

Bald Eagles of Fort Riley

Primary habitat for bald eagles on Fort Riley exists in the riverine woodlands that border the Kansas, Republican, and Smoky Hill rivers, as well as the shorelines of Milford Lake which have large trees. The number of year-round resident eagles continues to increase as the number of nesting pairs increase in the area. During the winter months large numbers of migratory eagles may be observed feeding along the rivers and lakes. These wintering birds will concentrate their overnight stays in communal roost locations. The number of wintering eagles will decrease with increased ice cover and limited food sources.

Fort Riley Winter Communal Roosts

Three communal roost sites have been identified on Fort Riley; two along the Kansas River, and the other located along Madison Creek upstream from Milford Lake. The number of eagles using the roosts varies nightly. The highest documented count occurred in 1999, when 388 bald eagles were counted along the Kansas River roost. The highest number of eagles counted at the Madison Creek roost was 253. Roosting bald eagles are generally expected to be in the Fort Riley area from October 15 to March 31, with the highest numbers typically in January. Eagles generally have returned to the same roosting areas on Fort Riley (1993-2009). The primary river roost has suffered a loss of trees due to high water events, straight line winds, ice storms, and a tornado. As a result, roosting eagles have moved approximately 200 m downstream. In 2004, a nesting pair of eagles established their territory in the Madison Creek Area. Once the nest was established, this area was no longer used as a communal roost. In 2010, a nesting pair of eagles established their territory near the Main Post communal roost site along the Kansas River. The roost location has seen some minor impacts from the nest, but the nesting pair appears to be somewhat tolerant of other wintering eagles until nesting activities begin.

Fort Riley Eagle Nests

Three bald eagle nesting pairs are known to occur on or near Fort Riley. The first pair established in the Madison Creek Area. This area has had nesting eagles each year since 2004. Eaglets have fledged from this nest six times (2006, 2008 through 2012). Three nests have been constructed in this area.

A second pair of nesting bald eagles established along Farnum Creek upstream from Milford Lake in 2005, immediately west of the installation's boundary on Milford USACE land. Eaglets were fledged from this nest four times (2009-2012).

A third pair of adult eagles was present along the rivers throughout the summer of 2009. A nest was discovered during the Fall of 2009 near the main post communal roost site. In 2010 two eaglets hatched but did not survive after a wind storm destroyed the nest. Two months later the eagle pair built a new nest in a Sycamore tree on the river's edge. Eaglets were fledged from this nest in 2011 and 2012. In the Fall of 2012 the pair built a new nest on the south side of the Main Post Cemetery.

There are two other bald eagle nests in the Milford Lake area along the Republican River. One nest is north of Milford Lake on the State Wildlife Area and the other is below the Milford Lake Dam.