

# Project Helps Birds and Protects Infrastructure

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Platforms were installed below Navajo Dam to provide safe nesting areas for ospreys currently nesting on the electric utility poles

By Hannah Grover, [hgrover@daily-times.com](mailto:hgrover@daily-times.com)

COMMUNITY OF NAVAJO DAM — Ospreys that are building nests on power poles near Navajo Dam could be electrocuted and cause power outages, according to Farmington Electric Utility System officials.

The utility partnered with Navajo Lake State Park, the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to provide more attractive nesting platforms and discourage nesting on power poles. The first of six platforms was installed on Wednesday and others were installed later in the week.

"We're working to help keep these birds as safe as we can and off of the power lines," said Ward Allies, the utility's transmission and distribution maintenance superintendent, while crews installed a platform Thursday.

The large osprey nest made of sticks, mud and debris can catch fire, leading to power outages and damaged infrastructure. Birds can be electrocuted while flapping their wings if one wing touches one energized wire and the other wing touches another, according to Farmington Electric Utility System environmental scientist Aaron Dailey.

The river below Navajo Dam has several nests partly because of the abundance of fish, Dailey said.

"They love this area so much because it's a heavily stocked river," he said.

Chris Smith, Navajo Lake State Park superintendent, said there was a single nesting pair in the area about 15 years ago. The population has since grown to an estimated eight nesting pairs.

While providing the ospreys with attractive places to nest, the electric utility is also installing roof-like structures that make it difficult to build nests on poles where ospreys have nested in the past. The entire cost of the project was about \$35,000. Allies said much of the material was surplus from other projects. The 50-foot high osprey platform near the pump house used a surplus transmission pole that could no longer be used in utility projects.

"It should work fine for what we're doing here," he said.

Allies estimated that the platform will last 20 to 25 years.

"The birds should be, hopefully, very happy on it," he said.

Where there were existing nests, the different entities received permits to move the nests onto the platforms. On Wednesday, a nest was moved from an electric utility pole to a new platform near the popular Texas Hole fishing location on the San Juan River. This nest can be seen from the parking lot. Allies said people interested in watching the nest should not disturb nesting birds. He encouraged birders to watch the ospreys from a distance using binoculars. Smith said if the public is interested, the state park may decide to install cameras that will provide a live feed of nesting birds.

The electric utility hopes the platforms will be a success. Allies said about eight years ago the utility moved a nest from a pole to a nearby platform.

"The birds took to that roost and that platform," he said.

*Hannah Grover covers government for The Daily Times. She can be reached at 505-564-4652.*