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Recovery of Nesting Bald Eagles in Texas

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and Brent Ortego⁴

One of the most successful conservation stories in United States' history resulted in *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* (Bald Eagle) being removed recently from the federal endangered species list. Few studies, however, have documented regional long-term recovery trends for Bald Eagles. We quantified Bald Eagle nesting density, distribution, and productivity trends by using aerial surveys of nests located 69 counties in eastern Texas from 1971-2005. The total number of occupied nests, productive nests, and offspring produced increased exponentially during that time with the most dramatic increases occurring from 1995-2005. Since 1971, the total number of occupied nests increased 13% per year, from 5 in 1971 to 157 in 2005 and the total number of young produced also increased 13% per year, from 6 in 1971 to 195 in 2005. Apparent nest success estimates (50- 100%) and mean brood size (1-2 young/nest), however, remained relatively consistent from 1971 to 2005. By 1989, Bald Eagles in Texas exceeded recovery goals set by the Southeastern States Bald Eagle Recovery Team (i.e., >0.9 young produced/occupied nest, > 1.5 young produced/successful nest, and >50% of nests successful in raising at least 1 young). Continued regional increases in Bald Eagle nesting activity may warrant specific attention, particularly as related to anthropogenic pressures and interactions in increasingly fragmented and urbanized habitats.