



News Release

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OSPREY NEST IN WAYNE COUNTY FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE 1890s

Gibraltar, Michigan – In 2009, a pair of osprey built a nest in a cell phone tower adjacent to the Gibraltar Wetlands Unit of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, representing the first time that osprey have successfully nested in Wayne County since the 1890s. Osprey are one of the largest birds of prey in North America, with a nearly six foot wingspan. Osprey are also known as “fish hawks.” They feed almost exclusively on fish and are considered a good indicator of aquatic ecosystem health. As with bald eagles, a dramatic decline of osprey occurred throughout North America due to widespread use of DDT and other organochlorine pesticides that caused eggshell thinning. DDT was banned in Michigan in 1969 and nationwide in 1972. Osprey restoration efforts began in the mid-1980s.

In the Gibraltar Wetlands Unit, osprey first attempted to nest in a large tree in 2006 and 2007. Both attempts were unsuccessful. In 2008, osprey again attempted to nest in the cell phone tower located on the edge of the Gibraltar Wetlands Unit, but were again unsuccessful. Finally in 2009, osprey successfully nested in the cell phone tower next to the Gibraltar Wetlands Unit and fledged two young.

“The first successful osprey nest in southeast Michigan was reported in 2002 at Kensington Metropark,” noted Jim Kortge of Osprey Watch of Southeast Michigan which works with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to restore the osprey population and educate people about this unique raptor. “Since 2002, osprey restoration efforts have been very successful, culminating with 18 confirmed nests in southeast Michigan that produced 46 chicks during 2009.”

Historical ornithological records from southeast Michigan are limited. “However, based on available surveys and reports, there have been no reports of nesting osprey in Wayne

County since the 1890s,” notes ornithologist Julie Craves of the Rouge River Bird Observatory.

“This news of osprey reproduction in Wayne County along the Detroit River is part of a larger ecological recovery story for the Detroit River,” said Tim Payne, wildlife biologist from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Since the enactment of the Clean Water Act and the signing of the U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement in 1972, there has been a substantial reduction in pollutant loadings to the Detroit River and substantial improvement in the water quality of the Detroit River. “There is no doubt that more needs to be done to clean up the Detroit River, but the environmental improvement achieved to date has laid the foundation for one of the most remarkable ecological recoveries in North America,” reports Dr. John Hartig, Refuge Manager of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge. Scientific evidence has documented the return of bald eagles, peregrine falcons, lake whitefish, lake sturgeon, walleye, and mayflies in large areas from which they had been extirpated or negatively impacted. And now there is evidence of the return of osprey to Wayne County. Clearly, this is good news for people living in the Detroit and Windsor metropolitan areas because if this ecosystem is cleaner for fish and wildlife, it is cleaner for people.

The Detroit River has the distinction of being the only international wildlife refuge in North America and the only river system to hold both American and Canadian Heritage River designations.

For more information, please contact Julie Craves of the Rouge River Bird Observatory (313-583-6373), Tim Payne of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (248-359-9040), Jim Kortge of Osprey Watch of Southeast Michigan (810-629-0378), or Dr. John Hartig of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (734-692-7608).

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