



# The Eagle Eye

Newsletter of the Ferry Bluff Eagle Council

Summer 2005

## Where Have "Our" Eagles Gone?

By Jeb Barzen

This was a commonly asked question last winter. "Our" eagle population has not likely died nor have they forever abandoned their wintering grounds in Sauk Prairie. What has happened is something that happens every year. The eagles are responding to changes in their habitat that are likely due to the vagaries of weather.

From our radio-tracking data we have identified several important habitats that eagles need. Forests on protected bluffs serve as places where eagles gather at night to sleep. The dam provides open water where eagles can find fish. The undeveloped and forested margins of the Wisconsin River provide good perches where eagles can forage during the day without using much energy. The fourth component, agricultural fields, create open areas where eagles can find carrion or animal materials spread out from farming operations. These fields provide not only food but also open vistas that guard against stalking predators while the foraging eagles are on the ground and vulnerable.

Yet we also learned that having these four habitat types alone are not enough to concen-



*Since "our" eagles wintered elsewhere this year, this couple enjoyed the other scenery at the overlook. Photo by Kurt Eakle.*

trate eagles in our area. Their location relative to each other is equally as important. The forested bluffs need to be in close proximity to the river or near agricultural fields to be attractive to foraging eagles.

But explaining when eagles concentrate in our area is even more complicated. Our winter weather varies greatly from one week to the next, and ice and snow affect where eagles find food. During early winter, when the Wisconsin River is free of ice, eagles are often spread out from Sauk Prairie to Lone Rock. At that time, eagles also feed in agricultural areas near

Leland and Blackhawk as well as along the river. Come January, ice often forms from Ferry Bluff down to Lone Rock and eagles can no longer fish along this river reach. Eagles respond by congregating near the dam in Prairie du Sac.

Snowfall affects eagles in a way similar to ice formation. Heavy snowfalls cover food in agricultural fields and, as in this year, when coupled with extensive ice formation, substantially limit the habitats available to Sauk Prairie eagles. The heavy snowfall and cold weather this

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FERRY BLUFF  
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The Ferry Bluff Eagle Council is a local, grassroots organization working to protect, enhance and maintain bald eagle habitat in the Sauk Prairie area through education, research, and management activities.

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## Presentation Well Received at Township Meeting

Juliana Clausen was invited to explain the habitat needs of wintering bald eagles to a joint meeting of the Town of West Point Board and Planning Committee on February 17, 2005. As part of the Smart Growth mandate for the state of Wisconsin, West Point is making



*West Point Township consulted with FBEC regarding future growth-related construction in the community and the importance of the territory to wintering eagles. Photo by Kay Roherty.*

plans for anticipated growth in the coming years. In anticipation of that work, they requested input from Ferry Bluff Eagle Council.

At the meeting, Juliana's presentation dealt with the general requirements of our wintering eagles, and focused specifically on the very crucial territory that eagles need in West Point Township. She explained that the two roosts closest to the dam, and the loafing and perching territory just downstream from it, are probably the most important habitat in the whole area - and most of that is within the boundaries of their township. Our concerns about the completion of the Hwy 12 expansion in the next year and the resulting population influx and development matched those of the Board and committee. It was agreed that we are all concerned about what it will mean for the future of our communities as well as eagle habitat.

West Point, like the Town of Roxbury, would like to maintain its rural character and protect its existing farmland. Clausen told the audience that would be very compatible with eagles' needs. "Farming and eagles get along just fine," she noted.

As a result of the presentation the Chairman of the Town Board, Fred Madison, requested maps showing just where the crucial land for eagles is located, and asked that it show the areas in order of priority for preservation. Clausen is preparing those and will deliver them to the West Point Town Hall.

The Habitat Committee is also working hard on another front. The Rox-Point-Prairie Eagle Wintering Ground team (John Keefe, Gene Unger and Juliana Clausen) are working with landowners and the DNR to broker another easement to safeguard eagle habitat on the land across the Wisconsin River from the villages.

As always, if you'd like to help us with the work of the habitat committee, please contact John Keefe at 643-3376 or Juliana Clausen at 795-4892.

# A Reciprocal Arrangement

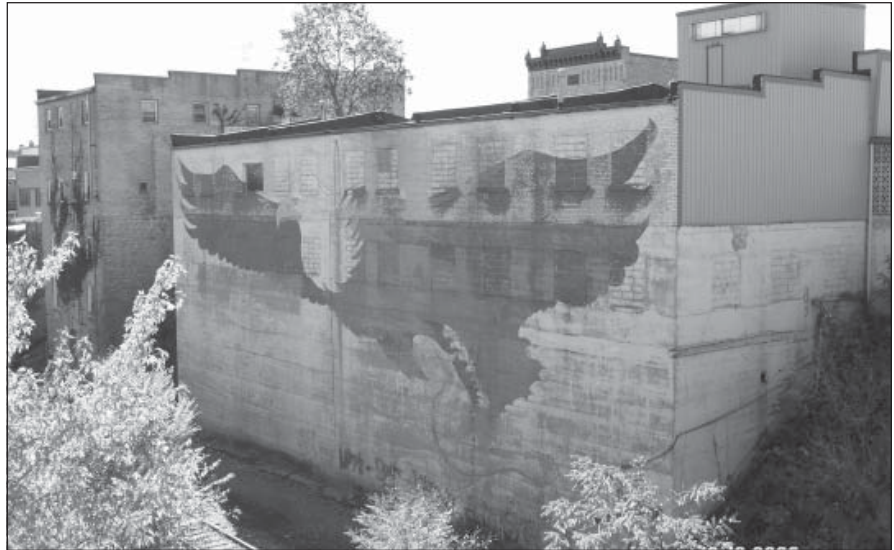
By Kristen A.L. Hall

What do eagles do for us, and what can we do for eagles? At the annual meeting of the Sauk Prairie Chamber of Commerce in January, over 100 people attended a presentation by Jeb Barzen and Kristin Hall on behalf of the Ferry Bluff Eagle Council that posed those two questions. For the past four years Barzen and Hall have headed the Ferry Bluff Eagle Council research team that has been monitoring Sauk Prairie's wintering eagle population.

Through radio tracking and roost count data we have inferred which resources eagles need in order to survive the winter, and through surveys of eagle watchers we have documented the economic impact of eagles on our community.

What can we do for eagles? The river acts as a main food source providing the eagles with ample fish, due to the Sauk Prairie dam keeping the river from freezing over. However, eagles not only require the river to be open but they also rely on undeveloped shoreline in order to successfully forage, undisturbed, at the rivers edge. In addition, eagles rely on agricultural fields as a supplemental food resource, and require isolated, undeveloped, forested bluffs for roosting habitat. Since ice forming on the river or snow cover in the fields may temporarily alter suitable habitat availability, eagles have to be adaptive in their requirements. This helps explain why we see the number of eagles in our area fluctuating from winter to winter.

Permanent changes in habitat



*Eagles can leave a powerful mark on the communities they call home.  
Photo by Kay Roherty.*

availability, such as shoreline and roosting area development, usually results in permanent habitat loss for eagles. The FBEC project has had great success thus far in balancing the interests of people who would like to see the Sauk Prairie area develop and thrive economically while still preserving eagle habitat. Fortunately eagles also play their own role in ensuring that Sauk Prairie thrives economically, just by doing the things eagles do in winter.

What is it that the eagles do for us? It turns out that preserving eagle habitat in the area is not only important for eagle ecology it is also important for the local economy. FBEC conducted an economic survey of eagle watchers in 1994 and another in 2004. The results from the 2004 survey indicate that eagles wintering in the Sauk Prairie area generated approximately \$1,144,000 - a substantial amount of money during what otherwise would be a slow tourist season. Comparing

this data with figures from the 1994 survey shows that eagle tourism has increased by \$200,000 real dollars (accounting for inflation) over the past 10 years. This increase is a positive sign that eagle viewing in our area will remain strong for years to come as long as eagles continue to use the area.

This combination of economic information along with understanding the ecological needs of wintering eagles results in a more comprehensive approach to eagle habitat preservation. The Ferry Bluff Eagle Council has been working with area planners and businesses in order to include eagle habitat protection into Sauk Prairie's future. Big changes are on the horizon and we have a chance to steer those changes in the direction that maintains Sauk Prairie's environmental integrity as well as fosters guided development in a growing region.

# Bald Eagle Watching Days

FBEC'S yearly celebration, Bald Eagle Watching Days 2005, was a huge success. Estimated attendance was 900 on Saturday and 500 on Sunday, down some from years past because of the bitter cold. This is the first year we received phone calls and emails asking if the event would be cancelled due to weather.

Yet it is this very weather - the clear, crisp, sunny days - that the eagles put to good use. The main act put on a marvelous show for all who were looking. The weather sent the birds soaring; and while looking at an eagle in the tree is inspiring, it is watching them on the wing that brings out the "WOWS".

Members of our community added variety and freshness to the event with new programs. Linda Bethke and Dr. Joe Kelley of Soaring Eagle gave a presentation about rehabilitating eagles while Lisa Hartmann's turkey vulture, Mr. Butsy, posed for artists to sketch him. Wendy Schneider of the Animal House had people scattered all over the floor building bird feeders as Bill Pielsticker shared his photography and techniques for getting great nature photos. Pat Manthey of the WI DNR, Bureau of Endangered Resources spoke about where eagles can be found in Wisconsin year-round and Sue Foote-Martin talked about the Great WI Birding and Nature Trail. Marge Gibson of the Raptor Education Group Inc shared her educational birds of prey and released 3 rehabilitated bald eagles back into the wild. We sincerely thank them all for their contribution to Eagle Days.



*Marge Gibson of the Raptor Education Group holds a rehabilitated adult eagle close shortly before the bird is released into the wild.  
Photo by Kurt Eakle.*

Although it may appear that this gathering is focused on visitors, it is truly for the community as well. Every year more and more of our local friends and neighbors attend the event to learn about our wintering bald eagles. Without the generous support of the Sauk Prairie community, Eagle Days could not be so successful. We gratefully acknowledge our sponsors for Eagle Days 2005 in the sidebar below. Our partners in producing this event are the Sauk Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce and the Wisconsin DNR Bureau of Endangered Resources.

## Eagle Days Sponsors 2005

Alliant Energy

Walter D. Smith, CPA

Village Family Dental Associates, S.C.

Consumer's Co-op Oil Company

Kayser Chrysler

Community Business Bank

The Window Sill

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Eagle Optics

Timm & Heather Zumm

Frank Family Foundation

Down Home Computing

Unity Health Insurance

John Keefe and Sandy Hayes

JenGraph

Leystra's Venture Restaurant

Sauk Prairie Small Animal Hospital

Sauk Prairie Kiwanis

River's Edge Mall / Ace Sauk Prairie

Rotary Club of Sauk Prairie

# A Great Leap Forward for FBEC

As this newsletter goes to press, Kristin Lucas Hall, our intrepid resident graduate student, is in the final stages of completing her M.S. degree. Kristin successfully defended her thesis in early June and has submitted her final draft to the graduate school for printing. FBEC will now turn our focus from gathering data to working with Kristin to publish the results of her graduate work in the appropriate journals so that the information gathered from our eagle tracking project is available to researchers anywhere. This collaboration for FBEC represents a major extension of our application of science on behalf of wintering eagles and it has been tremendously successful. Data that Kristin and FBEC volunteers have collected have already been used in several habitat assessment issues. There is likely much more to come. We thank you for your collective support of this project as much as we look forward to how we might do similar things in the future. Well done!



*Kristin Lucas Hall has put the finishing touches on her M.S. degree and will now be working with FBEC to make our tracking research more widely available for scientists. Photo by Kurt Eakle.*



*Dr. Joe Kelley and Bill Pielsticker entertaining an Eagle Days audience as part of the WEAGLE "radio show". Photo by Kurt Eakle.*

## Membership Matters

A fun and informative evening was had by all at our fall general meeting. Dr. Joe Kelley, local veterinarian, was our featured speaker and he provided us with interesting insights and humorous anecdotes related to his growing involvement with treating sick and injured eagles. Apart from eagles, during his normal work week Dr. Joe encounters a dizzying array of animals, reptiles and birds that he has managed to find creative and effective ways to care for. We very much appreciate the work that Dr. Kelley is doing and his collaboration with FBEC.

Our spring general meeting was held on May 13 at Park Hall. Brett Mandernack, preserve manager, gave a presentation about Eagle Valley, which is a privately owned nature preserve along the Mississippi, and the eagle related work that is being done there.

On Sunday, August 28, our annual summer membership gathering was held atop nearby Blackhawk Ridge. It was an opportunity to explore the upper part of this beautiful natural area without a long climb up the hill as this property is open to automobile traffic only for special occasions. After the brat, hamburger and potluck picnic, a short business meeting was held including the election of a secretary and other board members. The highlight of the afternoon was Kristin Hall's presentation on the wrap-up of our four year eagle tracking research project.

## Saturday Bus Tours Grow in Popularity

Ferry Bluff Eagle Council once again offered eagle watching bus tours throughout the season. At least 86 people joined our volunteer experts on the regular Saturday morning tours, and FBEC volunteers also served as guides for at least five additional groups that came to our area specifically to view eagles. Although the number of eagles spotted was generally down from past years, an increased number of participants enjoyed learning about the ecology of eagles in the area and touring the eagle viewing “hot spots” that they could then explore on their own. Thanks to all of our friends who volunteer to help visitors enjoy the eagles!

## “All About Eagles” Kit Also Popular

Two of FBEC’s “All About Eagles” education kits spent the winter on the road, being used by school groups, home schoolers, and a 4-H club. Our web site has been producing an increased demand for these kits, which contain videos, books, a puppet, a full-size eagle cutout, and other educational items related to eagles. If you know of a group who would like to borrow these materials please have them send us an e-mail at: [eagles@ferrybluffeaglecouncil.org](mailto:eagles@ferrybluffeaglecouncil.org) or call Barb Barzen at 544-2107.



*A member of the REGI staff holds a falcon at Eagle Days. Photo by Kurt Eakle.*

## Thank you, thank you, thank you...

to all of the volunteers for the many hours of service you gave to FBEC throughout the year. From doing roost counts and helping at Eagle Days to staffing the Overlook and everything in between, we appreciate all of your efforts. Though there is a decreased demand for volunteers during the summer months, we still have needs related to preparing mailings, serving on committees and helping with special projects and tasks. If you have already given us your contact information for volunteering we will connect with you as needs arise. If you wish to be put on our volunteer list, contact Jane Codero at 643-2864.

# Roost Count 2004-2005 Report

Our counting luck was troubled this year. On most of the counts that we conducted, visibility was hampered by fog, snow, or rain. Even so, the stalwart counters for FBEC were out in the precise abundance of 218 hours of volunteer effort and tallied a peak of 176 eagles (see table on back page). Our peak number of birds this year came early, in late December, and the numbers declined after that. Perhaps this was because it was both cold (bringing ice) and snowy (covering carrion) at first and then abnormally warm later on. Whatever the explanation, eagles did not gather in our area during the later part of winter as they have

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year coincided with the time when eagle numbers in our area dropped substantially. Though this temporary loss of habitat for our eagles had been substantial, they did not perish. The eagles simply moved out of the area to other winter habitats that were less affected by the severe weather. Past radio tracking data have confirmed that within a single winter season eagles caught and tagged in Sauk Prairie have traveled as far south as Davenport, IA and as far north as Eau Claire and Stevens Point. Late this past season, as the February thaw continued, radioed eagles did indeed begin returning here.

Tourists, visitors and residents of the Sauk Prairie area have come to expect and rely on the seasonal appearance of bald



*A view of Sugarloaf Roost from the overlook. Photo by Kurt Eakle.*

for the last few years. Thank you all for your efforts and I

look forward to better viewing conditions next year!


eagles. Occasionally, winter weather can alter habitat conditions enough to cause a substantial number of birds to move into or out of our area. When extreme winter weather is the problem, we know that a correction is not far off. Better weather usually returns and will bring back the eagles. But, when habitats are altered by unwise use of land such as development in the wrong place, we can surmise that the eagles will respond in the same way. They will leave when their habitats are no longer suitable. The difference is, however, that improper land use can alter eagle habitat forever and the birds will never return. The choice, and the responsibility, to co-exist with “our” eagles is fully our own.

## How FBEC Came to Be...

In March of 1988 a small group of people met to discuss the future of the eagles that were using Ferry Bluff as a night roost in winter. In July of that year the Ferry Bluff Eagle Sanctuary was incorporated. Its purpose, according to Rae Onstine, one of the founding members, was “to help manage the local roost and feeding areas, to provide viewing areas for the public where (eagles) can be observed and photographed without being disturbed, and to study the habits of the wintering birds as an aid to future management.”

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Ferry Bluff Eagle Council  
P.O. Box 532  
Sauk City, WI 53583



Summer 2005  
Bald Eagle Watching Days  
January 14 & 15, 2006

### FBEC Roost Count Summary

ROOST	Nov. 28, 2004				Dec. 12, 2004				Dec. 26, 2004				Jan. 9, 2005				Jan. 23, 2005				Feb. 6, 2005				Feb. 20, 2005			
	Ad	Im	Unk	Tot	Ad	Im	Unk	Tot	Ad	Im	Unk	Tot	Ad	Im	Unk	Tot	Ad	Im	Unk	Tot	Ad	Im	Unk	Tot	Ad	Im	Unk	Tot
Blackhawk				0				0	19	25	5	49	1		2	3	1	6		7				0	2	4		6
Sugarloaf	6	5		11				0	27	25		52	25	26	14	65	8	17		25	3	1	1	5	5	3		8
Isenring																												
Ferry Bluff	4		5	9				0	15	2	20	37				0	3		12	15				0				0
Thunderbird																												
Schroeder																												
Cassell																												
Fox				0	9		6	15			4	4				0		1		1	3			3				NC
McDonald				0				NC				NC				0				0				0				NC
Jones Slough				0	11	5		16				0				0	4	4	2	10			2	2	1			1
Lone Rock	8	5	24	37	9	6	22	37	5	1	12	18	10	6	2	18	3	4	1	8	7	1	3	11				0
Leland	1			1	2		3	5	7	2		9			1	1	12	8	7	27	4	4	1	9	5	2		7
Ederer/Been	1		1	2				?				?				0	5	4	2	11	1			1				NC
Big Hollow				0	2	1		3	2	3	2	7	5	6	3	14	4	7	1	12	1			1	2			2
Devil's Lake																												
Baxter's Hollow																												
<b>TOTAL</b>	20	10	30	60	33	12	31	76	75	58	43	176	41	38	22	101	40	51	25	116	19	6	7	32	15	9	0	24
Vol. Hours	30				28				28				38				42				28				24			

Grey Lines are for roosts not counted this year.