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## NEW RECORD SET FOR BALD EAGLES WINTERING IN VERMONT

WATERBURY - A dedicated crew of eagle observers spotted twenty bald eagles in January as part of Vermont's 2005 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey and set a new record for the number of bald eagles seen during the survey since it began in 1979.

The 13 adults and seven immatures were observed on four of the 15 standardized survey routes between January 1 and 15. Fifteen of these eagles were located on Lake Champlain, with four observed on the Connecticut River and one located near the Winooski River at the Burlington Intervale.

"The area between the Charlotte Ferry and Champlain Bridge on Lake Champlain was a hot spot for eagles this winter," noted Mark LaBarr of Audubon Vermont and survey coordinator. "The largest concentration of eagles, twelve in all, was seen in this area by a Vermont observer, and a New York observer also saw nineteen eagles just north of the Champlain Bridge."

Observers also located other eagles in Shelburne Bay and near the Moore Reservoir on the upper Connecticut River.

Bald Eagle numbers declined dramatically throughout most of North America between the 1950s and 1970s. Contamination by the pesticide DDT caused reproductive problems and is generally considered the main cause of the decline. The banning of DDT in North America, an effective reintroduction program and protection of bald eagle breeding and wintering habitat have led to a significant increase in eagles during the past twenty years.

"Vermont's wintering bald eagle numbers are following the Northeast's upward trend," stated Steve Parren, coordinator for the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's Nongame Wildlife and Natural Heritage Program. "Between 1979 and 1989, an average of two eagles per year was observed during the survey period. During the next ten years, an average of more than 9 individuals per year was observed, and between 2001 and 2004 the average rose to more than 15 eagles per year."

Vermont's Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey is part of a nationwide survey. In Vermont, the survey was conducted along the 15 standardized survey routes between 1979 and 1999. The standardized routes include areas along Lake Champlain, Lake Hortonia and Lake Bomoseen, as well as selected portions of the Missisquoi, Lamoille, Winooski, Connecticut, Battenkill, White, Black, West and Deerfield rivers. Since 2001, partial surveys of selected routes are conducted annually, supplemented by full surveys in alternate years.

Audubon Vermont coordinated Vermont's 2005 Midwinter Eagle Survey with field assistance and financial support from the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's Nongame Wildlife and Natural Heritage Program and Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative. The department's Nongame Wildlife and Natural Heritage Program works to conserve and protect threatened and endangered species and is funded by the Nongame Wildlife Fund. The fund is supported by contributions from the tax check-off on the Vermont income tax form, the purchase of conservation license plates and direct donations.

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is coordinating the Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative with several partners to establish a breeding population of bald eagles to the Lake Champlain basin. An informational meeting about the project is planned for Thursday, March 24 at the Central School in Addison, beginning 7:00 p.m., and public television's *Outdoor Journal* will feature the project's first successful season raising and releasing young eagles in Vermont, airing on Tuesday, March 29. You also can learn more about Vermont's eagles by visiting the project's website: [www.cvps.com/eagles/](http://www.cvps.com/eagles/).

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caption for picture: Twenty bald eagles were spotted during Vermont's 2005 Midwinter Bald Eagle Survey, setting a new high for the number of bald eagles wintering in the state.

Photo credit: courtesy of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service