



# BALD EAGLES

## John Martin Regulations

- The State Park is open from 5 am to 10 pm daily. A Colorado State Parks Pass is required on all vehicles.
- The State Park closes campsites 39 through 109 in the treed area of the Lake Hasty Campground from November 1 to March 31 of each year to provide an undisturbed and protected area for Bald Eagles to roost, loaf, hunt, and/or rest. The large trees in this area also help protect the eagles from the wind and weather. Visitors to the Park during this time should be particularly careful in controlling their pets and noise levels if Bald Eagles are roosting in the area.
- Both the north and south shore areas of John Martin and the reservoir are closed to all public access from the waterfowl closure line east to the dam from November 1 to the end of waterfowl season or as posted.
- Bald Eagles are protected by the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act. Anyone who harasses or harms a Bald Eagle may be assessed a maximum penalty of \$100,000, up to three years in jail, suspension of hunting and fishing privileges, and/or forfeiture of any vehicles/vessels used in the disturbance.

## History

The Bald Eagle is truly an all-American bird – it is the only eagle unique to North America. It ranges over most of the continent, from the northern reaches of Alaska and Canada south to northern Mexico.

When America adopted the Bald Eagle as its national symbol in 1782, as many as 100,000 nesting Bald Eagles lived in the continental United States, excluding Alaska. However, due to years of human persecution, habitat loss, food source reduction, and impaired reproduction caused by environmental contaminants, especially DDT, only 417 nesting pairs were found in the lower 48 states by 1963. The Bald Eagle was listed as endangered throughout most of its range (including Colorado) under the Endangered Species Preservation Act of 1966 and the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Today the American Bald Eagle has made a tremendous comeback. Since the banning of DDT in 1972 and with intensive protection efforts through partnerships between federal, state, and local governments, conservation organizations, universities, corporations and thousands of individual Americans, Bald Eagle populations have increased throughout much of the United States over the past three decades. As a result it is estimated today that there are over 5000 nesting pairs of Bald Eagles. The Bald Eagle was reclassified from endangered to threatened throughout its range in the lower 48 states in 1995 and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service proposed de-listing the Bald Eagle in 1999. To date no final determination has been made on this de-listing proposal.

## For Further Information

### Colorado State Parks

John Martin Reservoir State Park  
30703 Rd. 24  
Hasty, CO 81044  
719-829-1801  
[john.martin.park@state.co.us](mailto:john.martin.park@state.co.us)  
[www.parks.state.co.us](http://www.parks.state.co.us)



### Colorado Division of Wildlife

Lamar Area Office  
1204 East Olive  
Lamar, CO 81052  
719-336-6600



### Department of Natural Resources

1313 Sherman Street, #718  
Denver, CO 80203  
303-866-3311



### U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

John Martin Reservoir  
29955 Rd. 25.75  
Hasty, CO 81044  
719-336-3476



### U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

755 Parfet Street, Suite 361  
Lakewood, CO 80215  
303-275-2370  
[www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)



at  
*John Martin Reservoir  
State Park*



## Physical Characteristics

The Bald Eagle is the most recognized raptor (bird of prey) in North America. The Bald Eagle is a large brownish-black bird with distinctive white head and tail feathers, which appear only after the bird, is 4 to 5 years old. Young Bald Eagles are mostly dark brown until they reach four to six years of age and may be confused with the golden eagle. This striking raptor has large, pale eyes; a powerful yellow beak; and great black talons. Females can weigh up to 14 pounds and have a wingspan up to 8 feet. Males are smaller, weighing 7 to 10 pounds with a wingspan of 6 feet. The bird's life span in the wild can reach 30 years.



## Habitat & Diet

Bald Eagles are found in association with estuaries, large lakes, reservoirs, major rivers, and some seacoast areas. In winter, Bald Eagles congregate at specific wintering sites that are generally close to open water and offer good perch trees and roost sites. Roost sites are usually in tall trees in areas that are protected from the wind, weather, and human disturbance.

Their diet consists largely of fish and waterfowl, but also includes upland birds, small mammals (prairie dogs, rabbits, etc.), and carrion. Bald Eagles are skilled hunters, but are opportunistic predators and will steal prey captured by other raptors.

## Eagles at John Martin

During the winter months, Bald Eagles can be seen throughout the area flying, standing on the ice, and perched or roosting in tall trees. John Martin Reservoir and the surrounding area are considered essential winter habitat based on the number of eagles using the area and duration of use. In January of 2001 an aerial census documented 58 eagles using the area. That number increased to at least 126 eagles during the winter of 2001-2002. Bald Eagles begin to arrive in November and stay until mid-March and use the area for hunting, feeding, loafing, and roosting. To date no breeding activities have been observed.

Bald Eagle numbers vary from year to year. Not all factors influencing this variation are known although winter weather conditions appear to have an effect. During severe winters, northern lakes and reservoirs freeze prompting Bald Eagles to migrate south in search of preferred habitat (large open water areas with an adequate food base, good perch trees, and protected roost sites). Conversely, during mild winters, Bald Eagles do not have to migrate this far south to find preferred habitat. In addition to weather conditions, water levels also appear to affect Bald Eagle numbers. During high water years,

waterfowl populations (food source) increase and there are larger areas of open water for Bald Eagles to hunt. During low water years, the opposite is true.

## Viewing Ethics/Hints

- Dawn and dusk are the best times to view.
- Use binoculars or a spotting scope so that you can view eagles from further distances.
- View eagles without changing their behavior. Give them plenty of space. Eagles are sensitive to human disturbance.
- Be respectful of perching and roost sites. Well-meaning but intrusive visitors can cause an eagle to flee its roost. This leaves an eagle susceptible to the elements during inclement weather and causes undue stress, which reduces its fitness going in to breeding season. Visitors who get too close may also scare an eagle from its hunting perch, preventing it from capturing prey.
- Keep pets on a leash or leave them at home. Pets may startle, chase, or even kill wildlife.
- Let animals eat their natural foods. Pick up all trash and food scraps.

