

High-Rise Habitat Gets a Lift

Osprey nesting platforms have buffer zone between birds and power lines

By Lori Froehlich

It's that time of year again when the winged residents of the Columbia and Klickitat rivers make their summer homes. This occurs from late March through September every year.

One particular resident birdwatchers anxiously await the return of is osprey. Protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the fish-eating osprey also are known as seahawks—the inspiration for the Seattle football mascot.

Osprey pairs mate for life and generally return to the same nest every year to hatch and raise their young before their annual southern migration in the fall.

If there is an abundant supply of fish nearby, osprey will build their nest on any tall structure appropriate enough. This includes Klickitat PUD power poles, channel markers and cell towers close to the water.

These large stick nests often are built atop a double cross-armed PUD power pole. This can pose a fire hazard or an outage when the sticks from the nest interfere with the electrical equipment.

Rain and snow compound this risk when the nests become wet. A danger exists for osprey as well. They could be electrocuted if their nearly 5-foot wingspan completes either the circuit between closely spaced energized equipment or between one energized wire and one neutral or ground wire.

KPUD had seen an increase in osprey



An osprey nesting platform atop a Klickitat PUD power pole has a few feet of separation from cross arms.

building their nests on power poles, especially near Lyle and Klickitat. In 2007, KPUD crews had to remove part of an osprey's large stick-built nest to restore power, while leaving enough for the birds to use for the rest of the nesting season. After the migratory birds left the area in September, plans were made for KPUD crews to install a newly constructed nesting platform.

Working with students at Goldendale High School and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, KPUD's construction crew installed a nesting platform several feet above the power lines, offering

protection to the birds and the city's power supply. The students also built two more platforms to replace osprey nests on other power poles in the area that were a both a fire and reliability hazard and to prevent future interactions between the birds and power equipment.

The displaced ospreys have accepted their alternate nesting platforms. Each spring, all of the platforms have been occupied. Keep a close watch for them in your travels through the Columbia Gorge, as they often can be seen diving into the Columbia River after fish throughout the spring and summer. ■