



PRESS RELEASE

December 17, 2025

HARNEY COUNTY, Ore.

Community Partners Install New Osprey Nesting Platform at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge bring together Burns High School students and Harney County Electric Cooperative to support wildlife conservation and hands-on learning

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is home to a new osprey nesting platform, built by Burns High School students and installed by Harney County Electric Cooperative coordinated and funded by the Friends of Malheur. The project highlights the power of community partnerships in advancing wildlife conservation while providing meaningful, hands-on educational experiences for local youth.

The osprey platform was designed to provide a safe, elevated nesting site near the Donner und Blitzen River where a pair nests annually for the breeding season. In 2025, the pair lost two chicks after a wind event blew their nest off from where their nest sat on the insufficient support of an abandoned utility pole. Purpose-built platforms like this one help support successful nesting while reducing the likelihood of birds nesting on active power poles or other unsafe structures.

Students who constructed the platform were on-site to watch it installed, celebrating the culmination of weeks of planning, teamwork, and craftsmanship.

Student Voices

Burns High School student Triston DeCroo said the installation reflected the effort put into the project, noting that *“everyone worked really hard to make the platform.”*

For Kenneth Starbuck, seeing the platform raised into place was a moment of pride. He shared that he was *“pretty happy to see the project getting done,”* adding that the students *“worked hard to build it and now it’s going up.”*

Beyond construction skills, students also gained insight into wildlife behavior. Kaleb DeCroo explained that he learned about osprey nesting habits and how platforms like this one *“give them a start—a place to build a nest and a home.”*

The experience created a lasting connection to the Refuge as well. When asked if he planned to return to see whether ospreys use the platform, Noah Starbuck responded simply: *“yes.”*

Partner Recognition

The installation was made possible through collaboration with Harney County Electric Cooperative, whose expertise ensured the platform was safely and effectively placed. The project reflects a shared commitment to protecting wildlife while strengthening connections between the Refuge and the local community.



Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

"This project is a powerful example of how conservation, education, and community partnership come together at Malheur," said Janelle Wicks, Director of Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. "It fully embodies our mission in supporting wildlife while inspiring the next generation of conservation stewards."

Wicks added, "Thanks to the generosity of our supporters we are looking forward now to phase two of this project when we will install a solar powered camera to live stream the nesting activities of this osprey pair."

The Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Refuge through education, community engagement, habitat restoration, and volunteer involvement. The Friends work in partnership with Refuge staff and local communities to ensure Malheur remains a place of ecological health, learning, and shared stewardship.

Community members are encouraged to visit Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in the coming seasons and keep an eye out for osprey who will return and make the new platform their home.

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All photos by Ian Snyder, Friends Volunteer



FULL ARTICLE

Osprey Platform Installed on Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

Written by Janelle Wicks, Friends Director

Photos by Ian Snyder, Friends Volunteer



Tuesday, December 16th, Malheur National Wildlife Refuge celebrated a meaningful conservation milestone with the successful installation of a new osprey nesting platform. This project was coordinated by Friends of Malheur Director, Janelle Wicks, who brought together local students, community partners, and Refuge staff in support of wildlife through hands-on learning.

The nesting platform replaced an insufficient nesting apparatus that was in fact simply the remains of abandoned utility infrastructure on a pole that had previously experienced an electrical fire. In preparation for the new platform Refuge Maintenance employee Zackary McCoy straightened the pole and secured it with over 1,000 pounds of concrete.

While Zackary was preparing the site, students at Burns High School led by instructor Shawn Horrell utilized construction plans provided by Idaho Power to build the nesting platform. After building the platform, Shawn secured a mini-bus and drove his students to the project site to deliver it and give the youth an opportunity to see their hard work quite literally lifted into place. As the structure rose, students reflected on the teamwork and effort that made the project possible. Burns High School student Triston DeCroo shared, *'everyone involved worked really hard to make the platform.'* This sentiment was echoed throughout the group.

It was Harney County Electric Cooperative (HCEC), who did the heavy lifting of safely putting the platform in place using two bucket trucks. The crew carefully removed old debris and cut off the top of the pole damaged by the electrical fire before finally putting the structure in place.

As student Kenneth Starbuck noted, he was *'pretty happy to see the project getting done,'* adding that the students *'worked hard to build it and now it's finally going up.'*

Ospreys are migratory raptors that rely on elevated nesting sites near water, and platforms like this one play an important role in supporting successful breeding while promoting coexistence between wildlife and human infrastructure. Kaleb DeCroo explained that through the process he learned a great deal about the birds, particularly how they build their nests. By providing a sturdy platform, he said, *this gives ospreys a start—a place to build a nest and a home.*



FRIENDS OF MALHEUR

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Perhaps most meaningful
this project has created
the Refuge. When asked if he would return to see whether ospreys use the platform, Noah Starbuck
answered simply and enthusiastically: *yes*.

is the lasting connection
between local youth and

This installation reflects the Refuge's commitment to habitat stewardship while also investing in education and community engagement.

The Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge extend sincere thanks to Shawn Horrell and his Woods 2 Class for their dedication and craftsmanship, and to Harney County Electric Cooperative for their expertise and support in installing the platform. We also want to shine a light on the consultation and guidance provided by the Eastern Oregon Osprey Center and Idaho Power. Projects like this demonstrate what is possible when community partners come together to support wildlife and inspire the next generation of conservation stewards.

We look forward to welcoming back the osprey pair who nest at this site year after year this spring. And we hope many of the students who helped build this platform and their families will return to see the results of their work.