

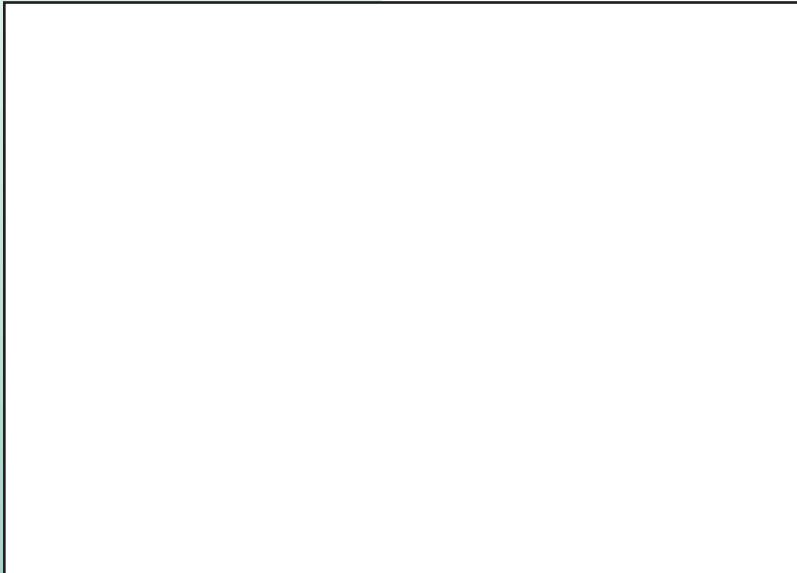


Information Bulletin

Williston Reservoir Raptor Project

PEACE/WILLISTON FISH & WILDLIFE COMPENSATION PROGRAM

Objective: *To determine the population status and nesting distribution of bald eagles and ospreys along the Williston and Dinosaur Reservoirs and their major tributaries, and to design and implement habitat enhancement projects.*



▲ This eagle nest is built in an aspen tree along the shore of Williston Reservoir. At only three months of age, these fledglings are already the size of adult eagles.

Wildlife biologists with the Peace/Williston Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program are embarking on a new and exciting long-term project.

The subjects of the study are fish-eating raptors—bald eagles and ospreys—which build their nests in large trees and inundated snags along the shorelines of the Williston and Dinosaur Reservoirs and adjacent rivers. Since no informa-

tion exists about the raptor population prior to the creation of the reservoirs, the first step for the biologists is to determine the numbers and distribution of nesting eagles and osprey in the watershed.

Nesting habitat is one of many factors of interest to the biologists. Bald eagles and ospreys breed in close proximity to water and their food supply. Ospreys build their nests on the tops of trees and on the snags located in the shallow bays of the reservoir which were formed when the area was initially flooded. Eagles, which are larger than ospreys, build their nests in the crotches of trees like cottonwood and aspen.

“As the snags in the reservoir decay and fall over with time, this valuable nesting habitat for ospreys will be lost,” said wildlife biologist Mari Wood. “We would like to determine the extent to which these snags are being used as nesting sites and the effect that the

loss of this habitat may have on the osprey population."

The project began in 1995/96 with three aerial surveys of the Williston and Dinosaur Reservoirs. The first survey was completed in March, when Wood, biologist Fraser Corbould and fisheries technician Randy Zemlak recorded the locations and tree species of the raptor nests. They flew the entire perimeter of both reservoirs, looking about 200-300 metres into the trees on one side and along the shoreline on the opposite side.

"We conducted this survey in winter because there are no leaves on the deciduous trees and the nests are filled with snow, making them more visible than in the summer," said Wood.

The June survey involved returning to each of the previously documented nests and recording the bird species occupying the nest and the 'clutch size', or number of eggs. Assisted by Bob Westcott, a B.C. Hydro environmental coordinator, the biologists returned to the nest sites in

August to record the number of young, giving them an indication of the raptors' productivity.

More detailed surveys planned for 1997 will address the raptors' different breeding chronology. Eagles lay their eggs earlier in the season, have a longer incubation period and take longer for the chicks to fly. The surveys will also be expanded to include the nests along the tributary rivers. From this information, the biologists will be able to get population estimates for the entire Williston watershed, and compare the numbers, -distribution and nesting habitat of the breeding eagles and osprey in the natural habitat (the rivers) with the altered habitat (the reservoir).

Depending on the survey findings, the future direction of this project may focus on one or both raptor species. Possible enhancement could include artificial nests poles for osprey to replace the decaying snags in the reservoir or the removal of the snags that are flooded each summer to prevent the ospreys from nesting on them.

It may also be necessary to implement protection strategies for cottonwood trees that are most important for nesting eagles. Food supply enhancement could include fish stocking or fish habitat improvement.

The Peace/Williston Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program is a joint B.C. Hydro and B.C. Environment initiative to enhance and protect fish and wildlife within the Williston and Dinosaur watersheds in northeastern British Columbia.

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