
MANAGING MONTANA'S GOLDEN EAGLES IN A LANDSCAPE OF DEVELOPMENT: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

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The Montana Golden Eagle Working Group, an active coalition of agency representatives and eagle experts, was convened in April 2011 to address information needs and management recommendations for Golden Eagles in the state. Current data indicates Golden Eagle populations may be declining across the western United States and stable or declining in Montana. New energy and subdivision development may exacerbate these population trends through direct mortality, indirect and direct habitat loss and alteration, and increased disturbance. However, we lack information that is necessary to evaluate population-level impacts of new development. In 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) published a final rule authorizing limited issuance of permits to take Bald and Golden Eagles where the take is consistent with the goal of increasing or stable breeding populations, is associated with and not the purpose of an otherwise lawful activity, and cannot practicably be avoided despite the implementation of advanced conservation practices. Consequently, limited take of eagles may be authorized relative to energy development or other activities while managing for no net loss to the population. This means the USFWS must identify potential eagle mortality sources, the impact of potential mortality on the population, and impact avoidance, minimization, and compensatory mitigation strategies. The Golden Eagle working group is drafting a monitoring strategy and management recommendations for Golden Eagles in a landscape of development. Here we provide information on working group activities which are focused on allowing for continued development while simultaneously conserving one of Montana's most charismatic birds.