

Boise River Raptors



Historically, bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nested in the spring and roosted and hunted in the winter along the Boise River. Due to DDT poisoning, by the 1960s America's national bird had nearly disappeared in the lower 48 states. Since DDT was banned eagles, osprey and other large raptors grace our skies once again. Local policies like the Boise River Ordinance's recommended setback lines for eagle perching sites, have contributed enormously to the comeback of the bald eagle.

Bald eagles are in our area primarily during the winter (December—February) but in recent years a few pairs have nested in the Boise area during the summer. Bald eagles are often seen roosting in large trees or soaring over the river in search of food—typically carrion, incapacitated fish and ducks. The best places to see them along the Greenbelt during the winter are between Barber Park and Lucky Peak Dam, and west of the Fairview Bridge.

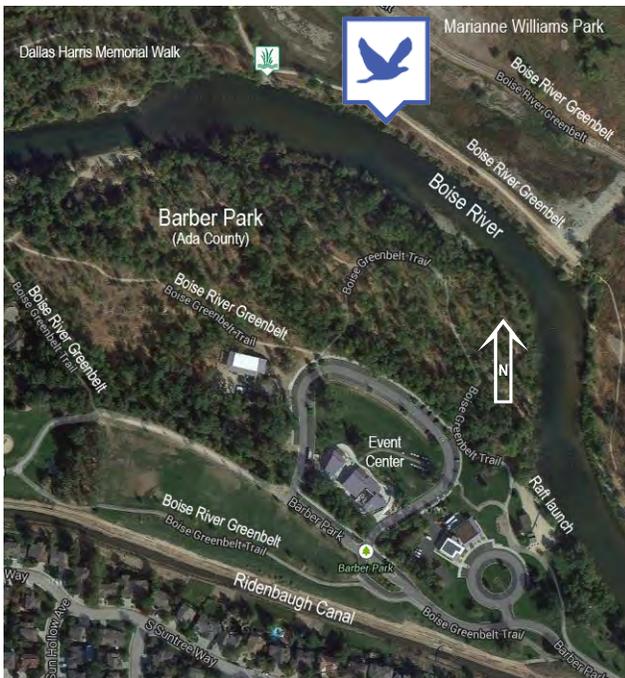
Adult bald eagles are easily identifiable by their white head and tail, but juveniles tend to be dark all over or have a head and tail that are transitioning from brown to white. Many people confuse bald eagles with osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), which are smaller, mostly white on the underside, and seen here from spring to fall—the breeding season. Golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*), which can be confused with immature bald eagles, are in our area year-round but are not as common along rivers because they feed primarily on small mammals in open areas.



Adult bald eagle (above) with its “trademark” white head and tail, and juvenile bald eagle (below)—mostly brown with irregular white patches. Photos: Kim Taylor.



An osprey (above) is mostly white on the underside and smaller than than an eagle. Distinctive dark marks include a stripe through its eyes, and a dark pattern on its wings that forms an “M.” Photo: Jane Rohling



This mature golden eagle's head shows the feathers for which it's named. Photo: National Park Service