

FEASIBILITY STATEMENTS FOR GOLDEN EAGLE GOALS & OBJECTIVES

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A public working group has recommended an initial goal and objectives for golden eagle conservation in Maine through the year 2019. Their feasibility, desirability, habitat capability, and possible consequences are discussed below.

Goal: Recognize the potential for natural expansion of golden eagles in Maine and adjacent states and provinces, and appropriately manage golden eagles in Maine.

Habitat Objective: Through 2019, protect known habitats of golden eagles from permanent land use changes through cooperation with landowners, with a focus on historic nest sites and associated habitats.

Feasibility: Relatively few golden eagle habitats are documented in Maine. Managers may be understandably skeptical about interventions in land use decisions unless the overall strategy is apparent. The feasibility of this strategy may be enhanced by well-timed and proactive negotiations (not arising as opposition to pending changes). Incentive programs (see “Problems and Strategies”) may prove helpful.

Natural range expansion of golden eagles into Maine from eastern Canada is plausible. However, significant progress within the 15-year planning horizon is doubtful due to apparently low breeding density of the source population in Quebec, low pioneering rates typical of many eagle species, and marginal habitat suitability in Maine.

Desirability: This objective is desirable and seems fundamental to the goal of promoting renewed residency of golden eagles in Maine. Directives to maintain the state’s wildlife diversity from the Maine Endangered Species Act greatly leverage any debate on whether management efforts for the species are warranted. Golden eagles are the most successful species of eagle worldwide, and their residency in Maine has spanned at least 300 years.

Capability of the Habitat: Suitable habitat has never been widely available to golden eagles in Maine. Cliff habitats traditionally used by golden eagles nesting in Maine are few, limit statewide carrying capacity, and also attract another endangered species: the state’s breeding population of peregrine falcons. The decline of open terrestrial habitats (from diminishing agricultural activity and wildfire prevention), and lack of preferred prey, may be more

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influential. As a result, Maine's golden eagles shifted to diets dominated by wading birds, resulting in higher vulnerability of golden eagles to environmental contaminants.

Possible Consequences: The conservative strategy for this species seems reasonable at present given the array of considerations. This habitat objective is clearly intended to maintain suitable settings for the species without extraordinary measures. It does not allocate scarce resources to experimental management like golden eagle reintroductions that may be doomed to failure and public disfavor.

Monitoring Objective: Through 2019, monitor known historic and potential golden eagle nesting sites in Maine.

Feasibility: Cliffs once inhabited by Maine's golden eagles, and similar potential sites, are monitored during active inventory and management for peregrine falcons. Potential tree nests have not been detected in > 4,000 hours of aerial surveys for bald eagle nests since 1972, but that effort does not focus on mountainous areas favored by golden eagles.

Desirability: Searches for golden eagle eyries are necessary to guide management and also to implement research at any occupied nests. Improved insights on limiting factors are invaluable to overall strategies for golden eagle conservation in Maine.

Capability of the Habitat: Not relevant.

Possible Consequences: It will be challenging to perpetuate and fund a contingency study of nesting golden eagles should the opportunity be identified in future monitoring. Efforts that fail to promptly identify nesting golden eagles could risk lasting extirpation of the species: contrary to the agency mandate and Maine's Endangered Species Act.

Outreach Objective: By 2006, develop outreach materials to increase the public's awareness, ability to identify, and participation in monitoring golden eagles.

Feasibility: Any publicity on this traditionally secretive subject will certainly bolster public opportunities for use and appreciation. Broad outreach ventures should utilize partnerships beyond MDIFW resources. At present, fall hawk watches and possible encounters with migrant golden eagles are the best venue for promoting species awareness.

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Desirability: Public awareness and potential aid to monitoring are highly desirable given the challenges of locating the rarest breeding bird in the eastern U.S.

Capability of the Habitat: Not relevant.

Possible Consequences: Naturalists that once monitored golden eagle eyries in Maine were very concerned about their vulnerability to disturbance. Undue publicity of sensitive sites is, of course, still a potential concern but not justification for further secrecy. Little progress in searches for golden eagles or appropriate conservation can be expected without improved public awareness.