

Helping Birds, Helping the KPUD Community

By Lori Froehlich

It is the time of year when the osprey of the Columbia and Klickitat rivers make their summer homes. This happens from late March through September every year.

Protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the fish-eating osprey is also known as a seahawk—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.



A pair of osprey make themselves at home on a nesting platform built on the top of a Klickitat PUD utility pole.

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

Quite often, these nests are built on top of the double cross-armed PUD power poles. This can pose a fire hazard or an outage when sticks from the nest interfere with the electrical equipment. Rain and snow compound this risk when the nests become wet.

A danger exists for the osprey as well, as their nearly 5-foot wingspan can be a potential for electrocution if it completes either the circuit between closely spaced energized equipment or between one energized wire and one neutral or ground wire.

Klickitat PUD had seen an increase in ospreys building their nests on poles, especially near communities on the water, such as Bingen, Lyle and Klickitat.

In 2007, it was necessary for Klickitat PUD crews 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 PUD crews to install a nesting platform.

Working with students at Goldendale High School and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, Klickitat PUD's construction crew installed a nesting platform several feet above the power lines, offering protection to the birds and the town's power supply. The students built two more platforms to replace osprey nests on other power poles in the area that were both a fire and reliability hazard, and to prevent future interactions between the birds and power equipment.

The displaced osprey have readily accepted their alternate nesting platforms, and each spring all the platforms have been occupied. Keep a close watch for osprey in your travels through the Columbia River Gorge. They often can be seen throughout the spring and summer diving into the Columbia River after fish.

Klickitat PUD appreciates everyone who was involved in the cooperative effort to provide safe, reliable power, while at the same time preventing hazardous bird interactions with power equipment. These efforts help us maintain a successful coexistence between people and wildlife. ■