



## **RECOMMENDED BUFFER ZONES AND SEASONAL RESTRICTIONS FOR COLORADO RAPTORS**

Tolerance limits to disturbance vary among as well as within raptor species. As a general rule, Ferruginous Hawks and Golden Eagles respond to human activities at greater distances than do Ospreys and America Kestrels. Some individuals within a species also habituate and tolerate human activity at a proximity that would cause the majority of the group to abandon their nests. Other individuals become sensitized to repeated encroachment and react at greater distances. The tolerance of a particular pair may change when a mate is replaced with a less tolerant individual and this may cause the pair to react to activities that were previously ignored. Responses will also vary depending upon the reproductive stage. Although the level of stress is the same, the pair may be more secretive during egg laying and incubation and more demonstrative when the chicks hatch.

The term "disturbance" is ambiguous and experts disagree on what actually constitutes a disturbance. Reactions may be as subtle as elevated pulse rate or as obvious as vigorous defense or abandonment. Impacts of disturbance may not be immediately evident. A pair of raptors may respond to human intrusion by defending the nest, but well after the disturbance has passed, the male may remain in the vicinity for protection rather than forage to feed the nestlings. Golden eagles rarely defend their nests, but merely fly a half mile or more away and perch and watch. Chilling and over heating of eggs or chicks and starvation of nestlings can result from human activities that appeared not to have caused an immediate response.

A 'holistic' approach is recommended when protecting raptor habitats. While it is important for land managers to focus on protecting nest sites, equal attention should focus on defining important foraging areas that support the pair's nesting effort. Hunting habitats of many raptor species are extensive and may necessitate interagency cooperation to assure the continued nest occupancy. Unfortunately, basic knowledge of habitat use is lacking and may require documentation through telemetry investigations or intensive observation. Telemetry is expensive and may be disruptive so a more practical approach is to assume that current open space is important and should be protected.

Although there are exceptions, the buffer areas and seasonal restrictions suggested here reflect an informed opinion that if implemented, should assure that the majority of individuals within a species will continue to occupy the area. Additional factors, such as intervening terrain, vegetation screens, and the cumulative impacts of activities should be considered.

These guidelines were originally developed by CDOW raptor biologist Gerald R. Craig (retired) in December 2002. To provide additional clarity in guidance, incorporate new information, and update the conservation status of some species, the guidelines were revised in January 2008. Further revisions of this document may become necessary as additional information becomes available.

## **RECOMMENDED BUFFER ZONES AND SEASONAL RESTRICTIONS**

### **BALD EAGLE**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area; see 'Definitions' below) within ¼ mile radius of active nests (see 'Definitions' below). Seasonal restriction to human encroachment (see 'Definitions' below) within ½ mile radius of active nests from October 15 through July 31. This closure is more extensive than the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007) due to the generally open habitat used by Colorado's nesting bald eagles.

#### **Winter Night Roost:**

No human encroachment from November 15 through March 15 within ¼ mile radius of an active winter night roost (see 'Definitions' below) if there is no direct line of sight between the roost and the encroachment activities. No human encroachment from November 15 through March 15 within ½ mile radius of an active winter night roost if there is a direct line of sight between the roost and the encroachment activities. If periodic visits (such as oil well maintenance work) are required within the buffer zone after development, activity should be restricted to the period between 1000 and 1400 hours from November 15 to March 15.

#### **Hunting Perch:**

Diurnal hunting perches (see 'Definitions' below) associated with important foraging areas should also be protected from human encroachment. Preferred perches may be at varying distances from human encroachment and buffer areas will vary. Consult the Colorado Division of Wildlife for recommendations for specific hunting perches.

### **GOLDEN EAGLE**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within ¼ mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within ½ mile radius of active nests from December 15 through July 15.

### **OSPREY**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within ¼ mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within ¼ mile radius of active nests from April 1 through August 31. Some osprey populations have habituated and are tolerant to human activity in the immediate vicinity of their nests.

### **FERRUGINOUS HAWK**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within ½ mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within ½ mile radius of active nests from February 1 through July 15. This species is especially prone to nest abandonment during incubation if disturbed.

### **RED-TAILED HAWK**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within 1/3 mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within 1/3 mile radius of active nests from February 15 through July 15. Some members of this species have adapted to urbanization and may

tolerate human habitation to within 200 yards of their nest. Development that encroaches on rural sites is likely to cause abandonment.

### **SWAINSON'S HAWK**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within ¼ mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within ¼ mile radius of active nests from April 1 through July 15. Some members of this species have adapted to urbanization and may tolerate human habitation to within 100 yards of their nest.

### **PEREGRINE FALCON**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within ½ mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within ½ mile of the nest cliff(s) from March 15 to July 31. Due to propensity to relocate nest sites, sometimes up to ½ mile along cliff faces, it is more appropriate to designate 'Nesting Areas' that encompass the cliff system and a ½ mile buffer around the cliff complex.

### **PRAIRIE FALCON**

#### **Nest Site:**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within ½ mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within ½ mile radius of active nests from March 15 through July 15.

### **NORTHERN GOSHAWK**

No surface occupancy (beyond that which historically occurred in the area) within ½ mile radius of active nests. Seasonal restriction to human encroachment within ½ mile radius of active nests from March 1 through September 15.

### **BURROWING OWL**

#### **Nest Site:**

No human encroachment within 150 feet of the nest site from March 15 through October 31. Although Burrowing Owls may not be actively nesting during this entire period, they may be present at burrows up to a month before egg laying and several months after young have fledged. Therefore it is recommended that efforts to eradicate prairie dogs or destroy abandoned towns not occur between March 15 and October 31 when owls may be present. Because nesting Burrowing Owls may not be easily visible, it is recommended that targeted surveys be implemented to determine if burrows are occupied. More detailed recommendations are available in a document entitled "Recommended Survey Protocol and Actions to Protect Nesting Burrowing Owls" which is available from the Colorado Division of Wildlife

## Recommended Buffer Zones and Seasonal Restrictions Around Raptor Use Sites

Species and Use	Buffer	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
<b>Bald Eagle</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	¼ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE WINTER NIGHT ROOST without a direct line of sight- No Human Encroachment	¼ Mile	■	■	■								■	■
ACTIVE WINTER NIGHT ROOST with a direct line of sight - No Human Encroachment	½ Mile	■	■	■								■	■
HUNTING PERCH - No Human Encroachment	Contact CDOW												
<b>Golden Eagle</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	¼ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Osprey</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	¼ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	¼ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Ferruginous Hawk</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Red-tailed Hawk</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	1/3 Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	1/3 Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Swainson's Hawk</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	¼ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	¼ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Prairie Falcon</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Northern Goshawk</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Surface Occupancy	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	½ Mile	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
<b>Burrowing Owl</b>													
ACTIVE NEST - No Human Encroachment	150 feet			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
		= time period for which seasonal restrictions are in place.											

## DEFINITIONS

Active nest – Any nest that is frequented or occupied by a raptor during the breeding season, or which has been active in any of the five previous breeding seasons. Many raptors use alternate nests in various years. Thus, a nest may be active even if it is not occupied in a given year.

Active winter night roost – Areas where Bald Eagles gather and perch overnight, and sometimes during the day in the event of inclement weather. Communal roost sites are usually in large trees (live or dead) that are relatively sheltered from wind and are generally in close proximity to foraging areas. These roosts may also serve a social purpose for pair bond formation and communication among eagles. Many roost sites are used year after year.

Human encroachment – Any activity that brings humans in the area. Examples include driving, facilities maintenance, boating, trail access (e.g., hiking, biking), etc.

Hunting perch – Any structure on which a raptor perches for the purpose of hunting for prey. Hunting perches provide a view of suitable foraging habitat. Trees are often used as hunting perches, but other structures may also be used (utility poles, buildings, etc.).

Surface occupancy – Any physical object that is intended to remain on the landscape permanently or for a significant amount of time. Examples include houses, oil and gas wells, tanks, wind turbines, roads, tracks, etc.

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