



News Release

Ferruginous hawk nesting platform installed on local conservation site

LETHBRIDGE, AB (September 26, 2018) - The Nature Conservancy of Canada and FortisAlberta are teaming up to help a provincially endangered bird, the ferruginous hawk.

On September 26, the two organizations will install an artificial nest pole on NCC's Johnson property, a conservation site located in the Milk River Ridge.

The ferruginous hawk is a species that has experienced a dramatic population decline. Although this species lives across the Great Plains of North America, the majority of their Canadian range is located in Southern Alberta.

A population survey found that the number of birds in Alberta had declined by more than 50 per cent between 1992 and 2010.

Ferruginous hawks live in the arid grasslands and are only one of two species of birds of prey that use grasslands as their main habitat; the other is the burrowing owl.

One of the main reasons for their decline is the loss of nesting habitat. Ferruginous hawks return to the same nesting area year after year and they are very picky about where they live. A breeding pair may have multiple nests in one area, but will select a single nest to use each year.

These birds are very sensitive to human disturbance so they prefer not to nest close to gravel roads, power lines, development, or farmlands. Their main source of food is ground squirrels, which make up nearly 90 per cent of their diet, so they need a nest with lots of access to prey. They are also very territorial, and suitable sites should be half a mile or more from neighbouring birds.

In Alberta, ferruginous hawk nests are usually built either in low trees, on the ground, or on badlands cliffs.

Artificial nest poles help this species by increasing the number of nesting sites. The location of these poles are critical and must be installed only where natural nest sites have historically occurred.

Since the 1980s, private landowners, conservation groups, and industry have erected artificial platforms to help these birds of prey.

The post that will be used in NCC's project is a recycled power pole supplied by FortisAlberta. A team of FortisAlberta employees will be on site to provide the manpower needed for this installation.

The nesting platform was donated by the Alberta Conservation Association, and the nest itself was built by local youths during the Southern Alberta Youth Range Days.



The Johnson property is 640 acres (259 hectares) and is surrounded by the provincially designated Ross Lake Natural Area Grazing Reserve. This grazing reserve contains the largest Crown-own area of foothills fescue grassland in Alberta and contains a number of rare plants and animals.

The majority of the Johnson property features rough fescue prairie, which provides important habitat for a variety of wildlife species including several provincially listed or priority management species within the Milk River Basin.

The Sandstone Ranch is another NCC conservation site that borders the Johnson property and provides critical habitat for many birds of prey.

About

The **Nature Conservancy of Canada** (NCC) is the nation's leading private, not-for-profit, private land conservation organization, working to protect our most important natural areas and the species they sustain. Since 1962, NCC has helped protect 2.8 million acres (more than 1.1 million hectares), coast to coast.

As owner and operator of more than 60 per cent of Alberta's total electricity distribution network, **FortisAlberta's** focus is delivering safe and reliable electricity to more than half a million residential, farm and business customers. The Company serves more than 200 communities with 123,000 kilometres of distribution power lines across Alberta.

High quality photos are available for your use [here](#) (photo credit to Leta Pezderic).

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