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BALD EAGLE COUNTS AT TWO FACILITIES OWNED AND OPERATED BY THE CENTRAL NEBRASKA PUBLIC POWER AND IRRIGATION DISTRICT
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INTRODUCTION:

Since 1988 the Central Nebraska Public Power and Irrigation District (Central) has provided, free to the public, a bald eagle viewing facility in its Johnson #2 Hydroelectric Plant south of Lexington, Dawson County, and since 1990 a facility near the outlet of the Kingsley Hydroelectric Plant at Lake Ogallala in Keith County.

Central provides binoculars and viewing scopes at both locations as well as personnel to answer questions and provide assistance. These individuals also conducted daily eagle surveys at the facilities.

METHODS:

Central personnel, using binoculars and/or spotting scopes, counted the number of eagles visible from the viewing site. Counts were made at 8:00 AM local time with age of the birds and weather conditions at the time of the count noted.

The number of people using the facilities was determined from registration books maintained at each site.

RESULTS:

The J-2 Powerhouse was open from 20 December 1997 to 22 February 1998, and the Kingsley Eagle Viewing building from 26 December 1997 to 1 March 1998.

At the J-2 Powerhouse, 2,025 people registered. Of that number, 1,333 were in attendance on the 22 regularly scheduled days (average of 61/day) and 692 registered on an additional 16 days as part of school groups.

The Kingsley viewing site was open 41 days (38 regularly scheduled days and three additional days for schools groups) with 2,033 people registering for an average attendance of 50 people per day.

Peak eagle counts from the facilities were 33 eagles on 13 January at J-2 and 117 on 27 January at Kingsley. The average daily count of 12 eagles from J-2 was slightly above the eight-year average of 11.1 per day. At Kingsley the average count 32 eagles per day was well below the 56 per day eight-year average. Table 1 shows the average number of eagles counted per day at both facilities for the past eight years.

Table 1: The average number of eagles counter per day from the J-2 Power Plant and the Kingsley Viewing Facility from 1991-1998

Year	J-2 Plant	Kingsley Center
1990-1991	11	21
1991-1992	8	42
1992-1993	4	87
1993-1994	13.6	114
1994-1995	11	17
1995-1996	16.5	64
1996-1997	13	74
1997-1998	12	32
Eight Year Daily Average	11.1	56.4

DISCUSSION:

While the number of eagles visible from the J-2 Plant on a given day was somewhat consistent with previous years, those visible from the Kingsley site were well below the average of previous years. This may be attributed to the mild weather, which resulted in Lake McConaughy remaining at least partially open and free of ice all season long.

The mild weather may have two effects on the concentrations of bald eagles near the viewing site. First may be the availability of other feeding areas during warmer weather and secondly the reduced winter stress on fish in Lake McConaughy which may have resulted in fewer fish traveling through the hydroelectric plant and thus becoming available as food below the plant.

Central will be opening the two facilities this year on December 19th. Photography blinds are available and may be reserved by contacting the Central office at Holdrege (308) 995-8601 or the Kingsley office at (308) 284-2332.