

Environmental Officials Band Bald Eagle Chicks at Quabbin Reservoir

BELCHERTOWN – Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretary Matthew Beaton and officials from the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) today banded two bald eagle chicks at a Quabbin Reservoir eagle nest— one of more than 50 active bald eagle nesting territories identified by DFG’s Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife).

“I am so proud that our restoration program has brought these magnificent birds back to Massachusetts,” said Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Matthew Beaton. “After being absent from Massachusetts for more than 80 years, today we find eagles soaring all over the Commonwealth, with nests in almost every county in the state.”

Joining Secretary Beaton for today’s eagle banding were Department of Fish and Game Commissioner George Peterson, MassWildlife Connecticut Valley District Supervisor Ralph Taylor and others from MassWildlife and the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

“Thanks to a vigorous restoration effort led by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife that started right here at the Quabbin Reservoir in 1982, the Massachusetts bald eagle population and range continues to expand,” said Department of Fish and Game Commissioner George Peterson. “It’s a testament to the vision and dedication of the state, federal, and private sector partners that have supported Massachusetts eagle restoration and conservation effort.”

A victim of habitat loss and reproductive failure linked to exposure to pesticides, such as DDT, bald eagle populations had plummeted across the country by the time they were placed on the U.S. Endangered Species List in 1973. Their numbers have since rebounded and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service removed Bald Eagles from the federal endangered species list in 2007.

In Massachusetts, the Bald Eagle was down-listed from Endangered to Threatened status in 2012 and is continuing to gain ground— thanks in large part to the restoration project begun in 1982. The Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife and its partners brought young eagles from Canada and Michigan and raised them in cages overlooking the Quabbin Reservoir. Through a wildlife management practice known as “hacking,” in which young birds of prey are raised in an outdoor cage and released into the wild, the eaglets came to view Quabbin as their home turf. After fledging, some of these eagles established breeding territories at the reservoir. In 1989, eight decades after the last bald eagle nest was observed in Massachusetts at Snake Pond in Sandwich, the first three chicks fledged from two Quabbin nests.

“The bald eagle restoration program is one of many long-term conservation efforts undertaken by the Division to protect, maintain or restore both common and endangered species in Massachusetts,” said Jack Buckley, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Director. “This year marks the agency’s 150th anniversary and we are celebrating the agency’s wildlife restoration successes and looking forward to developing more partnerships in the conservation community to ensure the future of fish and wildlife and their habitats for generations to come.”

In 2015, MassWildlife confirmed more than 50 active eagle nesting territories in the Commonwealth. Nests are located in Pittsfield, Sheffield, Sandisfield, the Connecticut River Valley, Quabbin Reservoir, Merrimack River (Newburyport area), Wachusett Reservoir, Holden, Framingham, Lunenburg, Quaboag Pond, Webster Lake, Assawompsett Pond Complex (Lakeville area), Wattupa Ponds, Westport River area, Waltham, Lynnfield, Northbridge, Royalston, Plymouth, Sturbridge, Mashpee, Milton, and Otis. Last year, 23 successful nests produced 37 fledged eagles (birds that hatched and survived to fly). The total number of chicks which have fledged in Massachusetts since 1989 is 582.

Secretary Beaton assisted MassWildlife staff in outfitting the Quabbin eaglets with uniquely numbered metal leg bands that will enable researchers to identify the birds. Banding young eagles is an important tool for measuring the success of

restoration programs – letting scientists gather information about survival rates, how far birds disperse when they leave the nest, habitat preferences and causes of death. MassWildlife bands as many bald eagles hatched in the Commonwealth as possible each year.

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