

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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BALD EAGLES FLOCK TO ILLINOIS THIS WINTER

Specially planned programs allow visitors to experience bald eagles up close and personal

CHICAGO – Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still considers the magnificent American bald eagle a “threatened” species, this winter Illinois will present visitors with the opportunity to see thousands of bald eagles in their natural habitat – more wintering American bald eagles, in fact, than in any other state outside Alaska.

Every winter Illinois rivers, reservoirs and waterfowl refuges are temporary homes to more than 3,000 bald eagles who spend the season on their shores, migrating from Canada and other northern states when the water there freezes. The first eagles of the season are spotted in Illinois in December and remain in residence until they migrate back north in March, with January and February the optimal time for visitors to see them up close.

To accommodate visitors who want to take advantage of the opportunity to experience the bald eagles’ majesty and glory, towns and parks across much of the state will host specially planned eagle observation programs and exhibits throughout the prime-viewing season. For anyone interested in American history, bird-watching and the environment, bald eagle season in Illinois is a not-to-be-missed opportunity.

Northern Illinois

- **Flock to the Rock**, January 9, at Starved Rock State Park in Utica is the premier event of the area’s bald eagle watching season. Visitors can enjoy the wilderness of Starved Rock State Park and get a sneak preview of all the events at the Flock Expo held at the Starved Rock Lodge and Conference Center. Events are planned throughout the day, and include Native American storytelling and trolley tours. Bald eagle tours will be conducted weekends throughout January and February. Admission is free.

For more information, contact the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitors Bureau (800-746-0550, flocktotherock.com/events.htm).

- The Illinois River Valley, where bald eagles roost in the shoreline bluffs and forests along

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the river, is another popular destination for eagle viewing. During **Starved Rock Bald Eagle Days**, January 22 and 23, visitors can attend live raptor programs, nature seminars, exhibits and children's activities. High-power viewing scopes will be available for eagle watching. Admission is free.

For more information, contact Starved Rock State Park (815-667-4726, dnr.state.il.us/lands/education/interp/rt/starved.htm).

- **Henry Bald Eagle Day**, February 19, in Henry will feature indoor eagle viewing and presentations. Visitors can scout for bald eagles along the scenic Illinois River at the Henry Lock and Dam, where the eagles like to hunt for food on the open water. Admission is free.

For more information, contact the City of Henry (309-361-7487, henryil.com).

Western Illinois

- In the western region of the state visitors can attend the **16th Annual Quad Cities Bald Eagle Days**, January 8 and 9, in Rock Island. The World Bird Sanctuary will present a seminar, complete with flying demonstrations, that features live bald eagles, hawks, owls, vultures and other birds of prey. Admission is \$4 for adults and \$1 for children under 16.

For more information, contact the Quad City Conservation Alliance (309-788-5912, qccaexpocenter.com/eagle.html).

- **Bald Eagle Watch and Clock Tower Tours** will be held weekends January 15-February 15 in Rock Island. The tours begin with a brief presentation about bald eagles in the Visitor Center Theater. Guests then walk to the Clock Tower for an overview of the historical structure. A spotting scope will be available at the top of the Clock Tower for eagle viewing. Tours are conducted three times daily and admission is free.

For more information, contact the Mississippi River Visitor Center (309-794-5338, missriver.org).

- The **Quincy Bald Eagle Watch**, January 30, in Quincy, features outdoor eagle viewing at Quincy City Park. Rangers will be available to answer questions and help visitors locate eagles with spotting scopes. The eagles are drawn to the area's open water along the Mississippi River where food is the most plentiful. Admission is free.

For more information, contact the Quincy Ranger Field Station (217-228-0890).

- During the **Havana Eagle Days Festival**, February 5 and 6, in Havana, local Audubon members will be on hand to answer questions and help visitors view eagles through spotting scopes. Children can have a free souvenir photo taken with "Emi" eagle in her larger-than-life eagle's nest in Riverfront Park, and festival goers will get a good start to the day by having "Breakfast with an Eagle." The Illinois Raptor Center will bring a bald eagle to visit with guests during the pancake and sausage breakfast from 8-9:30 a.m. on February 5. Admission is \$4 for adults, \$3 for children.

For more information, contact the Nature Conservancy's Illinois River Project (309-547-2730, havana.lib.il.us/community/tourism/eagles.html). (Note: 2005 calendar will not be posted on the site until December.)

Southern Illinois

- The **Union County Refuge**, in Union, offers another popular spot for bald eagle watching. Visitors can view bald eagles and take wildlife photography off the main road, which runs down the middle of the wildlife refuge. In addition to eagles, Union County is home to a winter population of 50,000 to 100,000 Canada geese every year -- one of Illinois' largest populations of wild geese in their natural habitat. Park rangers will be available weekdays to answer questions about the eagles and other wildlife spotted in the refuge. Admission is free.

For more information on eagle watching, contact the Union County Refuge (618-833-5175).

Southwestern Illinois

- Located off the Great River Road on the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, **Pere Marquette State Park** in Grafton offers free bald eagle watching programs December 27-February 27. These programs consist of lectures, video presentations and observational drives to several areas where bald eagles are most plentiful. In addition to eagles, visitors may also spot great blue heron, Canada geese, wild turkeys and the pileated woodpecker. Admission is free.

For more information, contact Pere Marquette State Park (618-786-3323, greatriverroad.com/Eagles/eagleViews.htm).

- **Eagle Days at the Old Chain of the Rocks Bridge**, January 15 and 16 in Madison, includes live eagle programs, exhibits, activities, videos and guides with spotting scopes. The spotting scopes will be located in the middle of the mile-long Old Chain of the Rocks Bridge, where guides will help visitors locate the birds along the Mississippi River. Admission is free.

For more information, contact the Old Chain of Rocks Bridge (314-416-9930, trailnet.org). (Note: Eagle information will not be posted on Web site until November.)

- With more than 40 miles of pristine shoreline, the Alton Lake section of the Great River Road is a picturesque spot to view bald eagles. The World Bird Sanctuary will present a live bald eagle for visitors to view up close every Saturday in January at the **Alton Eagle Meet & Greet**. More than 1,000 eagles migrate to the region each year, returning to their winter home along the bluffs of the Great River Road.

For more information, contact the Alton Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau (618-456-6676, visitalton.com).

The Illinois Bureau of Tourism offers free travel resources with additional information on eagle watching, winter and holiday festivals, and events and attractions. All are available by calling **1-800-2CONNECT** to speak with an Illinois travel counselor or by visiting the Bureau's Web site, **enjoyillinois.com**.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Statewide photography, including eagle-watching images, is available electronically or in slide format. For artwork, contact Katie Markese at katie.markese@edelman.com, 312-297-7561 or Amy McGee at amy.mcgee@edelman.com, 312-240-2829.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Bureau of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.