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BALD EAGLE COUNTS AT TWO CENTRAL NEBRASKA PUBLIC POWER AND
IRRIGATION DISTRICT FACILITIES

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Since 1988, the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (Central) has provided free access to the public at its Johnson #2 (J-2) Hydroelectric Plant south of Lexington, Dawson County, and the use of spotting scopes and binoculars to view Bald Eagles foraging and perching along the tailrace of the plant. Central also provided a small trailer from 1990-95 for viewing Bald Eagles near the outlet of the Kingsley Hydroelectric Plant at Lake Ogallala in Keith County. In 1996, Central completed construction of a permanent viewing facility at this location. Central provides personnel at both locations to answer questions and provide assistance with the viewing scopes. These individuals also conducted daily eagle surveys from these locations.

METHODS

Central personnel, using binoculars and/or spotting scopes, counted the number of Bald Eagles visible from each viewing site. Counts were made at 8:00 a.m. local time, noting age of the birds and weather conditions at the time of the counts.

RESULTS

The J-2 Plant was open to the public for 27 days from 21 December 1996 to 23 February 1997. A total of 2104 people registered for an average of 78/day, and 346 Bald Eagle sightings (12.8/day) were recorded. The new viewing facility at Kingsley Dam was open for 55 days from 13 December 1996 to 16 March 1997. Bald Eagle surveys were conducted on those days and ten additional days. A record 4127 people registered at the facility for an average of 75/day. A total of 4810 Bald Eagle sightings (74/day) were recorded.

Peak Bald Eagle counts were 24 on 26 December at the J-2 Plant, and 324 on 1 February at the Kingsley viewing facility. The average number of Bald Eagles counted in both locations was normal when compared to the previous six years of data (Table 1).

DISCUSSION

During the past seven years, over 40,000 people have registered to view Bald Eagles at the two facilities provided to the public by the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation

YEAR	J-2 PLANT	KINGSLEY
1990-91	11	21
1991-92	8	42
1992-93	4	87
1993-94	14	114
1994-95	11	17
1995-96	17	64
1996-97	13	74

District. During 1996-97, over 6000 people utilized the facilities for leisure or scientific observations of the eagles and other birds of interest.

By providing the 1200 square foot Kingsley Viewing Center with large picture windows overlooking Lake Ogallala and the Kingsley hydro discharge, in addition to the J-2 Power Plant viewing area with large windows overlooking the tailrace of the Plant, Central makes available to the public some of the best views of foraging eagles to be found anywhere in the Great Plains region of the United States. Central will open the facilities next season beginning in mid-December. Photography blinds may be reserved by contacting the Central office at Holdrege (308/995-8601) or the Kingsley office at 308/284-2332.