

MEMORANDM

TO: Park Advisory Commission

FROM: Dave Borneman, Deputy Manager, Parks & Recreation Services

DATE: November 10, 2014

SUBJECT: Osprey Nesting Platform Project

Overview

This is a project to place several nesting platforms in/adjacent to the Huron River in/near a city park where park users could easily enjoy watching the events of the nesting season without disturbing the birds.

Background

The Osprey is a large raptor of Special Concern in Michigan. They feed exclusively on fish, and thus usually nest in large trees where they have easy access to lakes and rivers. In a survey done through the 1980s, Ospreys were found to be extirpated from southeastern Michigan at that time. Only two nesting pairs were known in the 4 lowest tiers of Michigan counties. DDT was suspected as the cause of these low numbers of Osprey and other raptor species. While there was a slow increase in the number of Osprey pairs state-wide over the following decade, the southern part of the state continued to have low numbers. From 1998-2007, there was an Osprey re-introduction program by the MDNR, Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, and the Detroit Zoo that sought to increase Osprey numbers in the southern Lower Peninsula. Although this program was successful, the Osprey is still considered to be a Species of Special Concern in the state.

Ospreys naturally nest in dead trees but will readily accept nesting platforms provided for them. This has been proven to be a successful method for attracting Ospreys to nest at Kensington Metropark near Brighton. At another site, near Flint, Osprey Watch of Southeast Michigan partnered with GM and DTE to put up a platform that has proven successful in attracting nesting birds. Ospreys have also been observed nesting on power transmission towers, light poles, and telecommunication towers.

Ospreys are often seen flying up and down the Huron River, hunting for fish, so they are known to use the area. But they do not nest within the City limits, presumably because of the absence of suitable nesting opportunities in or near the river. The nearest known nest is located just north of town, near the intersection of Whitmore Lake Road and Joy Road.

Proposal

Natural Area Preservation (NAP) plans to install two Osprey nesting platforms at locations that we think will be attractive to the birds, and to birders and other park users.

These platforms are only 8-10 feet above the surface of the water. They are typically made of wood. Installation in the river, if we choose that option, would require a minor permit from the MDNR, although that is not expected to be a big obstacle. If they prove successful, the platforms would remain in place indefinitely.

Process

NAP staff, including Dea Armstrong, Ornithologist, met with representatives from Osprey Watch of Southeast Michigan and the Huron River Watershed Council to identify 5 potential locations in the river near city parks. (See attached map.) Staff then spoke with various stakeholders with connections to these sites. These included representatives from the Skyline Rowing Club, Gallup Canoe Livery, Washtenaw Audubon Society, Barton Sailing Club, and the Huron River Watershed Council. Staff has also been working closely throughout this entire process with the Leslie Science and Nature Center, especially their Raptor Specialist, Francie Krawcke. She is very enthusiastic about any project that creates opportunities for viewing raptors in their natural habitat, and especially excited about this project because Ospreys are one raptor species that does not do well in captivity.

After these discussions, and further consideration of factors such as habitat suitability, water depth, potential conflicts with rowers and other boaters, view-ability by birders, and ease of installation, the two most desirable sites were selected. One of these is upstream of the city, along the southern edge of Barton Pond, near Huron River Drive. The other is in the backwater area of Furstenberg Nature Area. (Locations numbered 1 and 3 on the attached map.)

NAP will seek partners to help with nesting platform funding, construction, and placement. Cost of platform materials is estimated to be \$200-500 per platform. If everything goes smoothly, we hope to have the platforms installed over the next several months, before the Spring 2015 nesting season.