



Endangered Species Act Alert 2000-8

RE: Species Update
DATE: July 7, 2000

The Fourth of July weekend brought some good news and some bad news in the world of threatened and endangered species. While some species are in sharp decline, others show signs of making a comeback. The following bullets provide updates on the status of four Western species: the gray wolf, the bald eagle, the sea otter and white abalone. Links to more information are provided.

The Good News . . .

Bald Eagle: It was widely expected that our national symbol, the bald eagle, would be removed from the endangered species list on July 4. While bald eagles have made a remarkable recovery (from 500 breeding pairs in the Lower 48 United States in 1963 to about 6000 pairs today), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service says it's not quite ready to propose delisting the species. Once delisted, bald eagles will still be protected from being hunted or captured, but this protection may not extend to the birds' habitat. Lawyers for the Fish and Wildlife Service are looking into this issue, which has delayed the proposal to remove bald eagles from the endangered species list. There is no new target date at this time.

Bald Eagle is Back, But Not Enough for Holiday Release (6-30-00) From the Seattle P-I.
<http://seattlep-i.nwsourc.com/national/eagl30.shtml>

Gray Wolf: On July 11, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will propose upgrading the gray wolf from endangered to threatened across most of the West. While the species has recovered from 400 wolves in the Lower 48 United States in 1973 to more than 3,500 today, wolves still inhabit only 5% of their historic range. The USFWS proposal would maintain the endangered designation for gray wolves in southern Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, where their recovery has not been as robust. The prospect of delisting this species presents potential management issues for federal and state agencies, as well as private landowners, who are concerned about wolves killing their livestock. When they are upgraded from endangered to threatened, wolves that kill livestock or threaten humans can be lawfully "shooed" away, and federal agents can shoot them or permit others to do so. Eventually, management of wolves could be turned over to state wildlife agencies.

Gray Wolf Status May Change to Threatened (7-3-00) From the Seattle P-I.
<http://seattlep-i.nwsource.com/national/wolf03.shtml>

Debate Grows Over Altering Wolf's Status (7-6-00) From the Oregonian.
http://www.oregonlive.com/news/oregonian/index.ssf?/news/oregonian/00/07/nw_51wolf06.frame

The Bad News . . .

Sea Otter: Sea otters in the Aleutian Islands are being considered for listing as a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act, or as “depleted” under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, following the discovery that their numbers have declined 95% since the 1980's. A history of commercial harvest for their pelts brought otters to the brink of extinction in the early 1900's, but they made a comeback under protection of the International Fur Seal Treaty of 1911. Twenty years ago, the Aleutians were an otter stronghold, supporting a population of 55,000 to 100,000; today, it is estimated that only about 6,000 otters remain in the area. While the cause of this recent decline is being debated, ocean conditions and killer whales are generally thought to be primary factors. Killer whales, which normally feed on Steller sea lions and harbor seals, may be turning to otters as a food source because of the decline of these species (Steller sea lions were listed as endangered in 1997).

Aleutian Otters Suffer Steep Dive in Numbers (7-5-00) From the ENN Newswire
http://www.enn.com/news/enn-stories/2000/07/07052000/ottersurvey_14381.asp

Otter Stocks in Steep Decline (6-30-00) From the Anchorage Daily News
<http://www.adn.com/nation/story/0,2360,173451,00.html>

White Abalone: White abalone are nearly extinct off the coast of Southern California and Baja where they used to thrive. With fewer than 2,600 white abalone remaining, the species is likely to be listed as endangered by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). White abalone were designated as a candidate species by NMFS in 1997; they would be the first marine invertebrate to be listed as endangered under the ESA. A booming commercial fishery during the 1970's contributed to the decline of the species from around 3 million to its current numbers—about a 99% decline. A moratorium on commercial and sport catches on all abalone species south of San Francisco in 1997 interrupted the decline, but the mollusks have not recovered. Abalone cannot successfully reproduce if they are more than a few yards apart; their low numbers and sparse distribution now make reproduction nearly impossible.

White Abalone on the Brink of Extinction (7-2-00) From the Santa Rosa Press Democrat
<http://www.pressdemo.com/local/news/02abaloneempireb.html>

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Parametrix project managers are encouraged to share this information with clients who may be interested in, or affected by, ESA listings and issues. Additional questions should be addressed to Megan Callahan Grant (mcallahan@parametrix.com), ESA Program Policy Analyst, who can direct them to the appropriate specialist.