

Bald Eagle Nest Summary

North Dakota

January 2022



Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) were removed from the list of endangered species in 2007. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has primary statutory authority for the protection of eagles. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGF) maintains a list of bald eagle nest sites to monitor the nesting population over time.

Bald eagles were regular breeders along the Red River, Missouri River, and in the Devils Lake area in the 1800's. In 1978 when the bald eagle was listed as endangered, there were no known nesting pairs in North Dakota. By the 1990's, a few nesting pairs had returned to the Missouri River. Since the year 2000, bald eagles nesting in North Dakota have increased significantly in both number (Figure 1) and distribution (Figure 2). Bald eagles frequently initiate nests in non-traditional habitat (e.g., tree belts in cropland, cottonwood stands in native prairie pastures), and citizen science is a valuable tool to document new nest site locations and update nest status on previously reported sites.

The NDGF issues a news release each spring requesting the public to report eagle nests in an online report form <https://gf.nd.gov/wildlife/nest-reports/bald-eagle>. The NDGF also receives nest site information from other state and federal agencies, consultants conducting environmental review, and NDGF staff observe and ground-truth a portion of nests annually. In 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2021, NDGF staff conducted limited aerial surveys of traditional nesting habitat (i.e., Missouri River System, Red River, etc.).

Highlights as of 2021:

- 505 nest sites have been documented since the year 2000, and of those:
 - 348 were occupied in 2021.
 - 76 have been destroyed (i.e., the tree and/or nest destroyed by weather events).
- Bald eagle nests have been documented in 47 of the 53 counties.

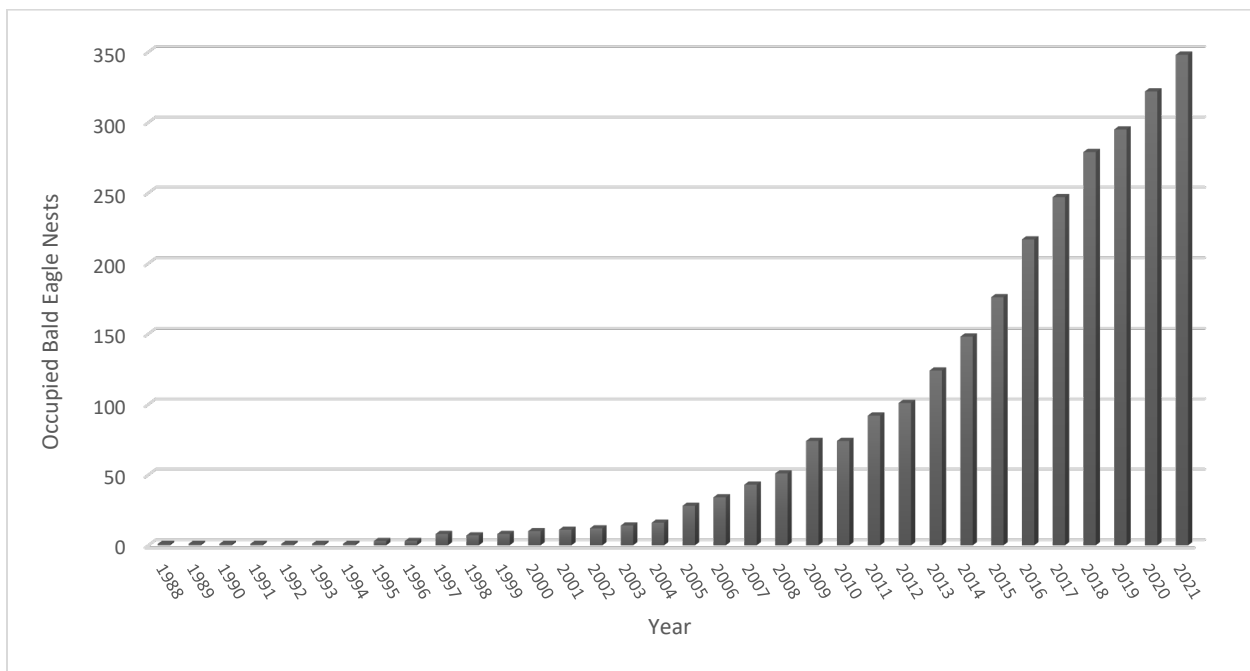


Figure 1. Occupied bald eagle nests in North Dakota 1988-2021. A nest is considered occupied if one or more adults are observed on or near the nest, or eggs or young are visible. A census of all nests is not conducted annually but an estimate is made based on the assumption that a nest remains occupied in subsequent years.

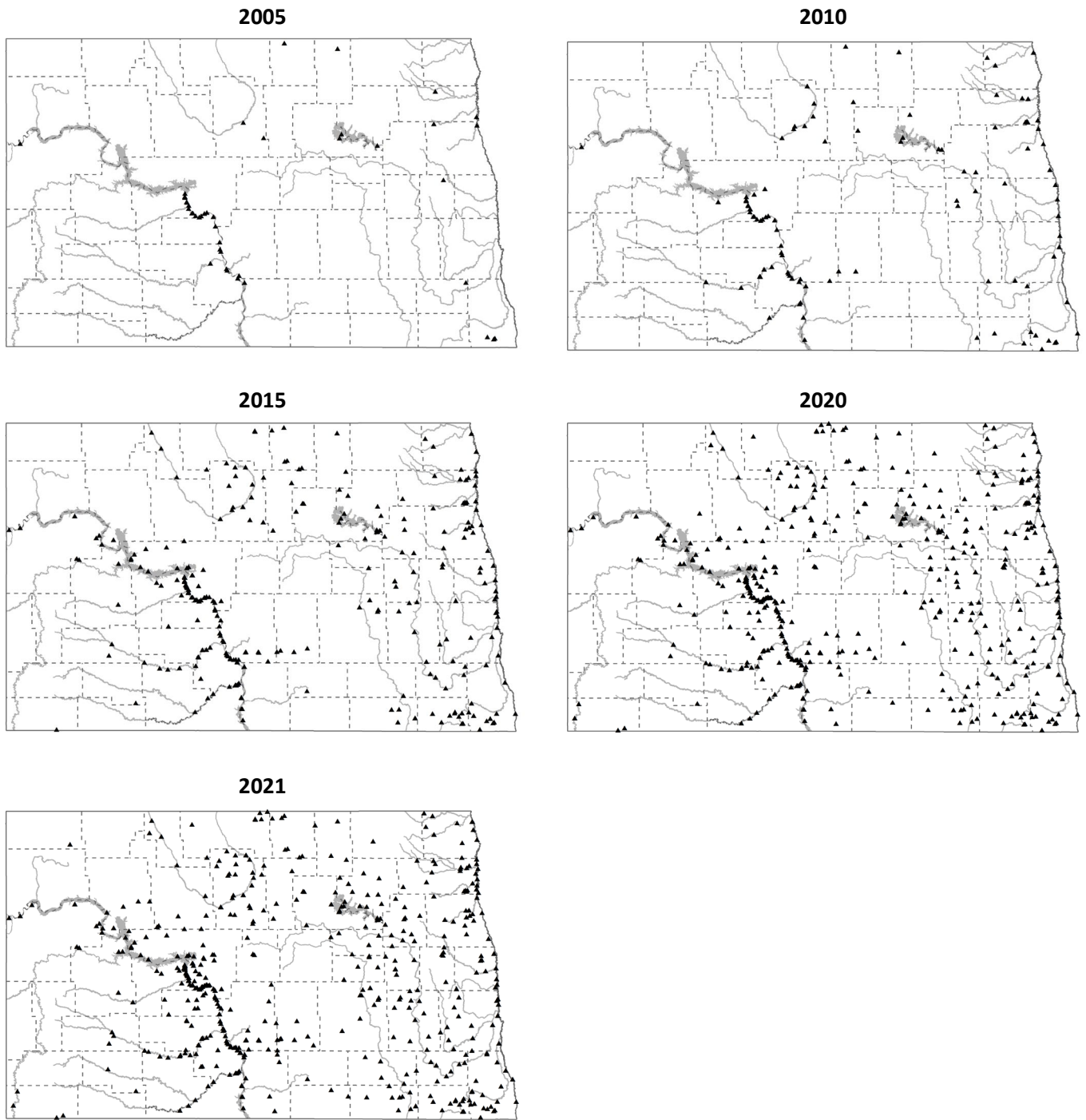


Figure 2. Distribution of all known bald eagle nests in 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020 and 2021.