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VOLUNTEERS HELP BUILD HOME FOR FUTURE VERMONT BALD EAGLES

The goal of establishing a nesting population of bald eagles in Vermont just got one step closer.

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department staff and volunteers from Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS), Outreach for Earth Stewardship (OFES), National Wildlife Federation (NWF), and Green Mountain Power (GMP) recently built three artificial nesting boxes for bald eagles at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area, in Addison.

The partners in the Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative teamed up to construct three 8-foot by 8-foot hack boxes --semi-open enclosures, perched 20 feet high and designed to simulate natural nesting conditions. Young eaglets, six to eight weeks old, will be placed into the hack boxes, artificially fed, protected and allowed to grow until they are ready to fly.

“Hacking is a method of gradually releasing raptors, like eagles, to the wild,” said Brad Mann, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department game warden and the department’s eagle project administrator. “We will closely monitor the eaglets and provide them with food, but we will minimize human contact so the young eagles will develop with natural fears and instincts intact.”

According to Eveleen Cecchini, director of Outreach for Earth Stewardship and Eagle-care Manager, "Trained volunteers will feed and monitor the eagles throughout the day. OFES Staff will provide dawn and dusk attention for the young eagles, night security and volunteer-support." Cecchini says, “The spirit and dedication of our newly trained volunteers is inspiring. This is truly a community project.”

For three years, six to nine eaglets will be raised using the hacking process until they learn to fly and hunt food successfully on their own. The eaglets will come from captive-bred eagles and wild eagles nesting in other states that have established breeding populations. The first eaglets are expected to arrive sometime in mid-May. It is hoped the eagles will return to the Lake Champlain basin to nest once they are old enough to breed, or in about four to six years.

“Eagles are poor pioneers of unoccupied habitats,” explains Margaret Fowle, NWF biologist. “ Thanks to the efforts of many, the overall health of Lake Champlain has improved enough to support eagles. This project is a proactive step to restore them to the lake so that people can enjoy seeing eagles year round.”

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“The project also offers a great opportunity to raise awareness about endangered species and the conservation of all wildlife,” said Fowle. “We are developing educational programs with help from OFES. Plus, CVPS is hosting an eagle web site and will install a web cam on the hack box. The web cam will let people monitor the eaglets progress from their computer.”

Vermont is the only state in the continental United States that does not have bald eagles nesting within its borders. The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is coordinating this bald eagle restoration effort in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Wildlife Federation, Outreach for Earth Stewardship, Central Vermont Public Service (CVPS), and others.

Funding for the new project was provided through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Senator Jim Jeffords request when he realized the potential for restoring a breeding population of bald eagles in Vermont.

To learn more about eagles and the Vermont Bald Eagle Initiative visit the website at www.cvps.com/eagles