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On the cover: World War-I era American postcard with bald eagle and American flag, postmarked 1917.

The bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) is the only eagle unique to North America. Admired for its majestic appearance and self-reliance, it became the national symbol in 1782 when the Second Continental Congress approved the design of the Nation's official seal. The Great Seal of the United States includes a shield that, according to Secretary Charles Thomson's journal of the Congress for June 20, 1782, is "borne on the breast of an American Eagle without any supporters, to denote that the United States of America ought to rely on their own virtue."

Although the bald eagle has endured as an American icon, by the 1960s only an estimated 450 nesting pairs remained in the conterminous (lower 48) States. Farmers and ranchers aggressively hunted the bird to protect their livestock. In 1940 Congress passed the Bald Eagle Protection Act which made it illegal to kill, harass, possess without a permit, or sell bald eagles. Still, the population continued to decline, largely due to the introduction of DDT and other pesticides, which contaminated the lakes and streams where the eagle fished. In 1967 the Department of the Interior declared a southern subspecies of the bald eagle as "endangered," signifying it was perilously close to extinction. In 1978 the Fish and Wildlife Service extended this designation to include all bald eagles in the conterminous United States.

Through public information campaigns and subsequent Federal conservation efforts, including a ban on DDT, the prospects for the bald eagle have improved. In July 1995 the Fish and Wildlife Service upgraded the bald eagle's status from "endangered" to "threatened." In July 1999, with approximately 6,000 nesting pairs estimated to be living in the conterminous United States, the Service issued a proposal to list the bald eagle as a "recovered" species.

For more information about the bald eagle's status as an endangered species, as well as related Federal regulations, visit the Fish and Wildlife Service Internet site at www.fws.gov.

Preface

As the official handbook of the Federal Government, *The United States Government Manual* provides comprehensive information on the agencies of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches. The *Manual* also includes information on quasi-official agencies; international organizations in which the United States participates; and boards, commissions, and committees.

A typical agency description includes a list of principal officials, a summary statement of the agency's purpose and role in the Federal Government, a brief history of the agency, including its legislative or executive authority, a description of its programs and activities, and a "Sources of Information" section. This last section provides information on consumer activities, contracts and grants, employment, publications, and many other areas of public interest.

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The *Manual* is published as a special edition of the *Federal Register* (see 1 CFR 9.1). Its focus is on programs and activities. Persons interested in detailed organizational structure, the regulatory documents of an agency, or Presidential documents should refer to the *Federal Register* or one of its other special editions, described below.

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