**Eagles Are Back**

Bald eagle no longer endangered

By [Karen Fanning](http://www.scholastic.com/browse/contributor.jsp?id=692)| June 29 , 2007

  
Bald eagle in flight. (Photo: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)

For more than 30 years, the American bald eagle has been perched atop the list of Endangered Species. But the stately birds have made a magnificent comeback. Government officials announced Thursday that the eagle is no longer a threatened species.

"The rescue of the bald eagle ranks among one of the greatest victories of American conservation," said John Flicker, president of the National Audubon Society. "The eagle has recovered across America."  
  
Today, there are at least 10,000 breeding pairs in the lower 48 states—up from just 417 in 1963. Still, the population remains scattered throughout the U.S.—from just one pair in states like Vermont and Rhode Island to more than 1,300 in Minnesota.   
  
**A Population in Danger**  
  
By the 1960s, habitat loss, illegal hunting, and the use of a deadly poison called DDT had threatened the bird's survival. DDT was commonly used to kill mosquitoes. The toxin leaked into streams and lakes and infected fish. Eagles that consumed the contaminated fish had difficulty reproducing.   
  
The government finally banned DDT in 1972. The Endangered Species Act of 1973 gave federal officials the authority to protect the eagle’s habitat. Since then, federal officials have been working to save the eagle from extinction. In 1995, the eagle's status was upgraded from "endangered" to "threatened." This week, the bird was finally dropped from the list altogether.   
  
**What Does the Future Hold?**  
  
While the soaring birds will still be safeguarded under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, some experts say those protections won’t be enough.   
  
"There is big money to be made in cutting down and developing bald eagle habitat," says Kieran Suckling of the Center for Biological Diversity, a conservation group in Tucson, Arizona. Suckling says the legislation does not defend eagle-nesting grounds from greedy builders.   
  
Landowner Edmund Contoski is eager to begin constructing five log homes on his seven-acre property, which is situated on Lake Sullivan in Minnesota. Until now, the 69-year-old retiree hasn't been allowed to build because of the bald eagle's nest located on his land. The Endangered Species Act forbade him from building within 330 feet of the nest.   
  
In 2005, he took the Fish and Wildlife Service to court, demanding that they follow through on a 1999 pledge to delist the bald eagle. Contoski won. The court case set in motion Thursday's decision to finally delist the bird.   
  
**A National Treasure**  
  
For 225 years, the American bald eagle has been our country's national symbol. In 1782, the Continental Congress moved to place the bird onto the country's official seal. Thursday was an occasion to salute the bird’s past and celebrate its future.   
  
"The eagle has returned," said Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne at an event held at the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. "Today is an opportunity to celebrate and draw inspiration."