Accelerating energy development in the far southwestern U.S. poses challenges for conserving golden eagles, largely because the species’ ranging behavior in the region is virtually unknown. During the late winters of 2012 and 2013, we worked with Dr. Gary Boerner of New Mexico State University and Dr. Jimmy Cain of the USGS Fish and Wildlife Cooperative Research Unit at NMSU in launching a study of the use of southern New Mexico landscapes by golden eagles, funded by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Our key tool was satellite telemetry. We met our target of capturing and tagging six ‘goldens’ with transmitters in 2012. As winter waned in 2013, however, the eagles weren’t buyin’ what we were showing,” and we had not yet deployed a transmitter. Meanwhile, on a windy early March day, an adult male golden eagle made what should have been a fatal mistake. Feeding on carrion beside a rural New Mexico highway, he was flushed into the windshield of a car traveling at 100 km/hour, smashing the glass and denting the car’s roof at the upper edge of the windshield. He was scooped up by the road from the following driver and taken to Gila Wildlife Rescue in nearby Silver City. Amazingly, a physical exam there revealed NO bone fractures, no nerve dysfunction...no permanent dysfunction...no permanent

photo by Denise Miller

One Tough Eagle

Dale Stahlecker, founder of Eagle Environmental, Inc. in Santa Fe, New Mexico, has conducted field surveys and research on raptors in the southwestern United States for three decades. Most of his work during the last 15 years has focused on golden eagles, involving work with tribes, as well as state and federal agencies. Since 2010, Dale has worked on satellite telemetry studies of golden eagles for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Robert Murphy is a migratory bird biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Southwest Region, where his focus is raptor conservation and research initiatives, especially for golden eagles. He currently leads a long-term, collaborative investigation of ranging behavior, survival, mortality factors, and resource selection by golden eagles in the Colorado Plateau and Southern Rocky Mountain regions.

Photo by Denise Miller

Accompanying photo: Adult male golden eagle “Thor” on a rural highway in southwestern New Mexico, 2 March 2013.

Windshield of car after striking adult male golden eagle “Thor” on a rural highway in southwestern New Mexico, 2 March 2013.

Migration tracks of adult male golden eagle between wintering range in southern New Mexico (black dot) to summer range on the northern Alaska-Yukon border (white dot); white track – 2013; blue track – 2014; yellow track – 2015 through early October. Migration stopover site is not red square. Tracks are based on hourly (0700-1900 hrs) GPS locations.

One Tough Eagle

Dale Stahlecker and Dennis Miller attach a 45g PTT to an adult male golden eagle that had been struck by a speeding car less than 1 month earlier. The eagle flew 120 km the afternoon it was released with the PTT attached.

Dale Stahlecker and Dennis Miller attach a 45g PTT to an adult male golden eagle that had been struck by a speeding car less than 1 month earlier. The eagle flew 120 km the afternoon it was released with the PTT attached.

Dale Stahlecker and Dennis Miller attach a 45g PTT to an adult male golden eagle that had been struck by a speeding car less than 1 month earlier. The eagle flew 120 km the afternoon it was released with the PTT attached.

Dale Stahlecker and Dennis Miller attach a 45g PTT to an adult male golden eagle that had been struck by a speeding car less than 1 month earlier. The eagle flew 120 km the afternoon it was released with the PTT attached.

Dale Stahlecker and Dennis Miller attach a 45g PTT to an adult male golden eagle that had been struck by a speeding car less than 1 month earlier. The eagle flew 120 km the afternoon it was released with the PTT attached.