



## NEWS RELEASE

### **U.S. Forest Service, San Bernardino National Forest For Immediate Release**

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### **Great Day of Eagle Counting**

**San Bernardino, Calif.**, March 8, 2014 – On Saturday March 8<sup>th</sup>, the final bald eagle count of the winter was conducted by volunteer eagle observers and local Federal and State biologists around several lakes in the southern California.

A grand total of nine eagles (7 adults and 2 juveniles) were observed at the lake areas during the 1- hour count. Five bald eagles (4 adults and 1 juvenile) were observed at Big Bear Lake; 1 juvenile eagle at Lake Arrowhead; 2 adult eagles at Silverwood Lake; 1 adult eagle at Lake Hemet; 0 eagles at Lake Gregory and 0 at Lake Perris. Juvenile eagles are distinguished by a brown head and tail; adults are recognized by the famous white head and tail - it takes 4-5 years to acquire full adult coloration. Juvenile eagles are the same size as the adults.

Approximately 191 observers participated in the 1-hour eagle census (57 at Big Bear area, 20 at Lake Arrowhead/Lake Gregory, 68 at Silverwood Lake, 19 at Lake Hemet, and 37 at Lake Perris. The count coordinators from the Forest Service and State Recreation Areas would like to thank those volunteers for their dedication in getting up early and participating in the eagle census. The success of the eagle counts is entirely dependent on the volunteers! We've had a great season with fantastic turnouts of volunteers (and bald eagles)!

Bald eagle counts have been conducted at some of sites since 1978 and all of the sites have been participating since around 2000. Four monthly counts are conducted between December and March to estimate the number of bald eagles that are wintering in the area. The highest numbers are typically in February and March.

It was a beautiful day for spotting eagles and was a great way to end our winter eagle censuses. Many of the bald eagles have started migrating out of southern California, heading north to their breeding grounds. A few breeding pairs have set up nesting territories and are year-round residents. A pair of bald eagles is tending their nest at Lake Hemet. Big Bear Lake's nesting pair hatched two chicks in early February but, unfortunately, they did not survive last week's severe storm.

See websites for additional information about the San Bernardino National Forest (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sanbernardino/>) and the California State Recreation Areas

([www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)).

*About the U.S. Forest Service:*

The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world. Public lands the Forest Service manages contribute more than \$13 billion to the economy each year through visitor spending alone. Those same lands provide 20 percent of the nation's clean water supply, a value estimated at \$7.2 billion per year. The agency has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 80 percent of the 850 million forested acres within the U.S., of which 100 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live. Learn more at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/sbnf>

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## Background

The best time of year to see bald eagles in Southern California is during winter months when there is an influx of eagles. Migrating eagles typically begin arriving in the area in late November and leave in late March or early April.

Bald eagles are usually found close to water because their diet is primarily made up of fish and ducks. As winter approaches in those northern regions, lakes freeze over and waterfowl fly south. For bald eagles, that means that the food they eat has become scarce. So, they head south looking for areas with abundant food supplies and end up wintering in sunny southern California!

During the winter, southern California bald eagles are typically found at many of the lakes, including Big Bear Lake, Baldwin Lake, Silverwood Lake, Lake Arrowhead, Green Valley Lake, Grass Valley Lake in the San Bernardino Mountains and Prado Dam, Lake Perris, Lake Hemet, Lake Skinner, Diamond Valley Lake, Lake Matthews, and the Salton Sea to the south.

Through radio-tracking bald eagles, biologists learned that some of the same individual eagles return to the San Bernardino Mountains year after year. We also determined that there is a lot of movement of eagles between the different mountain lakes and that the lakes do not have distinctive separate populations—the eagles regularly move between the mountain lakes.

Radio-tracking and/or banding also revealed that the eagles that winter in the San Bernardino Mountains migrate to Southern California from Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and Canada. Those regions are likely where most of our migratory bald eagles nest in spring and summer. Some of the San Bernardino Mountains' eagles were tracked all the way to Alberta and the Northwest Territories in Canada - that is about 2,000 miles one-way! For more information regarding bald eagle migratory routes for these and other California eagles go to the University of Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group's web site at (<http://www2.ucsc.edu/scpbrg/baeamigration.htm>). While the evidence suggests a northern interior migration for most of the bald eagles, some of our southern California eagles have traveled fewer miles, moving over from the Channel Islands.

Breeding populations of bald eagles in Southern California were extirpated by the late 1950s. Until reintroduction efforts began in the 1980s on Catalina Island, the southernmost nest site known in California was in Lake County. Since 2003, several pairs of bald eagles have decided that our southern California neighborhoods were too nice to leave – they built nests and have successfully raised families. Nesting bald eagles can now be found at Lake Hemet, Lake Skinner, Lake Matthews, and Big Bear Lake. As the populations continue to grow, more bald eagles are in our future.

This is exactly what happened at Lake Hemet in Riverside County. The female eagle with orange wing tags "02" hatched at San Francisco Zoo in 2000 and was released on Catalina Island as part of the reintroduction efforts. In 2004, she arrived at Lake Hemet and decided to take up year-round residence with the male bald eagle that was already there. Together, the pair has raised successful nests ever since then. In 2012, the first successful bald eagle nesting ever recorded in the San Bernardino Mountains happened in Big Bear Lake!

As bald eagles raise families in southern California, it is now possible to see bald eagles year-round (not just during winter migrations). Because of the influx of migrating bald eagles during the winter, the easiest time to see eagles is still between December and March.

The bald eagle is a success story of the federal Endangered Species Act – through protection under that law; its populations have recovered from the brink of extinction. Captive breeding programs, reintroduction efforts, the banning of DDT, and public education have all helped in the recovery of this species. There are over 10,000 breeding pairs in the United States and they now breed again in all 49 of the continental United States (they have never bred in Hawaii).

Because of the population rebound, bald eagles are no longer in jeopardy of going extinct. While bald eagles are no longer protected under federal Endangered Species Act, they still have full protection under the Bald Eagle Protection Act and under the State of California's Endangered Species Act. These laws make it illegal to harm or harass bald eagles. It is also illegal to possess bald eagle parts, even a feather.

Catching a glimpse of our breath-taking national symbol is relatively easy during winter months. There are some fantastic opportunities for excellent close-up photographs too. Just look in the tallest trees around the lake near open water for perching eagles. Or, if the lake is partly frozen, look for eagles perched on the ice near small groups of ducks using the open water.

If you want to look for eagles in the Big Bear area, stop by the Forest Service's Big Bear Discovery Center (on North Shore Drive, 1-1/2 miles west of Stanfield Cutoff) and pick up a handout on eagles. Also, join us for one of our free public talks – call the Big Bear Discovery Center (909-382-2790) for dates and times.

If you are in Garner Valley and want to see the resident pair, stop by the Forest Service's Lake Hemet Day Use Area and just look across the lake. The birds are often flying overhead fishermen and or sitting in trees above the picnic area.

**Remember that human presence may distract or disturb the eagles - so, try to limit your movements and do not make loud noises when they're nearby. If possible, remain in your car while looking at eagles - the car acts as a blind. Stay a respectful distance of at least 200-300' away from perched bald eagles. Do not get closer than 1/4 mile away nesting bald eagles – trying to get a closer look may result in eagles becoming agitated and knocking eggs or chicks out to the nest. It is illegal to harm or harass bald eagles. Please do your part to help protect our national bird!**