

TUCSON
AUDUBON
SOCIETY



300 E. University
#120
Tucson, Arizona
85705

www.tucsonaudubon.org

Audubon Nature Shop
520/629-0510

Director's Office
520/622-5622

Conservation
520/628-1730

Education
520/622-2230

Habitat Restoration
520/206-9900

Development
520/629-0757

Mason Audubon Center
520/744-0004

Fax
520/623-3476

conservation

education

recreation

May 17, 2006

Michelle Morgan, Chief
Branch of Recovery and Delisting
Endangered Species Program
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Headquarters Office
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 420
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Ms. Morgan,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed removal of the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) from the List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife (RIN 1018-AF21). Tucson Audubon Society's 3000+ member households have shown considerable interest in the proposed delisting.

The Tucson Audubon Society believes that the recovery of bald eagle populations in the lower 48 states is one of the success stories of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We support the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) assertion that the bald eagle has met or exceeded recovery goals in almost all recovery regions. However, of interest to our members is long-term persistence of the small breeding population of bald eagles in Arizona. It is to this population that we direct our comments.

Although perhaps at a recent historical high, the Arizona population of breeding bald eagles remains small. Issues 12 through 14 of the Proposed Rule for delisting addresses many of the threats and issues related to the persistence of the bald eagle population in Arizona. We believe that related factors such as high adult mortality, loss of habitat, and persistent drought are the most critical impediments to the long-term survival of this population. Your responses to these factors were inadequate and failed to put the Arizona population in a regional context. Specifically, the decline in the number of breeding pairs in Arizona in the last two years may not have a biologically meaningful effect on the larger population, but it may signal a long-term decline in the Arizona population. Because of the size of the population and potential threats to it, we suggest that existing regulations protecting habitat be maintained, and a rigorous monitoring program be implemented.

Section 4(g)(1) of the Endangered Species Act requires the USFWS to implement a "system in cooperation with the States to monitor effectively for not less than five years the status of all species which have recovered to the point at which the measures provided pursuant this Act [the ESA] are no longer necessary..." The Tucson Audubon Society asks that the FWS address this legal mandate by developing a post-delisting monitoring plan for

**TUCSON
AUDUBON
SOCIETY**



300 E. University
#120
Tucson, Arizona
85705

www.tucsonaudubon.org

Audubon Nature Shop
520/629-0510

Director's Office
520/622-5622

Conservation
520/628-1730

Education
520/622-2230

Habitat Restoration
520/206-9900

Development
520/629-0757

Mason Audubon Center
520/744-0004

Fax
520/623-3476

~

conservation

education

recreation

the bald eagle. This plan should survey the entire population once every three years for no less than 15 years and be designed to detect regional and national declines in territory occupancy, nest success, and productivity. And, if at any time during the survey period, data collected indicate declines in territory occupancy, nest success, or productivity (at regional or national levels), the FWS will initiate an investigation into the cause and if necessary relist the bald eagle to protect it from further decline.

In the absence of the protection provided bald eagle habitat by Section 7 of the ESA, conservation of nesting and foraging habitat is the key to the long-term sustainability of the recovered bald eagle populations of North America. Therefore, it is imperative that the FWS inform all land management agencies and the public that the delisting of the bald eagle does not negate existing laws, like the "National Forest Management Act" that continue to protect bald eagle habitat.

Sincerely,

Sonja Macys
Executive Director

CC: Christina McVie, Vice President and Conservation Chair
Brian Powell, Conservation Committee Member at Large