

Community Acts to Protect Osprey

From early April through September of each year, winged residents arrive along the Columbia and Klickitat rivers to make their summer homes.



One such group is the osprey. These birds are tolerant of human activities and commonly build their nests on any suitable tall structure, as long as it is close to a water source with an abundant supply of fish. Their building sites include the tops of power poles, channel markers and cell towers.

A pair of osprey return to the same nest year after year to raise their young before migrating south in the fall. Their large stick nests are routinely found atop double cross-arm power poles, often causing a fire or power outage when the sticks interfere with the electrical equipment. This is especially true when the nests become wet during inclement weather.

There also is the potential for electrocution, as an osprey's nearly 5-foot wingspan can complete the circuit between either closely spaced energized equipment, or between one energized wire and one neutral or ground wire.

Like many other birds, ospreys are a protected species under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which is federally enforced by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Klickitat PUD (KPUD) has recently seen an increase in the number of osprey nests atop power poles near the towns of Lyle and Klickitat, as both locations provide an excellent source of food nearby.

To protect the osprey while continuing to provide reliable electric service to our customers, which is the district's mission, the Goldendale High School's applied psychology class partnered with KPUD and area citizens to build



Above, from left, Dominique McConville, Krista Meacock, Jennifer McEwen and their classmates building osprey nest platforms, above, left, in the Goldendale High School applied psychology class. Below, Martin Taylor of the KPUD construction crew puts the platform in place.

nest platforms.

As a service learning project, teachers Laurie Wilhite and Matt Merfeld involved each student in a particular aspect of the planning and construction.

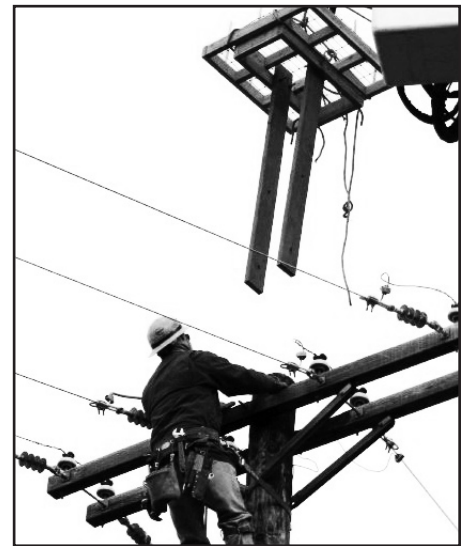
The students went on a field trip to view the problem nests firsthand.

This type of service-learning not only helps students understand the workings of human and animal behavior, it shows them how projects such as this can improve their communities. The students learn valuable information and skills that will help them in the future.

The students have finished the nest platforms, and the KPUD construction crew is installing them this winter, while the ospreys are away.

Ospreys readily accept alternate nests, especially if sticks from their old nests are scattered atop the new platforms.

Birdwatchers anxiously anticipate the return of the osprey in late March. These nesting sites, along with other critical nesting areas that are not on power poles, can be seen



at www.community.gorge.net/birding/2007osprey.htm, a Web site established by volunteers in the birding communities.

KPUD thanks all of those involved in the cooperative effort to provide safe, reliable power, while preventing hazardous bird interactions with power equipment and sustaining a successful environmental coexistence between people and wildlife. ■