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Basin Benefits

Conservation group works on habitat project

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CHRISTIE BLECK - Journal Staff Writer (cbleck@miningjournal.net) , Mining Journal

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MARQUETTE - The osprey is unique among raptors in that it can dive into water to catch live fish.

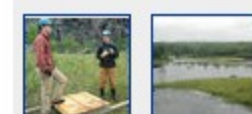
Soon, more local residents might be able to witness this spectacular feat in person.

A Great Lakes Conservation Corps crew has been working on an osprey platform to be installed in the Dead River Basin, an ideal place for such a fish-seeking animal.

Article Photos



Coleman Wilson, Great Lakes Conservation Corps crew le...



Coleman Wilson, a biology student at Northern Michigan University, is the crew leader and coordinator of the GLCC, which is part of the Superior Watershed Partnership.

The platform project is important, Wilson said, for the entire local ecosystem.

"We modify our environment a lot, for a lot of reasons, such as this site," Wilson said.

The basin, he noted, filled up once the dam was rebuilt, but it is still a habitat that can be used.

"It's still viable for these kinds of animals, so if we can give them as much help as we can, building this kind of structure, to give them a usable area, I think it's really beneficial for the environment, for the whole community," Wilson said.

In fact, Wilson said crew members have seen a bald eagle fishing in the area, which bodes well for the platform.

"Generally, where you find bald eagles, you find ospreys," he said.

The 2003 Dead River flood washed away a dam, which was reconstructed in the Tourist Park project that also transformed the area environmentally.

Putting up an osprey platform takes some prior planning because of the birds' territoriality.

"You can't have too many osprey platforms next to each other," Wilson said.

A platform also has to be in an open area, which rules out more forested areas near the basin, he said.

The crew's method of installing the platform, according to Wilson, involves placing crushed rocks around the base of the post, pounding them in with a hammer and adding topsoil. The platform then will be monitored to make sure it's holding together.

The Great Lakes Conservation Corps is geared toward individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 who work on conservation projects that benefit Upper Peninsula communities. The SWP has partnered with the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to provide field training and work-skill development for the GLCC.

Wilson said other projects in which the GLCC has been involved this summer include water-quality improvement at Lake Bancroft in Ishpeming, dune restoration along Lakeshore Boulevard in the city of Marquette (which involves pulling invasive plants and transplanting grasses) and trail work that's part of Gov. Rick Snyder's trails initiative.

"All the projects are in town or benefitting our Upper Peninsula communities, which is great," said assistant crew leader Emily Goodman.

Crew members who helped work on the osprey platform were Andy Sandell, Paulina Puskala, Nick Martin and Ari Rasmussen. All are NMU students except for Puskala, who is a student at St. Norbert College in Wisconsin.

Martin acknowledged being part of the GLCC will be good for his career, but he also enjoys just being on site.

"It helps me out, and it helps out the area," he said.

Giving an osprey a safe place to raise young, obviously, is good for the bird. But it's good for people too, at least those who like wilderness settings.

"It's great to see beautiful animals like an osprey or an eagle nesting right outside where we live in Marquette," Wilson said.

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