

## Web cam puts Sandpoint ospreys in spotlight

*New nest, live video will give peek into lives of popular raptors*

The much-loved, oft-observed ospreys of Sandpoint's Memorial Field have a brand new home, waiting for their finishing touches after they return to northern Idaho this month. But there's a bit of suspense: Will they, or won't they, move right in to their new nest?

Everyone can see how that question gets answered – thanks to a new web cam that is an eye in the sky above the ospreys' nest. The cam was installed as a collaborative project between the City of Sandpoint and Keokee Publishing, in partnership with Avista and Northland Communications. Biologists from Birds of Prey Northwest are consulting as well.

The new web cam provides real-time, live video of the osprey nest that is streamed onto a special section of Sandpoint Online, the community website produced by Keokee. You can peek into the nest right now at [www.sandpointonline.com/ospreys](http://www.sandpointonline.com/ospreys).

And whether the ospreys will adopt their new home is just one question the cam will answer. Assuming they do accept the new nest, the ospreys' entire nesting cycle -- nest building, egg-laying, hatching and fledging of chicks -- will be live on camera, all summer long. It promises to provide an engaging, real-time nature show.

The cam was installed last fall as part of the first in a series of major improvements planned for Memorial Field, the beautiful lakeside park and athletic fields that are home to Sandpoint football, baseball and soccer games and major events including The Festival at Sandpoint and Sandpoint High graduation.

The City of Sandpoint, with support from the Friends of Memorial Field, is in the first year of a \$1.375 million capital campaign for a series of upgrades at the field, including replacement of the field's aging grandstands. As the first part of the project, the city removed the field's old, decrepit lights and installed new light standards around the field. Two of the old light poles held osprey nests – built haphazardly, and dangerously, right atop the lights themselves – and in replacing those the city planned to erect a pair of nesting platforms just above the light arrays.

Staff at Keokee saw an opportunity: How about installing a web cam at the nest to let people to peek into the lives of the popular and fascinating fish hawks? Keokee's Chris Bessler broached the idea to Sandpoint Parks & Recreation Director Kim Woodruff – and Woodruff embraced it enthusiastically.

“Hey, everybody loves those birds,” said Woodruff. “With the light poles being replaced anyway, this was a one-time chance that was too cool to pass up.”

Bessler and Woodruff saw multiple goals. Most obviously was to promote osprey education and conservation, featuring birds that are already well known and loved. “I don't know how many times I've been on the field for different events and seen people pointing and admiring those osprey,” said Bessler. “I can remember a few times they've flown over with a fish in their talons, and the crowd has just spontaneously cheered. I think we're all fans.”

Additionally, the cam will help publicize – and hopefully, attract donors to – the Memorial Field upgrade project. “We hope people who hit that page will see how Memorial Field is such a huge part of what makes Sandpoint tick, and get the fever to contribute to the field renovation and especially the grandstand project,” said Woodruff.

As the nest cam idea began to pick up steam, Woodruff and Bessler passed it by another partner in the Memorial Field upgrades, Avista, and found more enthusiasm.

“The project fits with Avista’s goal of working with others to support our communities and protect the wildlife and natural resources in our area,” said Robin Bekkedahl, Avista’s senior environmental scientist. “Avista has ongoing programs in raptor protection, which include retrofitting our poles to support nesting raptors and adopting management practices that protect birds and other wildlife. This falls right into that commitment.”

Two more key partners quickly came on. At Northland Communications, Business Manager Bala Bishop was already a confirmed osprey fan. Northland was just installing new high-speed fiber optic Internet service throughout downtown Sandpoint, and with Bishop’s backing signed on to provide the Internet connection.

“We are proud to be a part of this great community and appreciate the opportunity to support local business and community projects when possible,” said Bishop. “It’s amazing how the power of the Internet can bring the osprey into the homes of people around the world.”

And at Birds of Prey Northwest, a raptor conservation and rehabilitation group based in St. Maries, biologist and executive director Jane Fink also gave the cam warm support and has agreed to act as a consulting biologist. Through a blog on the web page, Keokee staff will keep a log of activity on the nest and Fink will offer insights into the birds’ fascinating behavior and biology.

“Osprey are unique birds of prey,” she said, noting they are the only raptors that eat exclusively fish. Fink predicted osprey fans will be delighted by this chance to see all the complexities of nest building, breeding, and raising young ospreys.

Even with the partners lined up, installation of the cam was a team effort involving more than a dozen people. With Avista and Keokee providing funding for equipment and materials, city staff laid nearly 1000 feet of high-speed cable from the street to the cam, atop the new light standard on the southern side of the field. The cam is nearly 100 feet in the air on a specially built bracket above the nest platform. The nest itself is just a “starter” structure with sticks screwed down to convince the osprey it is a suitable home; it will be up to the osprey to build it out. It’s no sure thing – although Fink thinks they will. “Ospreys have high nest-site fidelity,” she noted.

Woodruff and Bessler gave kudos to all the help provided by city of Sandpoint parks staff; Ron Mende Electric staff; Thorco Electric; Ben Curto of Connect Technologies; Keokee’s Carlo Pati; Sean Fitzpatrick and CTA Architects; and birder Rich DelCarlo.

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## PHOTO CAPTIONS

DSC\_0043-OspreyCamInstallation.jpg

Thorco Electric crews place the new Memorial Field lights with osprey nesting platform and web cam above.

DSC\_0008-JaneDon.jpg

Biologist Jane Fink and Don Veltkamp of Birds of Prey Northwest examine the nesting platform atop the new light array before advising: Lose the hardware cloth. It posed a snagging hazard.

DSC\_0045\_Seau-Kim.jpg

City of Sandpoint Parks & Recreation Director Kim Woodruff, right, with architect Sean Fitzpatrick watch as crews set the new light standard, replacing the pole at right.

DSC\_0220RobinSean.jpg

Avista's Robin Bekkedahl and architect Sean Fitzpatrick examine the new light standard where the nesting platform will be attached.

DSC\_0167-Nest1.jpg

Ospreys' former nest on one of the recently removed light poles at Memorial Field.

OspreyNest04-09.jpg

Screen capture of Sandpoint ospreys web cam page.