

## Bald Eagles Primed for Removal from Threatened Species List

*Compiled by Outside Online*

**June 7, 2007**| The threat of Bald Eagles going extinct prompted the initial Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1973; however, due to three decades of protection, resulting in an almost complete recovery, they are up for removal from the list of threatened species.

The eagles' 100-year decline stemmed from hunting, habitat loss, and harmful insecticides. The banning of DDT, an insecticide that caused eagles to bear eggs too weak to nurture healthy babies, along with help from state wildlife agencies, created the healing combination that led to this proposal.

"It's brought the Bald Eagle population from just a few more than 400 nesting pairs to nearly 10,000 nesting pairs in the lower 48," said Nicholas Throckmorton of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The decision for their removal from the threatened list is set for June 29, but conservation groups are not celebrating. The ESA status provided the eagles with the mandated habitat protection that the act covers.

Kieran Suckling of the [Center for Biological Diversity](#) conservation group told CNN, "There is big money to be made in cutting down and developing bald eagle habitat," especially because the habitat that's been protected spans North America.

Even if Bald Eagles are removed from the threatened list, they will still remain protected under two additional acts: The Bald and Golden Protection Act and The Migratory Bird Treaty Act. However, the boundaries of their protection under these acts don't extend much further than to say it is illegal to "disturb" a Bald Eagle.

"In undefined terms, 'disturb' could mean you slam your car door and it causes an eagle to fly away," Throckmorton said, "so the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service had to come up with a definition that was biologically appropriate to eagles and also enforceable."

As stated in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife press release, the new definition, in terms of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, is "to agitate or bother a bald or golden eagle to a degree that causes, or is likely to cause, based on the scientific information available, 1) injury to an eagle, 2) a decrease in its productivity, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior, or 3) nest abandonment, by substantially interfering with normal breeding, feeding, or sheltering behavior."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes that the new definition of "disturb" does not speak to disrupting the habitat, so they've also created voluntary National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines for landowners who coexist with Bald Eagle territory. These guidelines include putting buffers around eagles' nests as well as planning land-use activities around important times for eagles such as when they build nests, lay eggs, and rear chicks, Throckmorton explained. The organization believes this management regime will allow for population growth to continue at a robust rate.