

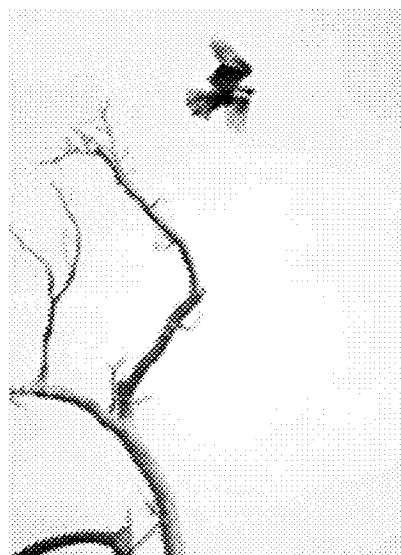
Jeff Humphrey/R2/FWS/DOI  
04/18/2006 02:51 PM

To Greg Beatty/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Mary  
Richardson/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Debra  
Bills/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS  
cc Jose Viramontes/RO/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS, Susan  
Jacobsen/RO/R2/FWS/DOI@FWS  
bcc  
Subject Environmental organizations fight for eagles - East Valley  
Tribune

<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/index.php?sty=63218>

## EAST VALLEY TRIBUNE

### Local News



desert bald eagle soars through the sky over the Lower Verde River.

rah Regnier For the Tribune

### Environmental organizations fight for eagles

By Shanna Hogan, Tribune

April 14, 2006

Bald eagles find the Sonoran Desert a tough place to raise their young. Nationally, the majestic winged symbol of America has made a strong comeback in recent years after its population was decimated by a now-banned pesticide. But experts agree the desert bald eagles just aren't thriving like their counterparts. What to do about it is another story.

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The U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service, which is planning to take bald eagles off the

endangered species list, wants to rely on voluntary programs to maintain eagle habitats.

Another idea is to get the desert bald eagles classified as a distinct subspecies and keep them listed as threatened. Last month, the Maricopa Audubon Society and the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit against the wildlife agency to do just that.

"There are lots of bald eagles, but there are no bald eagles like the Arizona bald eagles," said Bob Witzeman, conservation chairman of the Maricopa Audubon Society. "Our population is a(n) . . . isolated, genetically distinct population of eagles."

The desert nesting bald eagle has adapted to the hot weather and evolved into a nonmigrating resident of the Southwest, he said.

Many nest in the Tonto Forest northeast of Scottsdale, along the Verde River southeast of Fountain Hills and along the Salt River northeast of Mesa.

Arizona's current 39 desert nesting pairs spend their lives within a limited area, breed earlier and do not interbreed with the estimated 300 other bald eagles that only spend winters in Arizona.

"This is a very rare population," Witzeman said. "It's worthy of protection under the Endangered Species Act because there's so few of them."

The legal action by the two groups follows a petition submitted in 2004 to reclassify the desert eagles. The groups said the petition received no response. Under the Endangered Species Act, agencies should respond to petitions within 90 days and provide a final determination within one year.

According to the petition, if Arizona's eagles are taken off the endangered list, federal agencies would no longer be forced to consult on bald eagle and habitat issues.

"The biggest problem that we'll have is we'll lose habitat protection," said Robin Silver, board chairman of the Center for Biological Diversity and author of the petition.

"Losing Endangered Species Act protection dooms the bald eagles in Arizona to certain extinction," Silver said. "We filed the petition to try and increase protection instead of decrease it."

U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials said they will be investigating the petition this year. Currently, the agency's position is the desert birds are the same species as other American bald eagles.

Regardless of the outcome, Jeff Humphrey, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife spokesman, said Arizona eagles will retain a high level of protection even if they are removed from the list through the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Both protect bald eagles by prohibiting killing, selling or otherwise harming eagles, their nests or eggs.

However, he said that some habitat protection will be lost.

"When it comes to how we can guarantee that there will be a good source of water for bald eagles and for their prey — we will lose that," Humphrey said. "Those kind of broad habitat protections would go away with the delisting."

For example, eagle nesting and breeding areas will continue to be protected, but development, road construction and stream dewatering could be permitted nearby.

The American bald eagle was near extinction 30 years ago when the national symbol became one of the first species to be protected by the Endangered Species Act.

"Nationally, we're looking at a bald eagle population that healed robustly," Humphrey said. "It's our determination that the combined effects of the banning of DDT as well as Endangered Species Act protection have recovered the national bald eagle population to the point where it merits delisting."

Last month the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took another step in the eagle's removal from the list, a

process that began in 1999, with a voluntary protection plan.

The delisting has taken far longer than the typical year, partly because updated counts are required from each of the states.

In 1963 there were just 417 known nesting pairs left in the lower 48 states, mainly because of the widespread use of pesticides like DDT that weakened the bald eagle's eggshells and reduced its birth rate, Humphrey said.

Today at least 7,066 known nesting pairs exist in the contiguous United States.

Locally, the population hasn't bounced back as strong.

Arizona has 39 nesting pairs of bald eagles, almost all are along rivers and lakes. That is up from three nesting pairs in 1972, the year DDT was banned, and nine pairs in 1978, when the bald eagle was put on the endangered list.

"We certainly have more birds than we ever had or ever known about having in Arizona," said Greg Beatty, a wildlife and fishery biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife. "But there's still only 20 to 30 eaglets produced each year — that's not a lot."

Out of that 20 to 30 only about six will live to reach breeding age, he said.

"These birds still need our attention," Beatty said.

"They're an important part of Arizona," Silver said. "To stand by and allow their extinction is immoral."

*Contact Shanna Hogan by telephone at (480) 970-233*

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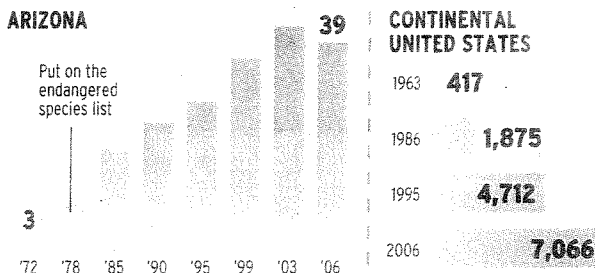


PHOTOS BY SARAH REGNIER, FOR THE TRIBUNE  
**MAJESTIC:** A desert bald eagle soars through the sky  
over the Lower Verde River.

### Bald eagle comeback

The American bald eagle population has steadily increased  
after being on the endangered species list for almost 30 years.

#### Nesting pairs of bald eagles



SOURCES: Arizona Game and Fish Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

TRIBUNE

Environmental  
organizations fight for

# DESERT BALD EAGLES

By SHANNA HOGAN  
TRIBUNE

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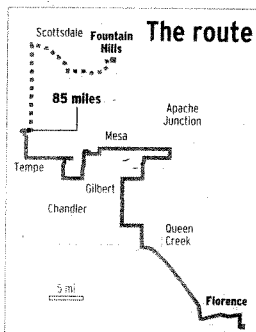
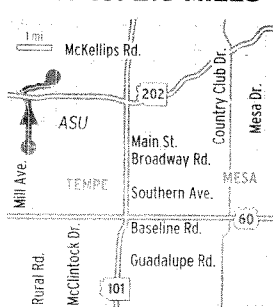
SEE EAGLES • PAGE A2

## Sidewalk stories



Columnist Slim Smith takes a look at the East Valley — one step at a time.

### DAY 13: 2.6 MILES



So my nerves were pretty frazzled for a while there.

Fortunately, though, I met a few folks who helped take my mind off my troubles.

Laura Mullen and her 19-year-old son, Kevin Real, were killing some time at the park. They are visiting from Chicago. Real will enroll at ASU in the fall, so he and his mom made the trip down so Kevin could pre-register.

Kevin is the oldest of Mullen's three kids, so it is with mixed emotions that she prepares to send her son off to school so far, far away.

"He's ready, I think," she said. "And I guess I'm ready, too."

Kevin chose ASU mainly because of the weather and the golf. "I work at a golf course back home and I really love to play, so this is a great place to go," he said.

A little while later, I met Alicia, who said she was just finishing her first year at ASU after transferring from City College of Santa Barbara.

"I really wanted to go some place exciting," she said. "My school doesn't have a football team or anything, so the weekends were kind of boring. This is a lot more fun. And it's a lot cheaper than UCLA or USC, even paying out-of-state tuition."

Alicia wouldn't give me her last name, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if it's Buel.

### MORE ONLINE

BEHIND THE SCENES: Ethel's house quest. Visit [eastvalleytribune.com/ss](http://eastvalleytribune.com/ss)

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## Border security, ASU Polytechnic key

other priorities such as border security.

But with some of the Legislature's most powerful members coming from East Valley districts, it appears that some money will be set aside for the Polytechnic campus. A bigger question will be how much.

Rep. Bob Robson, R-Chandler, a strong supporter of expanding the campus, said the amount will depend on how soon the Legislature wants to pay off the project.

Some lawmakers also said they were apprehensive about locking the state into a multiyear tax cut package.

Reps. Karen Johnson, R-Mesa, and Doug Quelland, R-Phoenix, said they didn't want to tie the hands of future legislators to respond to financial needs in the future. Once a tax cut is enacted, it takes a two-thirds vote to repeal.

The proposal also put the GOP-controlled Legislature at odds with Napolitano, who has said she wanted \$100 million in specific and targeted tax cuts for the upcoming fiscal year. That's a much smaller tax break than Republicans envision.

Napolitano, after a meeting with Republican legislative leaders Thursday afternoon, said she will push lawmakers to enact some of her spending priorities, which include expanding voluntary full-day kindergarten and a \$100 million border security package.

However, Pearce, who is chairman of the House's Appropriations Committee, said a significant tax cut was key to getting a budget out of the Legislature. Still, the governor's power to veto the budget proposal means Republicans will probably have to compromise on at least some portions of the plan.

A showdown with Napolitano, a Democrat, could delay a budget agreement as it did last year when she and the Legislature clashed over full-day kindergarten and school choice tax credits.

Pearce, who would like to abolish the state income tax, said his goal was to push through a \$250 million tax cut for the coming fiscal year. Legislative leaders are looking at a combination of property tax and income tax relief.

With real estate costs skyrocketing in recently, many lawmakers said they were feeling pressure from their constituents to enact a property tax cut. Lawmakers said voters want protection from the ballooning tax payments that have gone up along with their property values.

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