



Audubon

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT SUCCESS STORIES

Public Policy Fact Sheet

“Conservation actions carried out in the United States under the Endangered Species Act have been successful in preventing extinction for 99 percent of the species that are listed as endangered or threatened.”

— U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “*Why Save Endangered Species?*”



Bald Eagle, threatened

“The recovery of the Bald Eagle, our national symbol, is also a great national success story.”

— H. Dale Hall, Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, February 13, 2006

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) has three major goals: protect plants and animals from extinction by listing species as endangered or threatened, preserve the essential habitat that these species need, and recover and restore the populations of listed species.

As of mid-March 2006, there are 1,800 species on the endangered and threatened species list of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Because of conservation actions taken under the Endangered Species Act, dozens of species have been brought back from the brink of extinction with their populations stabilized and

The Bald Eagle

The recovery of the Bald Eagle is one of the great success stories of the ESA. It is hard to believe that not long ago America risked losing its majestic national symbol to extinction. By the early 1970s this grand bird was in dire peril, and its survival and recovery are a result of the protections provided to it by the ESA. If lost to extinction, the Bald Eagle would have come to represent great loss and negligence, rather than the symbol of freedom and strength it has long embodied. Now, with the Bald Eagle strongly recovered, it is symbolic not only of our national ideals but also of sound stewardship and the benefits of sensible federal protections.

The pre-Columbian Bald Eagle population, in the area of the lower 48 states, is estimated to have been 100,000 birds. By 1963, there were only 417 known nesting pairs. Bald eagles had been devastated by years of hunting, habitat loss, and exposure to pesticides. By the early 1970s it was known that pesticides such as DDT were concentrating in the food chain and causing the thinning of the eagles' eggshells. The effects of DDT dramatically reduced breeding success because eggshells broke during incubation or young birds did not hatch. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1967 listed the Bald Eagle as endangered under the law that preceded the Endangered Species Act. Bald eagles qualified for federal protection in 1973 under the newly authorized ESA.

In 1972, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) banned most uses of DDT. Listing the Bald Eagle afforded greater protection for important habitat, and saw the beginning of intensive monitoring and management of bald eagle populations in the wild as well as an extensive captive breeding program. In 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service “downlisted” the Bald Eagle from endangered to threatened in most states. The FWS estimates there are 7,066 nesting pairs of bald eagles today in the continental United States.



Whooping Crane, endangered

“The whooping crane population has survived and continues to increase. The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Whooping Crane recovery program has been so successful that other countries have adopted similar methods to protect other species of crane that are also threatened.”

– U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fact Sheet



Aleutian Canada Goose, delisted

“By the winter of 1989-90, the birds reached a peak winter count of 6,300 individuals, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reclassified the goose as threatened. Since then, the species has made a spectacular comeback and it is no longer threatened with extinction. The latest counts show the population has rebounded to more than 37,000 birds.”

– U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fact Sheet

The Whooping Crane

The Whooping Crane, the tallest bird in North America, once ranged throughout the Great Plains and Gulf Coast regions of the United States. In 1870, there were somewhere between 500 and 1,400 whooping cranes. By 1941, the migratory population had dropped to 16 birds. Their numbers declined because of collisions with power lines, illegal shooting, human disturbances and conversion of nesting and migratory stopover habitat for agriculture. Population numbers have also suffered due to disease, lead poisoning, and natural disasters. In 1967, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the whooping crane as an endangered species under the law that preceded the current Endangered Species Act.

The on-going recovery of the Whooping Crane has included habitat protection, captive breeding, and reintroduction of captive bred birds to parts of its historic range. Operation Migration, a nonprofit group that pioneered the use of ultra-light aircraft to teach captive bred birds how to migrate, has utilized these aircraft to teach whooping cranes a new migration route. In December 2005, the fifth generation of cranes, 19 birds led by four aircraft, reached their Florida wintering grounds after a 61-day trip of more than 2,200 miles through seven states.

Today the population of whooping cranes has increased to 300 birds, with three wild populations and four captive flocks. The only self-sustaining wild population has its nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park in northern Canada and wintering grounds in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. A second wild flock, the Rocky Mountain population, consists of only 4 birds that summer in Idaho and Montana and winter in New Mexico. The third wild population consists of 25 individuals, is non-migratory and is found in the Kissimmee Prairie of Florida. Captive populations exist in Wisconsin (31 birds), Maryland (41 birds), Calgary, AB (19 birds) and Texas (4 birds).

Aleutian Canada Goose

The Aleutian Canada goose is one of the smallest geese species and nests on the rugged Aleutian islands of Alaska and winters primarily in California and Oregon. The Aleutian Canada Goose was nearly lost due to the introduction of an invasive species to its habitat. The full recovery of the Aleutian Canada Goose is a model of management and a testament to the effectiveness of the Endangered Species Act.

During the height of the fur industry in the early 20th century, fur farmers and trappers released foxes on the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, islands that had no native mammal species. The foxes proceeded to devastate Aleutian Canada Goose populations, who had no natural defenses against the predators. The geese were particularly vulnerable because they are ground nesters, and adults are flightless during their molting seasons. Hunting also played a role in the decline. The Aleutian Canada Goose was almost completely eradicated and at one time was thought to be extinct. In 1962, a wildlife biologist found a small population of 200-300 geese on Buldir Island. Under the law that preceded the Endangered Species Act of 1973, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the bird as endangered in 1967.

In 1973, the federal government banned all hunting of the Aleutian Canada Goose and began trapping and removing the foxes from some islands. Geese were reintroduced to islands that were now clear of foxes. Strengthened conservation and management of wintering habitat have contributed to recovery as well. All the islands inhabited by Aleutian Canada geese are protected, and wintering habitat in California and Oregon also has been protected. In 2001, due to the successful recovery, the FWS removed the goose from the threatened and endangered species list.