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Vermont Has Its First Successful Bald Eagle Nest

WATERBURY, VT- The long wait is over. For several years, Vermont was the only state in the “Lower 48” that had no nesting bald eagles within its borders. That changed in late April when a pair of bald eagles successfully hatched young in a nest they built last year on the Vermont side of the Connecticut River.

“This is part of one more very important wildlife success story for Vermont,” said Governor Jim Douglas. “Wild turkey and moose have been restored to healthy populations, and the osprey, common loon and peregrine falcon were taken off Vermont’s endangered species list just last year.”

“I want to thank the state fish and wildlife personnel who protect and manage Vermont’s fish and wildlife resources for the people of Vermont and the many state partners who contribute greatly to making these fish and wildlife success stories possible.”

Last spring a pair of eagles built a nest in the Connecticut River valley in southern Vermont, but no eggs were laid. Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department biologists and game wardens monitored the site and were hopeful the pair would return to try again this year.

“The eagles built a good nest in a large, side-slope pine overlooking the river,” said Forrest Hammond, a wildlife biologist with the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. “Its location makes it difficult to see what’s in the nest so we’ve been watching the eagles’ behavior to determine their reproductive status. Chris Martin, from New Hampshire Audubon, used a spotting scope to observe one of the eagles offering bites of food to one or two different locations within the nest. This behavior strongly suggests chicks are present.”

“We won’t risk disturbing the eagles to get a closer look into the nest, but we will continue to watch from a distance. We are not releasing information about the location of the nest and urge people to respect wildlife by staying well away from the nest in order to avoid scaring the eagles. The adults could abandon the young, or the young could jump from their nests if disturbed by people getting too close.”

Historic records of bald eagles in Vermont are scarce, but they were reported to have nested near Lake Bomoseen in the 1940s. Nine years ago a pair of bald eagles displayed territorial behavior at Somerset Reservoir, but no nest was found. In 2002, a pair of bald

eagles built a nest near the North Springfield Reservoir but failed to lay eggs. A great horned owl occupied the nest the following year. The eagles didn't return to the site. Eagles built a nest near this same site in 2005 but did not lay eggs. This spring a great horned owl again took over that eagle's nest.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the state, the Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative is gearing up for its third season of raising young eagles at the Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in Addison. Nineteen eagles were reared and released from this site in the Lake Champlain Valley in the past two years. More young eagles are due to arrive sometime in May.

“We were confident that eagles would eventually nest in Vermont and are thrilled that it finally happened,” said Fish & Wildlife Commissioner Wayne Laroche. “The Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative is part of our recovery efforts to remove the bald eagle from the state's endangered species list.”

The initiative is one of many conservation projects found in Vermont's new Wildlife Action Plan, a statewide all-species plan to conserve wildlife and vital wildlife habitat. Funding for ongoing eagle recovery will come from the state Wildlife Grants Program. To learn more, go to (http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com/SWG_HOME.cfm).

Efforts to restore bald eagles to other states have been extremely successful. The banning of DDT, an extensive reintroduction program, and protection of critical breeding and wintering habitat have contributed to the bald eagle's recovery nationwide.

“We hope Vermont's restoration initiative will speed up the establishment of breeding eagles in the Lake Champlain region,” explained Laroche. “We also hope to increase public awareness about endangered species and the role of top predators in aquatic habitats of Vermont.”

To learn more about the project and Vermont's eagles, visit the Vermont Bald Eagle Restoration Initiative website:www.cvps.com/eagles.