

Wednesday, 02 July 2008 Colville Statesman Examiner

## Peregrine Falcons in North Pend Oreille County

### **First documented nesting In Northeast Washington**

METALINE FALLS--Metaline Falls' newest residents are a pair of peregrine falcons. The birds have chosen to nest on a cozy ledge in the face of Washington Rock, a tall rock feature located on the Pend Oreille River. Historically, peregrines were likely present in northeast Washington, but nesting has not been documented in Pend Oreille County until now.

Local birder Jack Morton is credited with discovering and photographing the falcons this year. Greg Green and Jessica Piasecke, contractors with Seattle City Light, were the first to find the active nest.

Peregrine falcons have a 3 ½ foot wingspan and a body length of 15 – 20 inches. The male bird is referred to as a tiercel and the female is a falcon. They are found on every continent except Antarctica. Peregrines chiefly hunt birds such as pigeons, starlings, shorebirds and waterfowl. Prey is usually captured in the air after fast pursuit or a steep dive. The Pend Oreille River and surrounding forest in the vicinity of Washington Rock provide a wide variety of prey species.

Peregrine nests are typically located on ledges of rocky cliffs near rivers or seacoasts. The birds also select tall buildings and bridges to nest on, including a bridge in Spokane. They do not build nests, but scrape a small depression in the soil or gravel. Peregrines lay 3-4 eggs, which they incubate for about five weeks. Young falcons fledge five to six weeks after hatching.

Peregrines and bald eagles were once listed as endangered species in the United States, due to the widespread use of pesticides like DDT. These chemicals caused the raptors to lay thin-shelled eggs, which would often crack before hatching; killing the developing embryo inside. Since the banning of DDT use in the United States, peregrine and bald eagle populations have rebounded.

The Peregrine Fund, a private, nonprofit conservation group headquartered in Boise, Idaho, was instrumental in the recovery of the falcons. This group released over 4,000 captive-reared birds into the wild over a 25-year period.

“Descendents of these birds have spread far and wide, commented Colville National Forest Biologist, Mike Borysewicz. “One pair discovered a suitable site on Washington Rock to hopefully raise a family.”