



# Delisting a Species

## *Section 4 of the Endangered Species Act*

The goal of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is to conserve endangered and threatened species. Species are added to the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants in order to regulate activities that may impact them. When a species is able to survive on its own in the wild, the species is considered to be “recovered,” and protection of the ESA is no longer necessary.

Endangered species are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. Threatened species are likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

When the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) removes species from the Federal Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants, we “delist” them. To delist species, we are required to determine that threats have been eliminated or controlled, based on several factors including population sizes and trends and the stability of habitat quality and quantity. When we reclassify species from endangered to threatened, a less dire status, we “downlist” them. If some of the threats have been controlled and the population has met recovery objectives for downlisting, we may consider changing the status of the species to threatened.

### **What is recovery, and how does it relate to delisting?**

Working with partners, we develop recovery plans for endangered and threatened species, outlining current threats and ways we might control them through beneficial activities. We also identify benchmarks for downlisting and delisting, such as number of individuals and quality of habitat. Then we devote our shared resources to make the goals a reality. Our partners include species experts; Federal, State, and local agencies; Tribes; nongovernmental organizations; the academic community; and other stakeholders.

To delist or downlist species, we follow a process similar to what is used in considering whether to list species. We assess populations and recovery achievements in eliminating or reducing threats, and we seek peer-review. In assessing threats, we review five factors:

- o Is there a present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of the species’ habitat or range?

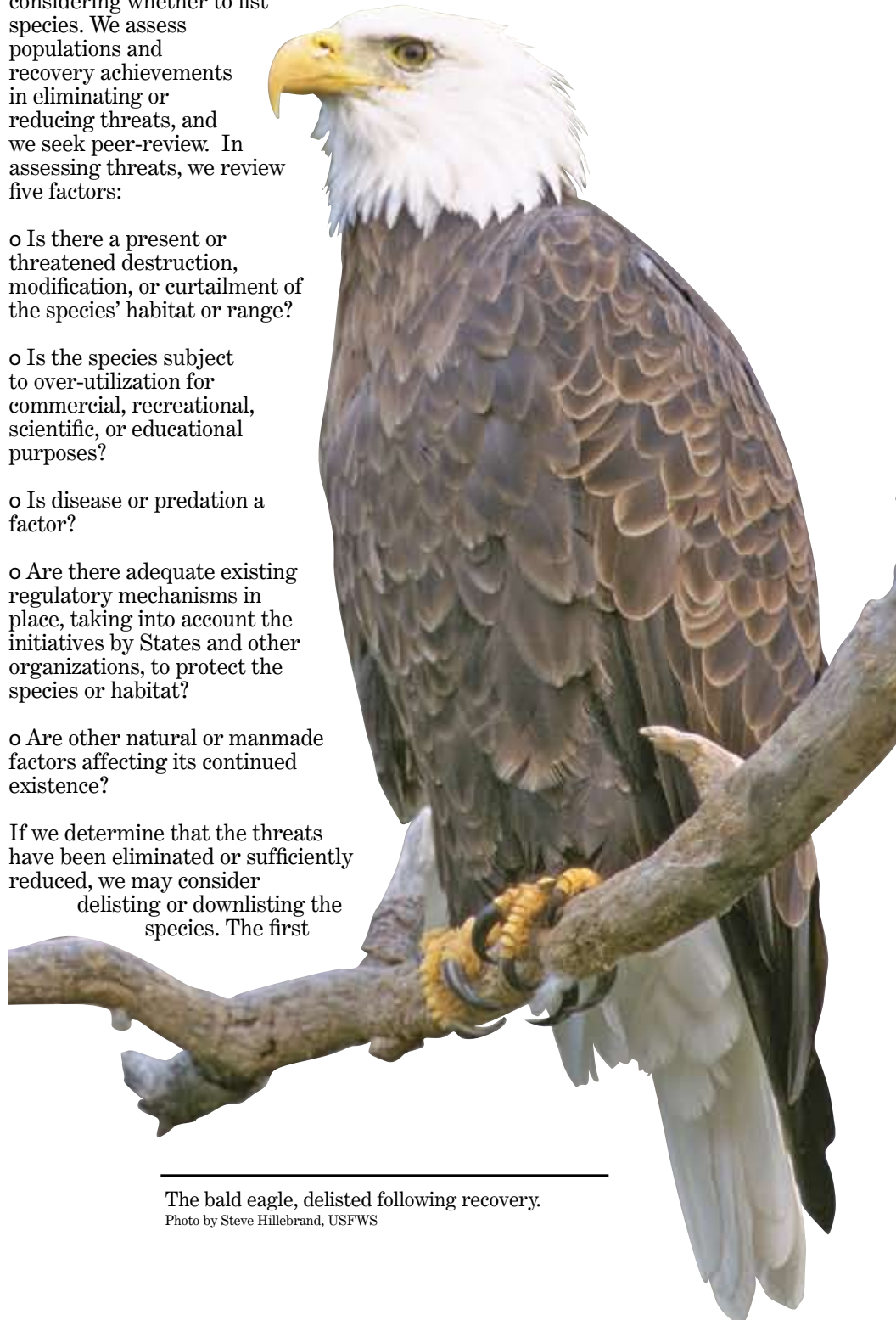
- o Is the species subject to over-utilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes?

- o Is disease or predation a factor?

- o Are there adequate existing regulatory mechanisms in place, taking into account the initiatives by States and other organizations, to protect the species or habitat?

- o Are other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence?

If we determine that the threats have been eliminated or sufficiently reduced, we may consider delisting or downlisting the species. The first



The bald eagle, delisted following recovery.  
Photo by Steve Hillebrand, USFWS

step is publishing a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* and seeking review and comment by other Federal agencies, State biologists, and the public, as well as the advice of independent species experts. After analyzing the comments, we respond to them and announce our final decision in the *Federal Register*, either completing the final rule or withdrawing the action and maintaining the current species' status.

Species are removed from the endangered and threatened species list for a variety of reasons, including recovery, extinction, or new evidence of additional populations.

Recovery is not always a fast process; it takes time to address threats that were years in the making. The first milestone in recovery is halting the decline of the species. Next is stabilizing the species, followed by increasing its numbers and distribution with the ultimate goal of making the species secure in the wild. One measure of the success of the Endangered Species Act is its rate of preventing extinctions: 99 percent.

**What happens after a species is delisted?**

For delistings that result from recovery, the ESA requires the Service, in cooperation with the States, to monitor species for at least five years in order to assess their ability to sustain themselves without the protective measures of the ESA. The draft post-delisting monitoring strategy is generally available at the time the Service publishes the delisting proposal in the *Federal Register*. We seek peer-review and public comment of this document. Once the final delisting monitoring plan is approved, it is put into action. If, within the designated monitoring period, threats to the species change or unforeseen events change the stability of the population, the Service may extend the monitoring period or re-list the species.

For more information about species that have been delisted or downlisted, visit our Web site at <http://www.fws.gov/endangered/wildlife.html>.

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