

## Bald Eagle

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*

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**STATUS:** Threatened without critical habitat in all of the contiguous 48 states (60 FR 35999, August 11, 1995).

**DESCRIPTION:** A large raptor with 6-7 feet wingspan and unfeathered feet. Adult has white head, neck, and tail. While gliding or soaring it keeps wings flat, not uplifted like vultures. Immatures are mostly dark, and may be confused with immature golden eagles. However, golden eagles have a more sharply defined white pattern on underside of wings and tail.

**HABITAT:** In Texas, preferred nesting habitat is along river systems, or within 1-2 miles of some other large body of water, such as a lake or reservoir. Nests are often located in areas where forest, marsh, and water meet. Large, tall trees (40-120 ft.) are used for nesting and roosting (taller than the general forest canopy, providing an unobstructed flight path to nest). Tree species used for nesting in Texas include loblolly pine, bald cypress, oak, cottonwood, and sycamore. Nearby (within 0.5 miles) wetland areas are necessary for feeding. Fish is generally the primary food, but eagles in Texas also prey on waterfowl, turtles, small mammals, and carrion.

### DISTRIBUTION:

**Present:** Nesting populations are gradually increasing in Texas, with territories located primarily along rivers, near reservoirs, and along the Gulf Coast. Wintering eagles may occur statewide on rivers, streams, reservoirs and other areas of open water where fish, waterfowl, and carrion are available for food.

**Historic:** Found throughout the contiguous United States, Canada, and northern Mexico.



**THREATS AND REASONS FOR DECLINE:** Past threats include reproductive failure caused by pesticides, loss of riparian habitat, and unrestricted killing by humans (including shooting, poisoning, and trapping). Current threats are habitat loss, human encroachment on nesting sites, and lead poisoning (even low levels can cause neurological dysfunction, behavioral abnormalities, anemia, and increased susceptibility to disease).

**OTHER INFORMATION:** In Texas, bald eagle nesting typically occurs from October to July. Clutch size varies from 1 to 3, dull white eggs are incubated for approximately 35 days. Young generally fledge in April, after 10-12 weeks of growth, but parental care continues for another 4-6 weeks. Northern migration begins in May; occasionally, a pair will remain within a territory year-round. Wintering Bald eagles may arrive in north Texas as early as October and return north February through March. Bald eagles are particularly vulnerable to disturbance during the nesting period. Bald eagles are protected by the Endangered Species Act, Bald Eagle Protection Act and Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

### REFERENCES:

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- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 1983. Northern States Bald Eagle Recovery Plan. USFWS, Endangered Species Office, Twin Cities, MN.
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