | A) survey 2 weeks prior | | B) One survey completed in March | | | | C) Daily surveys for winter roosts | | | | |

- A) Projects starting between February 1 to April 15 must have a nest survey completed 1-14 days prior to the start of construction
- B) Projects starting between April 15 to October 1 need a nest survey completed as early as March, or before project begins
- C) Projects starting between October 1 and December need daily winter roost surveys completed

NOTE: Surveys are only necessary in areas where the disturbance is near suitable eagle habitat

Timing of eagle activity references:

Draft National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines, US Fish and Wildlife Service, 2006,
 Buehler, D.A. 2000. Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), In The Birds of North America, No. 506 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Birds of North America, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.
 Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. 1993. Nebraska's threatened and endangered species: Bald eagle. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Lincoln, Nebraska.