

Endangered Species Act Success Stories Chippewa National Forest

Chippewa NF Instrumental in Success of the Bald Eagle

Since the bald eagle was fully listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1973, the number of nesting bald eagle pairs and productivity (number of young fledged per nest) have been monitored throughout the lower 48 states. On August 9, 2007, the bald eagle was removed from the federal list of threatened and endangered species. After nearly disappearing from most of the United States decades ago, the bald eagle is now flourishing across the nation. The Chippewa National Forest was part of this success story. Bald eagles in the lower 48 states have climbed from an all-time low of 417 nesting pairs in 1963 to an estimated 7,000 breeding pairs today. Minnesota has 1,312 pairs of eagles.

The recovery of the bald eagle in Minnesota began in the early 1960's on the Chippewa National Forest. U.S. Forest Service biologist (retired) John Mathisen became nationally recognized for his pioneering efforts to save nesting eagle populations. The U.S. Forest Service prepared individual management plans for every eagle breeding area on the Chippewa. Buffer zones and seasonal limits on human activity near eagle nests helped eagles increase their numbers.

The Chippewa also contributed greatly to efforts to band eagle chicks on their nests and study eagle ecology. A close tie with University researchers was an important part of this effort.



Biologist John Mathisen and adult bald eagle



Young bald eagles on Chippewa National Forest

The bald eagle was selected as the national bird in 1782, although it was long treated as far less than a national treasure. During early settlement, the eagle and other birds of prey were generally considered "varmint" because they competed with people for use of fish and game species. Birds of prey were often killed on site.

In addition, the proliferation of pesticides like DDT following World War II created a poisonous environment for raptors. DDT was passed along the food chain from fish and other organisms to bald eagles. The concentrated chemicals in their bodies caused their eggshells to become so thin that incubation crushed the shells.

The eventual recovery of the bald eagle has become a conservation success story. The recovery of bald eagles in Minnesota is particularly impressive, as eagles have repopulated the State from their last hold in northern Minnesota.

Today, the Chippewa National Forest is home to over 185 pairs of nesting bald eagles. With its abundant lakes, clean water, and large pine for nest trees, it provides ideal habitat for our nation's symbol to thrive. Given the rapid lakeshore development happening on private lands throughout the State, the Chippewa's role in providing safe, long-lasting habitat well into our future provides added assurance for the well-being of bald eagles.



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