

Shooting of Piscivorous Birds at the Miles City Hatchery
Deb Regele

In late summer 2020, Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society (YVAS) learned that the MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) Hatchery in Miles City had been applying for and receiving Federal Migratory Bird Depredation Permits to shoot Ospreys and other piscivorous birds. From 2018 to 2020, 8 Ospreys, 105 Canada Geese, 26 Great Blue Herons, and 16 Double-Crested Cormorants have been shot.

The Miles City Hatchery's 2021 Depredation Permit Application requests authority to shoot up to 4 Ospreys, 15 Double-crested Cormorants, 15 Great Blue Herons, 50 Canada Geese, and new this year, 5 Belted Kingfishers. The US Fish Wildlife Service (USFWS) regulates (issues or denies) the Depredation Permits.

According to MFWP, Ospreys were eating too many of the hatchery fish, specifically largemouth bass, which are an introduced species in Montana. YVAS was told that the number of bass taken by Ospreys was an unacceptable operational and financial loss for the hatchery. The hatchery shot two Ospreys in 2018, five in 2019, and one in 2020.

Miles City is the eastern extent of breeding Ospreys on the Yellowstone River. Data submitted by the Miles City nest monitors shows that the number of fledglings from known nests within a 20-mile radius has declined drastically over the last three years. In fact, no fledglings were produced in 2018, 2019, and 2020. This decline did not go unnoticed by the local Osprey nest monitors, who began expressing concerns through their posts to the Osprey Google Group in 2019. YVAS learned in August 2020 that Montana-Dakota Utilities reluctantly removed the nesting platforms adjacent to the hatchery at the request of MFWP.

The killing of native wildlife to support an introduced fishery in Montana goes against YVAS philosophy, sound science, and management for good ecological integrity. This deadly bird management and permitting situation at the Miles City Hatchery is upsetting, inappropriate, and unacceptable to many of us.

YVAS and National Audubon Society representatives are in discussions with USFWS and MFWP to find alternative non-lethal solutions to this conflict although there have been no significant cooperation or results from the agencies s

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Over 1,000 people signed Yellowstone Valley Audubon Society/National Audubon Society's Petition in June 2021 to stop the shooting of native birds at the expense of nonnative fish species at the Miles City Hatchery. More progressive and nonlethal solutions are available. They need to be studied and implemented.