

Note from Department of Fish and Game staff, Natural Community Conservation Program, Habitat Conservation Planning Branch, Sacramento: Because of the sensitive nature of data contained within this report, we have chosen to make public only a summary of the major findings and recommendations, as prepared by the authors.

Final Report

NCCP/MSCP Raptor Monitoring Project

Golden Eagles of the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Plan Area (2001-2003)

to

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by

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SUMMARY

The Golden Eagle is a meaningful umbrella species, which reflects the health of many other species that occupy the same territories but are harder to monitor. Golden Eagles are a top predator and, within the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Plan area, have territories of 20 to 30 square miles. They have survived by nesting in the most remote parts of the county where they are not subject to human disturbance. After 16 years of consistent monitoring, we estimate that thirty one (31) pairs formerly occupied the San Diego MSCP. Today, fifteen (15) pairs are still active and sixteen (16) pairs have been extirpated. Most of these extirpations occurred in the last 35 years. The fifteen (15) breeding pairs of Golden Eagles remaining in the SD MSCP represent 30 percent of all the breeding Golden Eagles in San Diego County. Seven (7) of the fifteen (15) remaining active pairs within the SD MSCP are in serious jeopardy of being extirpated in the next 5-10 years. Three (3) of the seven (7) pairs predicted to become extirpated may, in fact, already have been lost.

The first changes of significance that affected the SD MSCP Golden Eagle population were from intensive agriculture such as avocado and citrus groves. This intensive agriculture replaced the more Golden Eagle-friendly cattle grazing and grasslands. Some extirpations were documented to occur in San Diego County in the 1950s and 1960s, after the build-up of military personnel post-WWII, but most disappeared after the 1970s, when major freeways opened land for development that was formerly cattle ranches. Interstate and local freeways made access easy and allowed development to proceed.

Extirpated Golden Eagle territories were primarily located on private land (56 percent). Currently, only three (20 percent) of the remaining pairs of Golden Eagles core nesting areas remain on private lands. Twelve (80 percent) of the currently active Golden Eagles within the SD MSCP nest on public land. This provides a significant and valuable opportunity for the future management and survival of Golden Eagles within the SD MSCP.

We recommend for the SD MSCP: an annual survey of Golden Eagle breeding territories and provide a cost-effective approach; using only properly-trained and experienced observers for this monitoring; interpreting the findings within the context of the long history of data that WRI has collected; distributing, in a timely manner, the monitoring results to all resource and planning agencies that have a need to know; examining both private and public proposed land-use changes and human activities within the context of how they might impact the remaining Golden Eagles; maintaining the Golden Eagle Database at the Wildlife Research Institute, Inc. and selectively providing that information to individuals and organizations based on how it will potentially impact the Golden Eagles; and selectively re-introducing (hacking) young eagles back into appropriate habitat.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Human disturbance is one of the main factors negatively affecting Golden Eagles in San Diego County. Human encroachment and development continues to move further into what was the San Diego backcountry. WRI offers this report with detailed information about Golden Eagles and their nest sites for the sole purpose of protecting the remaining breeding pairs. We hope and trust that the agencies that use and share this information will be sensitive to the confidential nature of the following data and work towards the common goal of protecting Golden Eagles in San Diego County.