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News Release

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National Park Service to Test Eagles Along the Mississippi River

National Park Service (NPS) biologists will be visiting bald eagle nests along the Mississippi river beginning May 11th. The NPS is collecting blood and feather samples from eagle nestlings to measure contaminants they ingest from their prey, and fitting them with aluminum leg bands so the birds can be identified if they are ever captured again.

Bald eagles began nesting on the Mississippi in mid-to-late February and eggs hatched approximately one month later. Nestlings have to be at least five weeks old to be captured and banded for this study.

"This is part of a long-term monitoring program we are conducting in three national parks in the Great Lakes region: the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area (MNRRA), the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, and Apostle Islands National Lakeshore in Lake Superior," says lead investigator Bill Route from the National Park Service's Great Lakes Inventory and Monitoring Program. "This is a collaborative effort with support and assistance from each park, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Audubon Minnesota."

"It helps us to know more about the resources we are charged to protect, and to work with partners to jointly manage water quality in the Mississippi River," says Paul Labovitz, Superintendent of the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area. "Mississippi River water quality issues affect a vast array of wild- and aquatic life, and of course, millions of people."

The study began in 2006 and is uncovering some interesting patterns in contaminants that were banned in the 1970s (DDT and PCBs) as well as new contaminants such as perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS). Saint Paul-based manufacturer 3M Corporation, ended production of PFOS in 2002 due to concerns that it accumulates in wildlife and humans. However, this contaminant

continues to enter the river through many sources, including seepage from area waste disposal sites.

"We have found that PFOS levels steadily declined in eagle blood samples from 2006 to 2008" says Route. "We will monitor the levels in eagles for another three years [2009 – 2011] so we'll see whether that trend continues." The results show that current levels of PFOS are still very high compared to other areas of the country and that there are other contaminants that work their way in to the aquatic food web of the Mississippi River. "The bald eagles are sampling the river for us by feeding on fish and other prey that are contaminated from the water" says Route. The NPS and its partners are monitoring the long-term trends in contaminants that are known to accumulate in wildlife and humans.

Information from the study will be used by federal and state agencies to better understand the patterns, trends, and effects of these chemicals.

More information can be found online http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/units/glkn/ (then click on persistent contaminants from the bar on the left) or http://www.nps.gov/miss/naturescience/birdsbald.htm.

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Images from last year's eaglet sampling available upon request.

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