



Saturday, February 03, 2007

Game & Fish must do more to protect desert eagles

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It's not all that often that the residents of the Verde Valley receive a vote of support from the folks in Phoenix.

On Feb. 16, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to remove all bald eagles from the endangered species act, regardless of where they live or the condition of their home. Tuesday, *The Arizona Republic* published an editorial supporting efforts to keep the desert nesting bald eagle on the endangered species list.

Yet a major point is overlooked.

Yes, the Arizona population of the desert bird is not recovering as fast as their northern cousins and its very home is clearly under assault from the state's rapid growth as well. The Arizona Game & Fish Department is given credit for recently signing an agreement pledging to continue their protection of the state's eagles. It was nice of Game & Fish to do that.

However, the agreement, like the editorial, misses the whole point of having the birds on the endangered species list, something Game & Fish does not support.

The truth of the matter is that neither the State of Arizona nor the Game & Fish Department can do anything to protect the animal's habitat.

That habitat is riparian forests and cliffs. Tall trees and rocky escarpments adjacent to water are the home of this unique species. Unlike other bald eagles, the desert nesting eagles live in their waterside nests year around. They don't have anywhere else to go.

And water in Arizona, in case no one has been watching, is rapidly disappearing.

The only entity with a stick big enough to shoo away the manmade threats to the bird is the federal government.

Game & Fish should be leaned on to do their job and request every layer of protection possible to ensure the eagles' survival.

The Endangered Species Act was designed to do something that nothing else can. It adds a level of protection that no state agency can.

To remove that layer of protection will lead to the desert nesting bald eagle's ultimate demise.

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