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50-year Trends of a Breeding Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) Population in South-central Montana

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two public administrations, allowed the survey of bird populations in Santa Alejandrina Marsh, Minatitlán, Veracruz, from 2008 to 2012, as a bioindicator of the results to decontamination and restoration of the habitat.

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50-Year Trends of a Breeding Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) Population in South-Central Montana

Golden Eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in the western U.S. have received increased attention due to an apparent decline in the number of annual migrants and expected increased risk from energy development. Factors influencing the negative trend in migrating Golden Eagles are unknown and it remains unclear if this trend is indicative of a declining population or changes in migratory behavior. Unlike Golden Eagles nesting in higher latitudes, resident birds that breed in the western U.S. are typically non-migratory or do not follow typical migratory pathways. Unfortunately, long-

term research focused on resident, breeding Golden Eagles in this region is rare and sorely needed to assess the status of the population as a whole. Beginning in 2010, I revisited an historically surveyed study site to compare the current status of the Golden Eagle breeding population to that from the 1960s. In the last three breeding seasons, I have documented a near 100% occupancy rate of historic territories and an increase in the number of breeding pairs by roughly 42%. To investigate factors influencing this population expansion, I am currently assessing the degree of landscape change and influence of environmental factors on breeding Golden Eagle density and productivity by comparing the availability of selected breeding habitat. The longevity of data collected in this study area allows for one of the longest-term comparisons of Golden Eagle nesting density and success in the western U.S. and provides invaluable insight into the landscape factors responsible for maintaining or increasing breeding Golden Eagle populations.

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Golden Eagle
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