United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

Mountain Top Ranger District

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PRESS RELEASE

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*** VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO COUNT BALD EAGLES ***

Eagle Counts for this winter have been scheduled for the following Saturday mornings: December 18, January 8, February 12, and March 12. The first bald eagle count for this winter is scheduled for Saturday morning, December 18th. Volunteers are needed for the counts--they are stationed at various vantage points around the lakes where they map and note any eagle observations during the 1-hour period from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m.

This winter's bald eagle counts will be conducted on Saturdays; December 18, January 8, February 12, and March 12. Mark your calendars now. Volunteers will be needed for each census. Volunteers need not have experience--just bring binoculars, a watch and dress warmly. Volunteers for Big Bear should come to the Forest Service Big Bear Discovery Center on North Shore Drive at 8:00 a.m. for instructions. Volunteers for Arrowhead should go to the Sky Forest Ranger Station at 8:00 a.m.. For more information, please call Marc Stamer, Wildlife Biologist at the Big Bear Ranger Station 909-382-2828. Volunteers for Silverwood Lake State Park should contact Rick Reisenhofer for information 760-389-2281 and meet at the Park Office at 8:00 a.m. Volunteers for Lake Hemet should contact Kim Huber at 909-382-2936 and plan on meeting at the Lake Hemet Grocery Store at 8:30 a.m. for intructions.

The San Bernardino mountains support the largest wintering bald eagle population in southern California. Eagles typically begin arriving in the area in late November and continue to stay in the area until early April. Numbers using the Big Bear Basin have fluctuated over the past 21 years, from lows of 10-12 to highs of 35-40.

The U.S. Forest Service has organized monthly winter counts since 1978. Observers are stationed around the mountain lakes for a simultaneous 1-hour census/mapping effort once a month December through March. Through this method, the Forest Service has gained information about high-use foraging, perching, and day resting areas, fluctuations of numbers, and changes in use areas depending on weather, ice, and lake level conditions. Concurrent censuses are conducted at Big Bear Lake, Baldwin Lake, Lake Arrowhead, Silverwood Lake, Lake Gregory, Little Green Valley Lake, and Lake Hemet.

Thirteen winters ago (1991-1992), the Forest Service started a research project to learn more about what areas in the mountains are important for eagle foraging, perching, and night roosting. Fifteen eagles were caught and equipped with tiny radio-transmitters that allowed us to track their movements. 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—the eagles regularly move between Silverwood, Big Bear, and Arrowhead lakes. We have also learned that some of the San Bernardino Mountains' eagles travel to Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Canada, and even the Northwest Terrritories (about 2000 miles one-way!) for nesting.

Scientists at Lake Silverwood have equipped some bald eagles with transmitters tracked by satellites. One of the eagles caught in 1999 returned to Big Bear Lake in early December of 2000! 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.**

Breeding populations of bald eagles in southern California were extirpated by the late 1950s. Until reintroduction efforts began in the 1980's on Catalina Island, the southern-most nest site known in California was in Lake County. During the Winter/Spring of 2003 one pair of bald eagles successfully fledged two young at Lake Hemet in the San Jacinto's! Potential nesting habitat exists on San Bernardino National Forest lands adjacent to Big Bear Lake, Lake Arrowhead, Baldwin Lake, Lake Hemet, and Lake Silverwood State Park. The Forest Service will be monitoring these areas in the spring for future nesting attempts.

The bald eagle is a federally-listed Threatened Species. It has full protection under the Endangered Species Act as well as the Bald Eagle Protection Act. Although once gravely threatened with extinction, the bald eagle population is now on the increase. Bald eagle populations have done so well in recent years that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service "down-listed" bald eagles from the Endangered status to the Threatened status. Captive breeding programs, reintroduction efforts, the banning of DDT, and public education have all helped in the recovery of this species.

Catching a glimpse of our breath-taking national symbol is relatively easy during winter months in Big Bear. There are some fantastic opportunities for excellent close-up photographs too. Just look in the tallest trees around the lake near open water for perching eagles. Or, if the lake is partly frozen, look for eagles perched on the ice near small groups of ducks using the open water. Stop by the Forest Service's Big Bear Discovery Center (on North Shore Drive, 1/2-mile west of Stanfield Cutoff) and 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 they're nearby. If possible, remain in your car while looking at eagles - the car may act as a blind.

To welcome and celebrate the eagles in Big Bear, the Forest Service and San Bernardino National Forest Association invite you to participate in Eagle Season. Discovery Tours to view bald eagles will be held each Saturday and Sunday and during holiday periods. The tours consist of an introductory slide show and a tour bus ride around Big Bear Lake to look for eagles. Binoculars and spotting scopes will be provided. Call ahead at 909-382-2790 for reservations and information.

MARC STAMER, Biologist

BIG BEAR LAKE EAGLE COUNT SUMMARY

(Includes Big Bear and Baldwin Lakes)

Month / Year	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	**No Count**		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	Dec. 18	Jan. 8	Feb. 12	March 12'			
Average	11	17	14	10	5	13.10	19.42
					Maximum	18	28
					Minimum	7	11
					Median	13	19