

Bald Eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus



Photo by Wendy Francis

Habitat Use Profile

Habitats Used in Nevada	
Open Water Great Basin (and Mojave) Lowland Riparian (Coniferous Forest) (Agriculture)	
Key Habitat Parameters •	
Plant Composition	Pines, spruces, firs, cottonwoods. Conifers preferred as winter roost sites ¹ , but deciduous trees also used
Plant Density, Size	Nests placed in trees ~ 20 – 60 m [60 – 200 ft] high and 50 – 190 cm [20 – 75 in] DBH; usually a tree larger than its neighbors ¹ . Winter roost trees usually 30 – 100 cm [12 – 40 in] DBH, 15 – 60 m [50 – 200 ft] high ¹
Mosaic	Nest trees usually in open canopy area and/or near forest edge ¹
Distance to Water	Nests in tree close to lake, river, or other water body, usually < 2 km [1 mile] ¹
Other	Summer and winter habitat similar, but in winter, roost sites that provide shelter from weather exposure important ¹
Area Requirements •	
Minimum Patch Size	300 km ² [74,000 ac] in winter ¹
Recommended Patch Size	> 500 km ² [120,000 ac] in winter ^{EO}
Home Range / Territory Size	5 – 20 km ² [1,200 – 4,800 ac] home range in breeding season; ~ 300 km ² [74,000 ac] in winter. Typical territory size ~ 1 – 2 km ² [250-500 ac] ¹

Conservation Profile

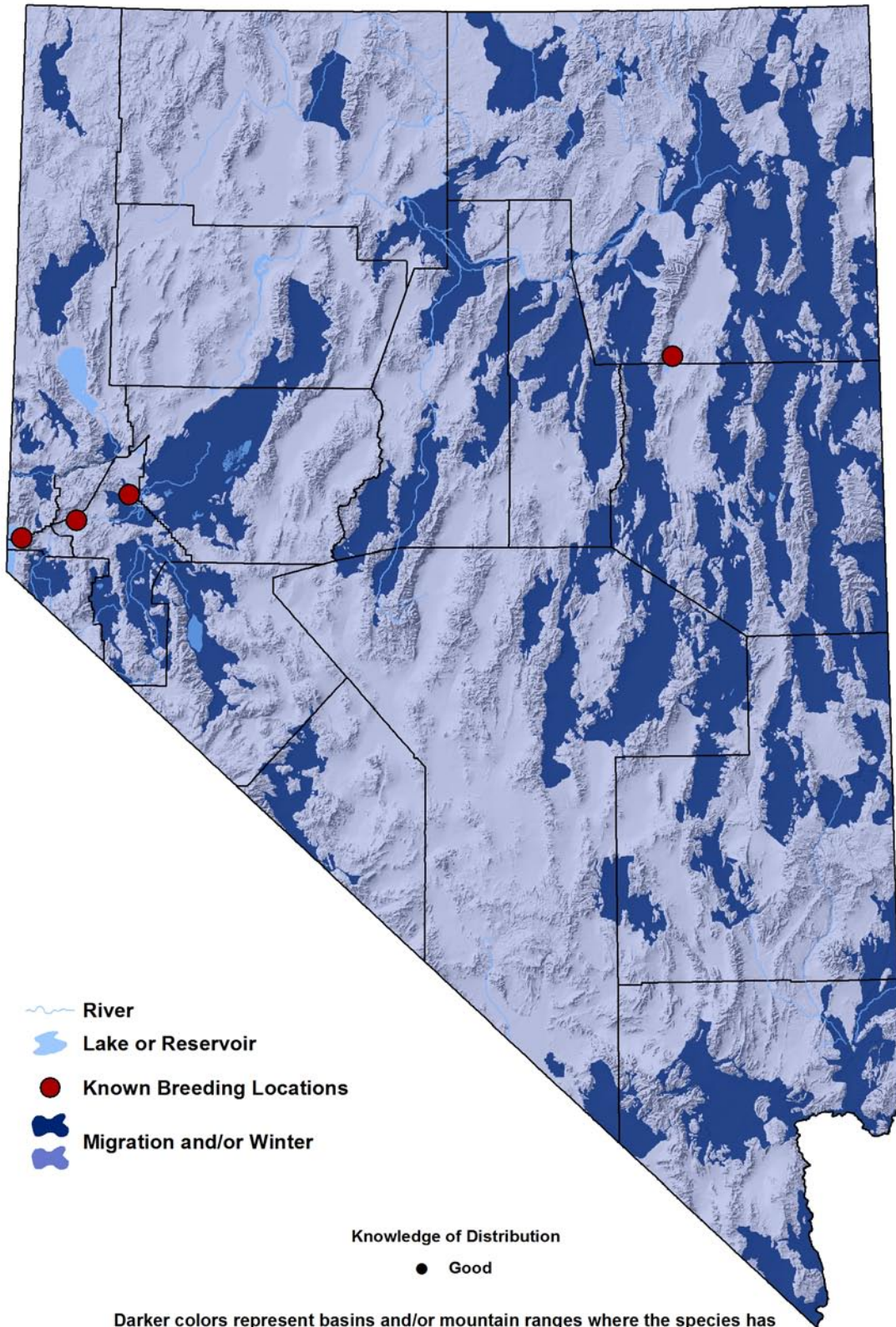
Priority Status	
Special Status Species	
Species Concerns	
Historical declines	
Other Rankings	
Continental PIF	Stewardship Species
Audubon Watchlist	None
NV Natural Heritage	G5, S1B, S3N
USFWS	Eagle Act, Migratory Bird, Bird of Conservation Concern
BLM	None
USFS	Sensitive Species
NDOW	Conservation Priority
Trends	
Historical •	Substantial declines regionally and in Nevada ¹
Recent •	Stable/increasing regionally and in Nevada ^{1,5}
Population Size Estimates	
Nevada •	~ 10 breeders ^{3, 4} ; > 120 wintering birds ¹
Global •	330,000 ⁴
Percent of Global	< 1 %
Population Objective	
Maintain / Increase ^{7, EO}	
Monitoring Coverage	
Source	NDOW winter raptor surveys, USFS and USFWS breeding surveys
Coverage in NV	Good for breeding
Key Conservation Areas	
Protection	Lake Tahoe Basin; Carson River; known winter roost sites
Restoration	Potential winter roost sites near all open water

Natural History Profile

Seasonal Presence in Nevada	
Winter; small Spring-Summer breeding population	
Known Breeding Dates in Nevada	
Early May – August ^{1, 2}	
Nest and Nesting Habits	
Nest Placement	Platform stick nests in large trees (cliffs more rarely) near large water body, usually > 500 m from human development ¹
Site Fidelity	High for breeding sites and winter roosts ¹
Food Habits	
Basic	Predatory; hunts from air, scavenger, food pirate
Primary Diet	Fish (34-38 cm [13-15 in] length preferred during breeding season) ¹
Secondary Diet	Carrion, waterfowl, small mammals ¹

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Darker colors represent basins and/or mountain ranges where the species has been recorded within the past 12 years. Lighter colors represent the broader area within which the species is presumed to occur in appropriate habitat types.

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Overview

Bald Eagles inhabit Nevada primarily during the winter. A small breeding population was detected in the state in the mid 1980s and continues to be present, following more than a century in which no Nevada breeding was recorded.⁸ However, breeding activity in Nevada is likely still more restricted (and irregular) than it was in the early 19th century -- historical accounts exist of nesting Bald Eagles in several locations (such as Anaho Island in Pyramid Lake) that are no longer used.⁸ Given current management practices, it is possible that Nevada's nesting population will slowly increase over the coming years.

In winter, roost sites (each often hosting several eagles) are often located near lakes and reservoirs that are large enough to remain unfrozen. However, eagles sometimes forgo proximity to water in exchange for roost sites offering good protection from weather extremes. An informal review of current information suggests many of Nevada's wintering Bald Eagles are not, in fact, located in immediate proximity to water bodies. For instance, in northeastern Nevada, mixed species roost sites with both Bald and Golden Eagles are found in high-elevation coniferous forests (P. Bradley *pers. comm.*), where they have been reported to prey primarily upon jackrabbits.⁸ There are also reports of Bald Eagles wintering in proximity to agricultural areas where they opportunistically feed upon calving afterbirth.³

The Bald Eagle is regarded as a Special Status species in this plan based upon its recent de-listing in 2007. Despite modest declines in Nevada's wintering population in the 1990s,⁶ current trends appear to be stable or slightly positive. As might be expected given its iconic status, Bald Eagles in Nevada are generally well-monitored and closely managed. One important monitoring objective for the species, however, is to develop a thorough inventory of Bald Eagle winter roost sites.

Abundance and Occupancy by Habitat

No information

Nevada-Specific Studies and Analyses

No information

Main Threats and Challenges

Habitat Threats

- Loss of suitable nest and roost trees or forest patches in proximity to large water bodies

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- Human activity close to nest sites and winter roosts can cause nest or roost abandonment or interfere with required activity patterns; it may also prevent eagles from attempting to breed in otherwise suitable locations¹
- Bio-accumulated mercury from fish or exposure to other pesticides may interfere with reproduction or cause direct mortality^{1, 3}

Conservation Strategies

Established Strategies

- USFS Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/>) guidelines prohibit logging, human disturbance, and use of chemicals toxic to eagles within a primary zone of ~ 100 m [330 ft] around nest sites, and less stringent restrictions within a secondary zone of at least 200 m [660 ft] around nest sites

Habitat Strategies

- Open Water (p. Hab-15-1) and Great Basin Lowland Riparian (p. Hab-7-1) habitat conservation strategies benefit this species
- In areas near known nest sites, several large trees (especially known nest trees) in proximity to large water bodies with large fish should be left intact
- Tree removal should be restricted or closely supervised in known winter roost areas
- Restrict human disturbances and pesticide use near nest sites per current USFS guidelines
- Manage recreational use of lakes and reservoirs to prevent undue disturbance of nest sites and actively used foraging areas
- Monitor and, if necessary, manage human disturbance in proximity to winter roost sites

Research, Planning, and Monitoring Strategies

- Conduct a thorough inventory of winter roost sites, coordinated with the Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey⁷

Public Outreach Strategies

- Conduct additional outreach to private landowners that have stewardship over winter roost sites or potential breeding sites to encourage appropriate land use practices
- Support ongoing outreach efforts, such as the annual Eagles and Agriculture Festival in Gardnerville

References: ¹Buehler (2000); ²Nevada Breeding Bird Atlas unpublished data; ³Nevada Wildlife Action Plan Team (2006); ⁴Rich et al. (2006); ⁵Sauer et al. (2008); ⁶Steenhof et al. (2002); ⁷Steenhof et al. (2008); ⁸U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (1986); ^{E0} Expert opinion