

Power-line firm probes duck deaths

Retired scientist discovers 'avian slaughterhouse'

Colette Derworiz, Postmedia News Edmonton Journal
Published: 2:01 am Jan 9, 2014

A Calgary company is investigating after a retired scientist found dozens of dead ducks underneath one of their transmission lines in southern Alberta.

David McIntyre, a forest scientist who worked at the Smithsonian, went for a walk on Dec. 31 along the one-year-old line - north of Pincher Creek and Highway 3 and south of the Oldman River valley and Oldman Reservoir - and found dozens of freshly killed ducks and the remains of others.

"It seems apparent that the new lines have, within a very short period of time, killed hundreds of ducks due to high-speed - bone-breaking - collisions," he said.

"The land beneath the lines looks like an avian slaughterhouse."

McIntyre said he also found the remains of at least one Canada goose and a grey partridge.

Officials with AltaLink, which operates the transmission line, said they are treating the matter seriously and will fully investigate the incident.

"We sent a team of environmental experts, both from AltaLink and external agencies, down to the Pincher Creek area to investigate," said Scott Schreiner, director of external engagement with AltaLink. "At the same time, we have reported it to Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development to make sure they are aware of our investigation and that we are beginning to do the necessary work."

Nikki Booth, a spokeswoman for Alberta Environment, said the province has also sent in a Fish and Wildlife officer to assess the situation.

"It was an unfortunate perfect storm of things that came together," she said. "There was a significant number of waterfowl at the reservoir because it is an open body of water during the winter so it attracts a lot of waterfowl.

"There was also high winds that night so basically the birds either flew or were blown into the lines."

But McIntyre said it appeared the birds were killed over an extended period because there were freshly killed ducks, and skeletal remains of others.

"It was just a quick look," he said. "The thing that hit me was the inappropriate placement of these lines to the waterfowl."

Once they determine what happened, Schreiner said AltaLink will work to find ways to reduce the number of bird collisions with the line by installing both reflectors and diverters.

The company has an avian protection plan that works to assess risks to birds due to collisions with wires, electrocutions on structures or substations and nesting on utility poles.

Schreiner said the line in question was built about a year ago after receiving all of the necessary approvals - including an environmental assessment - by the Alberta Utilities Commission.

Another line is being built in the same area.