



NEWS

For immediate release July 17, 2009

Contact: Amy Rutledge

Email: arutledge@mnpower.com

Phone: 218-723-7400

Mobile: 218-348-2961

After helicopter reconnaissance, Minnesota Power linemen gather osprey chicks for adoption in Iowa

With a big assist from Minnesota Power, a group of natural resource officials and bird lovers from two states accomplished their July 13 mission of securing ten osprey chicks from nests in the utility's service area and moving the birds to Iowa.

For more than a decade, MP has been helping Iowa Department of Natural Resources officials import wild ospreys, fish-eating raptors that nest along the wetlands and lakes of northern Minnesota – often atop power poles and transmission structures.

A few days before the ten chicks were transplanted, Minnesota Power employees Bill Fraundorf and Lynn Orth spent three hours peering downward from a helicopter into nests of ospreys built upon company equipment amid the lakes and forests of north-central Minnesota.

“We spend maybe five to 10 seconds over each nest,” said Fraundorf, a senior environmental compliance specialist who has headed up Minnesota Power's osprey relocation program for six years. Orth is a customer service representative by occupation and nature lover by heart.

“The birds are difficult to see,” Fraundorf continued, “and when you come by, they flatten out in the nest. They're brown, the same color as the nest.” He said he and Orth search the nest interiors for “the white dots” on the feathers of the chicks, who are not quite mature enough to fly but whose talons can already assist in devouring small fish.

“It's good to have the multiple sets of eyes.” After a full day of flying, Fraundorf and Orth had taken note of enough nests to supply the ten young birds requested by the Iowa officials. They planned out a route that would be accessible by vehicle rather than by air.

As the sun rose on osprey collection day, a group composed of Fraundorf, Iowa Department of Natural Resources personnel, conservation district employees and raptor rehabilitators from Iowa and Minnesota gathered their gear and headed for Minnesota Power's service center in Crosby, Minn.

There they met up with Minnesota Power lead line worker Bill Christensen, line crew members Carl Thesing, Cole Schwarz and Casey Pederson and Audubon Avian Biologist Mark Martell. Over the next several hours, the linemen climbed poles or aluminum structures, reached into nests, and pulled out osprey chicks. The perfect adoption age for an osprey is 42 days – before the chicks can fly but after their talons are developed enough so that they can grasp and eat small fish.

(more)

With the aid of bags and boxes, the young birds were lowered to the ground, and examined and banded by one of the raptor specialists. The best candidates for transfer were put into small cages and the other chicks returned to their natural nests. At least one young osprey is always left in a nest during the resettlements.

By noon, the team had acquired five osprey chicks from an area near the town of Riverton. Nests in the Breezy Point vicinity provided the team with chicks in the afternoon. The last two osprey chicks were secured from a nest on a direct current transmission line structure about eight miles northeast of Pine River.

Iowa officials were delighted with the outcome of the osprey collection. Pat Schlarbaum, Iowa DNR Osprey Program manager, said the chicks were taken to “hacking boxes” on waterways in northwest and west-central Iowa. There, it is hoped, the birds will “imprint” on their new surroundings and return each summer to nest in Iowa. He was asked why moving ospreys from Minnesota to Iowa was important.

“This program has been a tremendous asset to the Iowa water resources,” Schlarbaum said. “We’ve accrued 14 nesting pairs, of which seven were contributed from Minnesota.” He said ospreys don’t expand their range on their own, but with human help, the raptor populations can spread out over a wider area. Schlarbaum said the birds, as fish-eaters, are “biological indicators” of clean water.

“It’s an incredible commitment that ALLETE/Minnesota Power provides,” Schlarbaum said. “You just can’t warehouse wildlife, you can’t stockpile it. There’s always a balance. We want to promote good clean water, and these birds lead the way.”

Minnesota Power, a division of ALLETE, Inc., provides retail electric service within a 26,000-square-mile area in northeastern Minnesota to 142,000 customers and wholesale electric service to 16 municipalities. More information can be found at: www.mnpower.com.

The statements contained in this release and statements that ALLETE may make orally in connection with this release that are not historical facts, are forward-looking statements. Actual results may differ materially from those projected in the forward-looking statements. These forward-looking statements involve risks and uncertainties and investors are directed to the risks discussed in documents filed by ALLETE with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

#####



recycled paper

ALLETE • 30 West Superior Street, Duluth, Minnesota 55802
www.allete.com