

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – Recovery Strategy for the Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in Ontario**

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The Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) is found predominantly in western North America, but historically was more widespread in the eastern United States and Canada. The Golden Eagle population in eastern North America is currently estimated at only a few hundred pairs. This population historically bred in eastern Canada and the northeastern United States. Currently, breeding of the eastern North American population is limited to Manitoba, remote northern areas in Quebec and Ontario, the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec and Labrador. The Golden Eagle is listed as endangered on the Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) List.

Breeding history of the species in Ontario has not been well documented. Recent aerial surveys of known and potential nesting sites by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR), and surveys associated with the two Ontario Breeding Bird Atlases (1981-1985 and 2001-2005) have substantially increased knowledge of the species' breeding distribution in Ontario. All documented nests from these surveys have been found in the Hudson Bay Lowlands region and the Severn River drainage of the Kenora District. It is estimated that approximately 10 to 20 pairs nest in Ontario; however, due to the difficulty in surveying the potential breeding range of the species, the fact that nest sites can be missed during aerial surveys and the belief that the total population may be/likely is augmented by an unknown number of non-breeding "floaters," a confident assessment of the total number of breeding pairs in Ontario is not currently feasible.

Golden Eagles in eastern North America are faced with many direct and indirect threats, such as: lead poisoning, incidental trapping, shooting, electrocution and collisions with structures that obstruct flight paths, disturbance at nest sites, habitat loss, environmental contamination and climate change. The extent of many of these threats to the Ontario Golden Eagle population currently remains unknown and needs further investigation. There is some evidence that the Golden Eagle may never have been common in Ontario. The apparently small breeding population in Ontario may be its greatest limiting factor. A loss of a few individuals as a result of any of the identified threats may have demographic consequences to an already small population.

The goal for the species, identified in this recovery strategy is to maintain existing individuals and populations, allow for the natural increase of successfully breeding Golden Eagles in Ontario and minimize threats. The protection and recovery objectives are to:

1. identify, reduce and mitigate threats to Golden Eagle and its breeding and non-breeding habitat in Ontario;
2. identify and protect currently occupied and newly identified habitat of Golden Eagle in Ontario;

3. increase knowledge of Golden Eagle biology in Ontario including distribution, abundance, life history, habitat needs and impact of threats to this population; and
4. increase public awareness and understanding of Golden Eagle and its habitat in Ontario.

It is recommended that historical, current and newly discovered nesting sites (occupied and unoccupied) be considered for inclusion within a habitat regulation. Golden Eagles are known to reuse nest sites and refurbished several nests in one year. The time between nest reuse is variable, and has been observed to range between one and 30 to 40 years. At present, survey efforts for nests in Ontario are rare and infrequent, making data on Golden Eagle nest use limited. It is therefore suggested that nest sites that have been identified as either occupied or unoccupied within the last 35 years be considered for inclusion within a habitat regulation.

Given the importance and sensitivity of cliff habitat for nesting, it is recommended that habitat for cliff nests should include the cliff face on which the nest rests, and extend vertically from the top of the cliff to the base and horizontally across the entire cliff face. At sites where Golden Eagles nest in trees, it is recommended that regulated habitat should include the nest, the tree supporting the nest, and an area with a 22m diameter around the nest tree to protect the tree itself.

The use of habitats by Golden Eagles in Ontario outside of their breeding season is currently not well documented. It is recommended that provisions should be made to incorporate any future information gathered on migration corridors and stop-over sites (habitat used for resting, roosting and foraging during migration) for inclusion within a habitat regulation.