

# NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service

San Bernardino National Forest



Date: January 8, 2005

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## BALD EAGLES SEEN IN SAN BERNARDINO MTNS

Big Bear Lake, CA...On Saturday January 8th, the second bald eagle count of the winter was conducted by local land management agencies and volunteers around Big Bear Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains. Counts at Lake Arrowhead, Lake Silverwood and Lake Hemet were cancelled due to flooding and weather conditions. One eagle (1 immature) was observed in the Big Bear Basin. The January average for Big Bear counts since 1978 is 16. Eight volunteers braved icy roads and snowy conditions during what could be this years biggest storm to participate in the 1-hour eagle census.

Immature eagles are distinguished by a brown head and tail; adults are recognized by the famous white head and tail. While immature eagles are about the same size as the adults, it takes 4-5 years to acquire full adult coloration.

The U.S. Forest Service has coordinated counts of this federally-protected species since 1978. Data from our local count will be used in the nation-wide Mid-Winter Bald Eagle census to assess recovery status of the species. The Forest Service relies on volunteers to gather information during the monthly winter eagle counts. Counts are conducted for a 1-hour period from 9-10 a.m. Forest Service volunteers stationed around lakes in Big Bear, Arrowhead, and Idyllwild record all observations of bald eagles. Volunteers at Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area conduct simultaneous counts.

Bald eagles are similar to many southern Californians in that they visit the lakes of our San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains for their winter vacations. Eagles are easily observed around the lakes between November and April. Instead of vacationing here for dynamite skiing, eagles come for the plentiful food supplies. As lakes and rivers up north freeze each winter, fish become unavailable under a thick layer of ice and ducks leave the frozen waters. The eagles' "grocery stores" have essentially closed for the winter. So eagles fly south looking for open water stocked with food. The lakes of the San Bernardino Mountains fit the bill perfectly--they are part of the Pacific Migratory Flyway, a migration freeway for millions of ducks. Eagles like to spend their winters here because of the abundant and tasty ducks and fish.

If you'd like to see a bald eagle this winter, there's still time: they migrate out of the San Bernardino and San Jacinto Mountains in late March, heading back to summer homes in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and Alberta, Canada. By the end of March, they'll all be gone.

In 1992, the Forest Service biologists in Big Bear started a research project to learn more about what areas of the San Bernardino National Forest are important for eagle foraging, perching, and night roosting. Biologists caught 15 eagles and equipped them with tiny radio-transmitters that allowed their movements to be tracked. Through radio-tracking, we learned that some of the same individual eagles return to the San Bernardino Mountains year after year. We also determined that there is a lot of movement of eagles between the different mountain lakes and that the lakes do not have distinctive separate populations. We have also learned that some of Big Bear's eagles travel to Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho for nesting.

Scientists at Lake Silverwood have equipped some bald eagles with transmitters tracked by satellites. Current information regarding bald eagle migratory routes for these and other California eagles can be viewed from the University of Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group's web site at <http://www2.ucsc.edu/~scpbrg/migration.htm>.

Catching a glimpse of our breath-taking national bird is relatively easy during the winter months. There are also some fantastic opportunities for excellent close-up photography. Just look in the tallest trees around the lakeshore. Or, if the lake is partially frozen, look for eagles perched on the ice near small groups of ducks using open water pockets. Stop by the Forest Service's Big Bear Discovery Center (on North Shore Drive, 3 miles east of Fawnskin) to pick up a handout on eagles. **Remember that human presence may distract or disturb the eagles--so, try to limit your movements and don't make loud noises when nearby. If possible, remain in your car while observing eagles--the car acts as a blind.**

There are two more eagle counts this winter and volunteers are needed for both dates, which are, February 12 and March 12. So mark your calanders now!! Volunteers need not have experience--just bring binoculars and a watch (and dress warmly!). For more information about eagle counts, please call Marc Stamer, Wildlife Biologist at the Forest Service Ranger Station in Big Bear (909-382-2828) or Kim Boss at the San Jacinto Ranger Station (909)382-2936. To participate in the count at Lake Silverwood, contact Rick Reisenhoffer at (760)389-2281. To welcome and celebrate Bald Eagles in Big Bear, the Forest Service and the San Bernardino National Forest Association invite you to participate in Eagle Season. Discovery Tours to view bald eagles are held Saturdays and Sundays. Call ahead for reservations and information (909-382-2790).

## BIG BEAR LAKE EAGLE COUNT SUMMARY

(Includes Big Bear and Baldwin Lakes)

Year \ Month	December	January	February	March	April	Average	High Count
1978 - 79	7	27	27	18	9	18	27
1979 - 80	20	22	13	11	3	14	22
1980 - 81	11	19	25			18	25
1981 - 82	15	27	22	6	3	15	27
1982 - 83	7	27	18	11		16	27
1983 - 84	14	28	18	10		18	28
1984 - 85	27	8	3	3		10	27
1985 - 86	20	24		9		18	24
1986 - 87	20	24		9		18	24
1987 - 88	9	17	21	16		16	21
1988 - 89	12	6	4	12		9	12
1989 - 90	15	11	19	17		16	19
1990 - 91	6	16	22	17		15	22
1991 - 92	19	19	13	9		15	19
1992 - 93	6	15	3	3		7	15
1993 - 94	9	17	15	8		12	17
1994 - 95	10	10	20	<b>No Count</b>		13	20
1995 - 96	6	14	15	10		11	15
1996 - 97	10	15	5	9		10	15
1997 - 98	8	14 - 15	15	12		12	15
1998 - 99	8	17	15 - 17	9		11	17
1999 - 00	8	13	3	13		9	13
2000 - 01	13	13	14	12		13	14
2001 - 02	7	9	11	9		9	11
2002-03	6	13	15	9		11	15
2003-04	4	14	11	7		9	14
2004-2003	6	1	Feb. 12	March 12		4	6
<b>Average</b>	11	16	14	10	5	12.74	18.93

Maximum            18            28

Minimum            4            6

Median              13            19