



**OMINECA – PEACE REGIONAL HABITAT  
GUIDELINES: PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW UPON  
ENCOUNTERING AN INTERIOR NORTHERN  
GOSHAWK NEST**

**SCOPE OF DOCUMENT**

**These guidelines apply to any (interior) Northern Goshawk nest encountered anywhere within the Prince George Forest Region**

**PREAMBLE**

Northern goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis atricapillus*) are a forest-dwelling raptor capable of taking prey the size of red squirrels or grouse, and are exquisitely adapted to hunt from the cover of the forest and manoeuvre swiftly through mature forest habitat. They are tenacious and aggressive, but rather secretive, and are often found only when their nesting territory is inadvertently stumbled upon by a forester laying out a block or road, or during active falling. Goshawks in the interior of the province are a species of management concern, directly affected by forest practices, and currently listed as Identified Wildlife under the Forest Practices Code. Depending on the stage of forest development at which a goshawk nest is discovered, different strategies may be employed to secure the nesting habitat of the birds.

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## BIRD IDENTIFICATION

Adult goshawks (see below, left) are a large bird (up to 61 cm. total length for females, 55 for males, females weighing up to 1.36 kg.) with long, broad wings and a long, rounded tail. The upper parts of the adult are brown-grey to slate grey. The head features a black cap and a prominent white “eyebrow” line. The underparts are light grey with fine, wavy gray horizontal markings, and fine black vertical streaks. The tail is dark gray above with conspicuous broad, dark bands; the tip may or may not have a thin white terminal band. The undertail covert (covering) feathers are pure white and fluffy. Females tend to be browner above than males. Feet, legs, toes and cere (base of bill) are yellow, and the eye is red.



Adult



Juvenile

Immature goshawks (see above, right) appear brownish on the back, buffy beneath, with large teardrop shaped markings on the breast, and a prominent white “eyebrow” line. The tail has wavy, dark bands bordered with white, and a thin white tip.

The adult’s basic call, particularly when alarmed, is a loud, strident and oft-repeated “kak, kak, kak” (as contrasted with similar-sized red-tailed hawks, which give a sort of raspy, descending “scream”. Redtails (below) occupy somewhat similar, albeit more open, habitats, and are often mistaken for goshawks).

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Red-Tailed Hawk



Red-Tailed Hawk

Juvenile goshawks later in summer give a monotonous, repetitive, high-pitched begging call, which can often lead you to the vicinity of their nest (near the center of their post-fledging territory). As mentioned above, goshawks are one of our most aggressive hawks, and can sometimes be separated from more placid (if noisy) species such as red-tailed hawks, on the basis of their behavior alone. They have been known to attack intruding humans on foot or on horseback, generally going for the highest spot, i.e., the head.

## **NEST IDENTIFICATION**

Goshawks tend to build their somewhat loose stick nests (up to a meter in diameter) fairly far down from the crown of a tree, as opposed to redtails, who tend to build higher up and approach the nest from the top. Goshawks typically fly in the space beneath the canopy and above the regeneration and shrub layers to access their nests from the side. They also tend to build more in the middle of a stand of trees, rather than on the edge of an opening of some sort with a commanding view, as redtails do. Conifers and deciduous trees are used as nest trees. They will often utilize a patch of aspen in the middle of a mature conifer stand (or more uncommonly an older pine or spruce itself, if it displays the appropriate structure), and generally pick the largest tree in the stand, particularly if its branching structure is conducive to supporting a large stick nest.

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Goshawk nest, Shilsky Lake, Y.T., 1977



Goshawk nest, Lumpy Lake, PG FD, 1999

Other nests could possibly be mistaken for goshawks, but tend to lack the interior, mature forest, mid-canopy attributes of goshawks. Bald eagle nests (below left) tend to be MUCH larger structures, built in a significant branching crotch structure near the top of a VERY large cottonwood, aspen or Douglas fir tree, almost always overlooking and in close proximity to a large body of water. Osprey nests (below right) are very distinctive, in that they are INVARIABLY perched at the very top of a large, usually dead tree (or on an artificial platform, or hydro tower), with no or almost no cover around or above the nest. They tend to be built a little “tighter” than bald eagle nests, being more compact and exhibiting fewer loose, large sticks. These are highly visible nests, often situated on a commanding hillside, usually, but not always, adjacent to a body of water offering fishing opportunities. Osprey nests are not as closely tied to water as bald eagles, however, and can be found several kilometers uphill from the nearest fishing waters.

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Bald Eagle nest, FSJames FD, 1996



Osprey nest, Fraser Lake, 1997

Raven nests, when built in a tree, tend to be looser twig structures, often in a less dominant tree, in a more open situation than goshawks, and nearer the crown of the tree, though with some cover above.

Like other raptors, goshawks on territory will often have built multiple nests over the years, any one of which may be refurbished to use in a given nest year. Alternate nests may be visible from the active nest, or could be several hundred meters or more distant. On encountering one nest, it is important to scout out the stand, especially similar adjacent timber types, for other nests.

## **FOREST PRACTICES CODE PROVISIONS**

Goshawk nests are not as yet a designated “wildlife habitat feature”, and therefore a “resource feature” under the Code, in all districts. However, Section 41 (1) (b) of the code states:

The district manager must approve an operational plan or amendment submitted under this Part if

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- (a) the plan or amendment was prepared and submitted in accordance with this Act, the regulations and the standards, and
- (b) the district manager is satisfied that the plan or amendment will **adequately manage and conserve the forest resources (includes wildlife - DJW) of the area to which it applies.**

## **FPC Provisions in Forest Districts in which goshawk nests have been designated “resource features” under the FPC (truncated to emphasize only those sections pertinent to goshawks):**

**“Resource feature” means a resource feature as defined in Section 51(1) of the Act and includes the following features:**

### **(a) Wildlife habitat features**

**"wildlife habitat feature"** means

- (a) a significant mineral lick or wallow,
- (b) an active nest of a bald eagle, osprey or great blue heron, or
- (c) **any other localized feature agreed to by the district manager and a designated environment official;**

**"known"** means, when used to describe a feature, objective or other thing referred to in this regulation as "known", a feature, objective or other thing that is

- (a) contained in a higher level plan, or
- (b) otherwise made available by the district manager or designated environment official at least 4 months before the operational plan is submitted for approval;

### **Best information available**

Subject to any requirement to use known information, a person required to prepare an operational plan must, when preparing the plan, use the most comprehensive and accurate information available to the person.

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## **FPC Section 51(2):**

If a person carrying out a forest practice, other than fire control or suppression, finds a resource feature that was not identified on an approved operational plan or permit, the person carrying out the forest practice must

- (a) modify or stop any forest practice that is in the immediate vicinity of the previously unidentified resource feature to the extent necessary to refrain from threatening it, and
- (b) promptly advise the district manager of the existence and location of the resource feature.

## **Part 5 — Silviculture Prescriptions**

### **Division 1 — Scope and Content**

#### **Information that must be available before a silviculture prescription may be approved:**

(4) A person must ensure, for the area under a silviculture prescription and the area adjacent to that area, that the prescription describes or contains all of the following:

- (a) a map that illustrates the following items:
  - (vi) known resource features, other than domestic water supply intakes;

#### **Content of stand management prescriptions**

**50** (1) A person preparing a stand management prescription must ensure that the prescription meets the requirements of this section.

(2) A stand management prescription must

- (a) specify the objectives proposed for each standards unit,
- (b) contain a map illustrating
  - (ii) for the area under and adjacent to the prescription, the following items:
    - (F) known resource features, other than domestic water supply intakes;

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## **Information respecting a range use plan — general**

**52.1** The district manager must give, to a person preparing a range use plan, a map that contains the following information:

- (e) known resource features or sensitive areas, if the district manager determines that there is a significant potential for the grazing, hay cutting or related activity to negatively affect the resource features or sensitive areas under the plan;

## **PROCEDURES**

### **I. If the nest is encountered during block/road layout, before SP / Category A cutblock or road approval:**

- If possible, flag the nest tree and take a GPS fix on it, or indicate its location as accurately as possible on a large scale map, and describe how to get to it.
- Do not stay in the vicinity (<300m) of an active nest (bird seen on nest or bird repeatedly calling and/or attacking for more than 10 min. Prolonged disturbance will cause nest failure through hypothermia and subsequent death of the young and/or desertion of the nest by the adults.
- If you have a camera, take pictures of the nest and its surroundings, and the bird if possible (remember, goshawks can be dangerous when they have eggs or young in the nest, so stay alert!)
- If there are feathers shed underneath the nest tree, collect them and bring them to Ministry of Water, Land & Air Protection (WLAP) staff in the district or regional office for identification
- Remains of prey items, or cast pellets containing bones and fur, may also be collected for examination by WLAP staff
- Look for the presence of “whitewash” (droppings ejected over the edge of the nest) on vegetation below the nest, which is a strong indicator of occupancy, as are prey remains
- If the bird calls, make a mental note of the sound and its intensity, and take note of its behavior towards you
- As soon as practicable (within 48 hours) after leaving the bush, notify the Forest Ecosystem Specialist or other Habitat Protection (WLAP) staff at the Forest District in which the nest is located, OR the Rare and Endangered Species Specialist (RES) in the Regional WLAP office (250-565-6135).



## **GENERAL PROTECTIVE MEASURES TO BE INSTITUTED AROUND AN GOSHAWK NEST IN SP PLANNING (I.E., BEFORE THE SP IS APPROVED):**

- Incorporate the nest tree at the center of a wildlife tree patch (WTP); the WTP must be a **minimum** of 12 hectares in size (roughly a 200 meter radius around the nest tree); preferably up to 36 hectares (a radius of roughly 338 meters around the nest), and incorporate as much suitable habitat (i.e., large trees with an open understory, a closed canopy (50% or greater), and low ground vegetation) as possible. Wherever possible, abut the WTP with a larger contiguous area of intact mature forest.
- Conduct a search of the stand for alternate nests, and where found, ensure that they also are incorporated into the WTP
- Consider opportunities to incorporate protected areas, ecological reserves, riparian reserves, parks, ungulate winter range, economically inaccessible areas, and environmentally sensitive areas that may have been netted out of the productive forest landbase. It is also important to consider potential disturbance due to road construction and logging activities, and design boundaries to minimize the effects of disturbance, or select WTPs that, to the greatest extent possible, avoid essential access routes.
- Do not construct roads within nest areas (the 12 ha + WTP as described in the first bullet) unless the district manager is satisfied there is no other practicable option and the road is approved by him/her. Do not harvest or salvage within nest areas, except for treatments aimed at maintaining or improving stand structure for nesting (i.e., understory thinning to maintain or promote desired stand structure: single storied, crown closure  $\geq 50\%$ , and uniform trees  $\geq 60$  cm dbh). If these practices are planned, avoid the breeding period (February 15-August 15).
- No logging or salvage should occur within a WTP set aside for nesting goshawks unless approved by the district manager.
- No blasting **or burning** should occur within 500 m of an active nest during the courtship, nest establishment and juvenile nest occupancy period (i.e., February 15-June 30), and within 300 m. of an active nest between July 1 and August 15. Actual times may vary by site and year. Consult WLAP staff for site-specific times or variances.
- No road construction or modification should occur within 300 m of an active nest from February 15 to August 15. No prolonged (i.e.,  $>3$  days) hauling on existing roads should occur within 300 m of an active nest between February 15 and August 15 unless approved by the district manager.
- No silviculture treatments should be conducted between February 15 and June 30 within 300 m of an active nest unless approved by the district manager.
- **Activity restrictions are removed after June 30 for inactive or unsuccessful nests.**

## II. After the SP is approved (Category A cutblock):

- Consider amending the SP to incorporate the nest tree into a WTP, as outlined in the General Protective Measures above.
- If incorporation into a WTP is not an option at this stage (and a **written rationale** as to why this option was not a consideration is required), consider other timing options, e.g., winter logging, commencement of harvesting at farthest distance from nest, or as late in summer as possible, i.e., concentrate efforts on other blocks in area, or distant sections of nesting block, in order to give the birds time to raise young to a good size, and firmly establish nest site fidelity.
- The Wildlife Act protects the nest tree itself when occupied by a nesting bird; make all possible efforts to re-align cutting boundaries so as to keep harvesting activity and road locations a minimum distance of 100 meters from the nest tree. It's worth noting that an apparently unoccupied nest in good condition may in fact BE occupied, but temporarily uninhabited, or may be used in future years if not the current one. In order to firmly ascertain use by goshawks, it may be necessary to establish a reserve around the nest during a non-nesting period, and re-examine the nest and stand the following spring. *As noted above, goshawks may use one of several nests within their home range in any given year.* Goshawks are most vulnerable to disturbance early in the courtship / nest establishment period, which can begin as early as mid-February at our latitudes. Once they have laid eggs, and especially once they have hatched young in the nest, they are more inclined to tolerate occasional disturbance without abandoning their nest.

## III. While harvesting is underway (nest discovered in the course of active logging):

- **Immediately** cease operations within 300m of the nest, if birds are seen or heard in its vicinity, and notify WLAP staff at the district/regional office, or the RES at the regional office
- Leave the nest tree intact, and as much contiguous old seral habitat in its immediate vicinity as is possible
- For all nests where birds are NOT seen or heard pull back from the vicinity of the nest, to a minimum distance of 1 ½ tree lengths, to minimize disturbance to the birds. The birds may be present, or may have been present, but not obvious, depending on a number of factors such as time of year and weather; assume that they ARE or WILL BE present, particularly if the nest appears to be in good repair. An assessment by WLAP staff may be required to determine whether the nest is a relatively recent one, or old and long abandoned. Firm evidence of use may have to wait until the following year's

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breeding season. The time period of nest area establishment and occupancy is from February 15 to August 15.

- Negotiate with WLAP a compromise solution that offers the most protection for the nest without jeopardizing the major portion of the harvesting operation

## **WILDLIFE HABITAT AREAS FOR GOSHAWKS**

In watersheds which have been relatively heavily harvested, where only a small proportion of the forest cover is in an older seral stage, and where goshawks have shown themselves to be strongly tied to the area by virtue of repeated breeding from year to year, consideration may be given to the formal establishment of a 240 hectare Wildlife Habitat Area for goshawks. On a landscape that has been relatively lightly impacted, in which a large proportion of the area remains apparently suitable goshawk habitat, smaller 36 hectare nest area WHAs may be established, centered around that year's active nest. These smaller areas have been demonstrated to be adequate to the needs of a goshawk pair and their brood for that given breeding year. The WHA route represents a much more complex and difficult approach towards conservation of nesting habitat, and obviously represents a considerably greater impact on timber availability. However, this procedure remains an option to be selected or rejected by the RES and Habitat staff at each nest site.