

Statement of Senator Jim Jeffords
Kickoff to Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Project
Shelburne Farms
March 15, 2004

The bald eagle is the symbol of our nation. It is the most American of images, displayed on our currency and gracing the seal of the U.S. Senate.

Unfortunately, this bird has also become the symbol of our poor treatment of the environment. Thirty years ago, we pushed the bald eagle to the brink of extinction through habitat destruction, pesticide poisoning and sport shooting.

But this bird's plight also became a powerful motivation in the banning of the pesticide DDT in 1972 and in the passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973. As a result of these and other acts, the recovery of this majestic bird in this relatively short span has been just incredible, from a low of about 400 nesting pairs in the lower 48 states to nearly 6,000 pairs today.

It is a success story that we can all be proud of, and it shows that it is possible to halt and even reverse environmental damage. We simply need the will to do so.

While other New England states and New York have had active eagle restoration programs, Vermont has not had such a program, until now. Yet with its abundant water resources and nesting sites, our state provides an ideal habitat, as shown by the number of eagles that visit here on their way to other places.

The return of resident eagles to Vermont will serve as a powerful tool for educating our children about the mistakes that we have made, and the great potential for healing our environment.

As I look at this bird, I am reminded of an inscription on a wall in the U.S. Capitol, a quote from Theodore Roosevelt: Quote: "The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets, which it must turn over to the next generation, increased and not impaired in value." End quote.

It is time to celebrate our national symbol with the pride that these great birds deserve.

A great team has come together to make this project possible, and I would like to thank The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Wildlife Federation, Central Vermont Public Service and Outreach for Earth Stewardship for their efforts.