Bald Eagles and Forestry

Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and their habitat are protected in Oregon by the Oregon Forest Practices Act (FPA). In addition, they are an Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Sensitive Vulnerable species and are an Oregon Conservation Strategy species. Bald eagles are also protected federally by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

Bald eagles (BAEAs) have a wingspan of 6 to 8 feet. Adult BAEAs are easily identified by their white head and tail, their yellow eyes, beak and legs, and their dark brown body. Immature BAEAs are darker and mottled; they do not obtain adult plumage until they are 4 to 5 years old.

BAEAs are most abundant in Oregon during the late winter and early spring, and are best detected by searching suitable habitat with binoculars or a spotting scope. BAEAs primarily eat fish caught by other birds of prey (e.g., osprey), but also hunt other birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals. BAEAs eat what is available, and will capture their food live or as carrion (already dead).

BAEAs typically nest in live-top trees, often choosing a large dominant tree generally within 2 miles of water. Nest building and repair are done by both sexes, and nests are often 5 to 8 feet in diameter and 2 to 3 feet deep. They exhibit strong fidelity to nests and mates. BAEAs will often build and maintain more than one nest. All nests and associated replacement and perch trees require protection under the Oregon FPA even though the site may not be occupied that year. During nesting season, BAEAs are usually detected near shorelines of rivers, lakes and reservoirs.
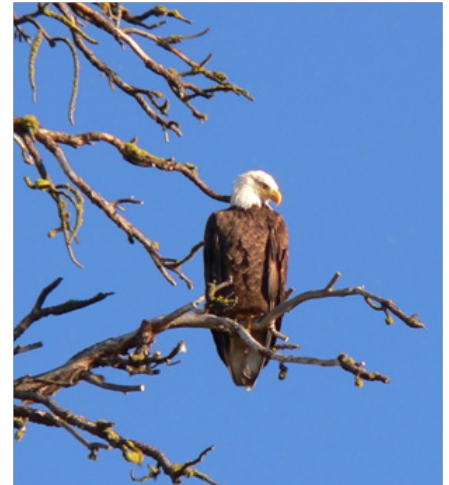

Photo by Christine Maynard.

Photo by Steven Wilder.
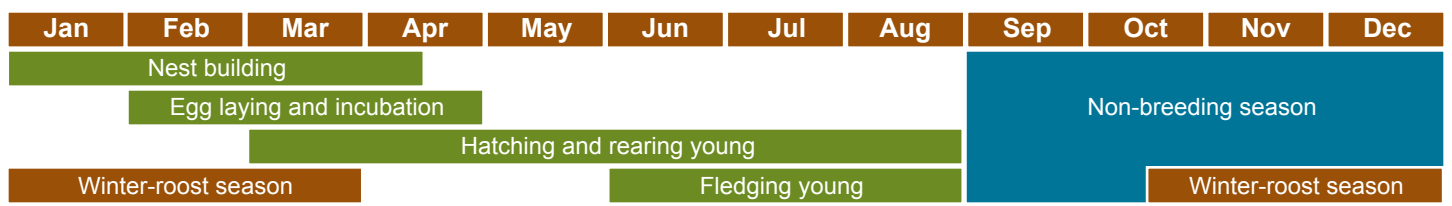
WHAT ARE SOME THREATS TO THE BAEA?

- Bald eagles are a success story. Their recovery has been so successful that BAEAs are commonly found throughout Oregon.
- Starvation is one of the main causes of death in juvenile bald eagles, due to competition for food.
- Toxicants

WHAT IS MOST LIKELY TO DISTURB A NESTING BAEA?

- The BAEA is most sensitive to disturbance during the nest-building phase of the nesting chronology, and while hatching and rearing young.
- Chainsaw noise and other timber-felling equipment noise
- Road construction
- Repeated passes by low-flying aircraft such as helicopters
- Blasting

WHEN DO BALD EAGLES NEST?

Critical nesting period:
Jan 1 - Aug 31

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

Nest building (Jan – Apr)

Egg laying and incubation (Feb – Apr)

Hatching and rearing young (Mar – Aug)

Non-breeding season (Sep – Dec)

Winter-roost season (Jan – Apr)

Fledging young (Jun – Aug)

Winter-roost season (Oct – Dec)

WHAT DOES THE FPA REQUIRE FOR NESTING SITES?

Protect the resource site, which includes the active nest tree and alternate nest sites, as well as an area no less than 330 feet surrounding the nest tree. The resource site includes all identified key components important to BAEAs: perching and fledging trees, replacement nest trees, and forested area around the nest tree.

HOW DO I PROTECT THE NESTING SITE?

Site-specific protections are required if operations are found to be within 660 feet (or 1,000 feet for use of an aircraft) of a nest. Generally, protections will include:

- Designing operations to protect the nest tree and surrounding buffer from damage and windthrow
- Working with ODF to determine trees that are left. The protected trees are there to provide a visual screen for the BAEA nest
- Prohibiting forest operations within 660 feet of a nest tree (or within 1,000 feet of a nest tree if using aircraft) from **January 1 to August 31**
- Submitting plans to ODF before operating within or near a nest site. The plan must clearly describe how the nest site will be protected

HOW DO I PROTECT THE ROOST SITE?

Though the Oregon Department of Forestry has removed roost sites from the Forest Protection Rules, bald eagle roost sites are still protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. It is illegal to have "take" of bald eagles under this act. According to the USFWS bald eagle management guidelines, the following are suggestions for avoiding disturbance to eagle roost sites.

- Minimize potentially disruptive activities in the eagles' direct flight path between their nest and roost sites and important foraging areas.
- Protect and preserve potential roost sites by retaining mature trees, particularly within one-half mile of water.
- Use pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers, and other chemicals only in accordance with federal and s tate laws.

HOW DOES THE BAEA NEST TREE REVIEW PROCESS WORK?

In order to verify that a nest is abandoned, surveys are required. The FPA requires two two-hour surveys during the nesting season, for a period of five years. Surveys can be performed by the landowner, a wildlife biologist, an operator, or another individual. Survey requirements include:

- Establish a survey location where the observer can view the nest tree and nest.
- Use appropriate equipment for the survey (good quality pair of binoculars or a spotting scope).
- Have an ODF Stewardship Forester verify the presence of an adequate line of sight for observation of the nest and the location of nest tree. Verification must occur before the first survey if conducting abandonment surveys.
- Turn in survey forms annually to the local Stewardship Forester.
- Complete surveys between **March 15 and August 31**. The initial visit should be conducted in March or April, and the second visit must be conducted after mid-May.

In order to declare abandonment there must be five consecutive years with no evidence of nesting. More information on abandonment surveys, including the appropriate data sheet, can be obtained by contacting your Stewardship Forester.