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# MACKINAC BRIDGE AUTHORITY

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2016**

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## **Rescued bald eagle to launch his reintroduction from the Mackinac Bridge**

**September 22, 2016** -- First he was simply called "The Manistee Eagle," indicating the county where he was rescued. Now he's dubbed "Mighty Mac" in honor of the location where he'll be released back into the wild on Tuesday, Oct. 4.

The Mackinac Bridge Authority (MBA) is assisting in the release of bald eagle Mighty Mac with Wings of Wonder (WOW), the Empire-based raptor sanctuary and rehabilitation center. The current plan is for a release from either a bridge tower or from an anchor pier, the location where the bridge's main cables connect to piers, depending on wind conditions, logistics of getting the bird to the tower top, and precautions taken for the bird's health and safety. The release is tentatively scheduled for 2 p.m.

WOW founder and Director Rebecca Lessard was first approached about doing a release from the bridge by MBA Chairman William Gnodtke, a member of the organization who has attended other releases of recovered raptors.

"Anyone who has ever attended the release of a rehabilitated raptor knows just how amazing it can be to witness," Gnodtke said. "To have Mighty Mac, a symbol of our nation, released from our iconic bridge will be both thrilling and inspiring."

Lessard said she was immediately intrigued by the idea.

"Oh, yeah," she told him with a smile. "We could make that happen."

From there, it was a matter of picking the right time of year, and the right eagle candidate. Mighty Mac came into Lessard's care in early August when she received a call from a concerned person in Manistee County who spotted him sitting on a fence post at a horse ranch. He was clearly weakened by some illness or injury, and didn't put up much of a struggle for Lessard and a Michigan Department of Natural Resources conservation officer.

Lessard said she believes Mighty Mac was suffering from West Nile Virus, which is exhibited by respiratory distress, similar to influenza, in birds. However, without care, raptors often die not from the disease, but instead starve to death when they can't hunt. Mighty Mac was in the WOW intensive care clinic for 48 hours, where he received vital fluids and medical attention.

"He responded quite well to treatment, which means he was rescued just in time," Lessard said. "Mighty Mac graduated from intensive care to a small flight pen designed to restrict flying. He is now in a larger 100-foot flight pen where he has been stretching his wings and building his aerobic conditioning."

He is fully rehabilitated and strong, which makes him a good candidate for the release from the Mackinac Bridge, Lessard said. He is estimated to be between 7 and 10 years old, weighs about 10 pounds, and has a wingspan of roughly 6 feet.

"He's a seasoned, mature adult who is ready to fly free," she said. "He's 'feather perfect' and shows no sign of ever being in captivity."

WOW, a 501c3 charity, rehabilitates and releases more than 120 raptors (eagles, hawks, owls, falcons, vultures and osprey) each year, in addition to providing more than 100 educational programs annually throughout Michigan. Releases have been done in many different venues, including some over water, but this will be the first from a big bridge.

At a typical release, the raptor to be released would be transported in a crate, then held briefly before being set free. If this release is to be done from the tower, Mighty Mac will need to be placed in a custom-made crate for his trip up through the tower elevator and ladder system. Lessard and bridge staff will need to monitor winds that day to determine whether a tower release is safe and practical.

Lessard will give a brief introduction about the release in Bridge View Park at about noon Oct. 4, prior to the release at 2 p.m. For more information on WOW and its programs, visit [www.wingsofwonder.org](http://www.wingsofwonder.org) or their [Facebook page](#), or call 231-326-4663.



**Caption information - Mighty Mac: Mighty Mac, shown here just a few days into his recovery at the Wings of Wonder (WOW) center, is scheduled to be released from the Mackinac Bridge on Oct. 4. Photo courtesy WOW.**

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