Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)

**Pennsylvania Endangered Bird Species**

State Rank: S1B (critically imperiled), Global Rank: G5 (secure)

**Identification**

From bill to tail tip, adults are about 40 inches long. The wingspan is 55 inches. The plumage is white, bill yellowish, and legs and feet black.

**Biology-Natural History**

The major distribution of this species is south of Pennsylvania. Fingers of a Mid-Atlantic coastal population extend into the Delaware and Susquehanna drainages. During migration, this species drifts slowly southward. By mid-spring, nesting has started. A nest of sticks contains three to four pale bluish green eggs. After a 24-day incubation period and six weeks as nestlings, young are ready to fly. Maturity may not be reached until the third year. Food consists of frogs, minnows and other small aquatic animals.

**Habitat**

This egret is typically found feeding in shallow rivers, streams, ponds, lakes and marshes. Nests are found in adjacent trees or shrubby growth, preferable on islands. The birds usually nest in colonies that may include other colonial nesting species.

**Reasons for Being Endangered**

Years ago, this species was hunted for its feathers. By 1917, some doubted this species could be saved from extinction. Pennsylvania’s first documented nesting record was in 1957. By 1990, birds had established three modest colonies here. Today, the main threats faced by the great egret is habitat loss (inundation of shallow feeding areas as a result of dams, for example), water pollution, and disturbance of nesting colonies.

**Management Practices**

Colonial nesting birds are vulnerable to disturbance and direct persecution. All known nesting colonies should be closed to public intrusion and preserved from developmental pressures.

**References:**
