

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FALCONRY RULES PROPOSED AGAIN BY U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Proposed falconry regulations setting guidelines and requiring competence of all engaging in the sport were announced today by Lynn A. Greenwalt, Fish and Wildlife Service Director. Public comments are invited through June 7, 1974.

Falconry is the ancient sport of taking quarry with trained birds of prey or raptors.

Greenwalt said, "The regulations provide adequate protection for birds of prey used in falconry, while still allowing enthusiasts to engage in the sport."

The proposed regulations published in the Federal Register on April 4, 1974, initiate, once more, a process that was started on July 30, 1973, when the Fish and Wildlife Service first proposed a set of falconry regulations. Nearly 8,000 comments from individuals and organizations were received, and many issues of substance were raised. The differences in the regulations now presented for public comment are so substantial that the Fish and Wildlife Service is once more inviting the public to comment over a 60-day period. After the 60-day period expires, the Fish and Wildlife Service will consider all the comments received before issuing a final set of rules for falconry.

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The proposed regulations:

- (1) set limits on the species of raptors to be used in the sport,
- (2) establish guidelines for three classes of falconers,
- (3) set housing requirements, and
- (4) provide for marking raptors.

Federal regulation of falconry is required by a March 1972 convention between the United States and Mexico which extends Federal protection to virtually all species of North American birds traditionally used for falconry.

Since 1964 Federal migratory bird hunting regulations have recognized falconry as a lawful hunting method. Congress in 1972 amended the Bald Eagle Act to recognize falconry and authorize the Secretary of the Interior to set regulations to allow the taking of depredating golden eagles for falconry.

The proposed regulations indicate which raptors may be used for falconry and which may not. No raptor would be allowed for use in falconry if it is listed by the Secretary of the Interior as endangered. Currently five raptors are listed in that category--the Hawaiian hawk, southern bald eagle, American peregrine falcon, Arctic peregrine falcon, and the Florida Everglade kite.

Any raptor listed as a threatened species--a new category set up by the 1973 Endangered Species Act--is proposed for use only under very restricted circumstances after a permit is approved.

All species of owls, except the great horned owl, would be prohibited from falconry under the proposed regulations. Great horned owls would be acceptable since their population appears stable throughout North America.

Certain other restrictions on raptor use are proposed: The regulations would prohibit the taking of nestlings from the wild for falconry; the possession of a falconry permit would not authorize the captive breeding of raptors or caring for injured raptors. Separate special permits would be required for captive breeding and care of injured.

The proposed regulations establish clear guidelines for three classes of falconers. The minimum age for falconers is placed at 16 by the proposed regulations, and new falconers must go through a two-year apprenticeship with a sponsor. Apprentices may only work with five raptor species--the American kestrel, red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, marsh hawk, or, in Alaska, the goshawk. Further, apprentices may only possess one raptor.

A second class of falconer is proposed as a general class. General class falconers would be required to be at least 18 years old, and have two years apprenticeship. They may have only two raptors during any 12 month period, and they would be prohibited from having bald or golden eagles and any threatened or endangered species, under the proposed regulations.

The third class or master falconer will be required to have at least five years experience at the general class level or its equivalent. He may possess no more than three raptors during a 12 month period, but of the three only one may be a golden eagle or threatened species. Eagles and threatened species may only be taken under special permits.

The proposed regulations require an applicant for a falconry permit to pass a Fish and Wildlife Service approved examination on basic biology, care and handling of raptors, literature, laws, and regulations.

The proposed regulations give primary consideration for raptor housing to protect the birds from adverse environment, predators, and undue disturbance. Minimum requirements for both indoor and outdoor facilities are included in the proposal. These include adequate space, roofs, and perches suitable for the various species. Basic falconry equipment such as leashes and gloves required before issuance of a permit is also listed.

Guidelines for identification and transfer of raptors are proposed in the regulations. All raptors would be identified and marked by State wildlife agencies with non-reuseable markers supplied by the Fish and Wildlife Service within 10 days of acquisition. Falconers must keep State wildlife agencies informed of the death of their raptors and turn over the carcass with its marker. Written authorization from the State wildlife agency would be required before a raptor can be released into the wild, and the loss or escape of a bird must also be reported.

Falconers could leave their raptors in the care of a second party provided their written authorization accompanies the birds when they are transferred. If birds are cared for longer than five days, the State wildlife agency must be informed in writing where the birds will be held, the reason for transfer, who is caring for them, and how long they will be in the care of the other person.

The sport of falconry is not allowed in some States. Where it is allowed, State regulations would have to be in line with the minimum requirements stated in the proposed Federal regulations.

California has, by far, the most falconers in the country with approximately 780 people licensed in the State. The exact number of falconers nationwide is not known; however, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 to 3,000 serious followers of the sport are active.

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