

Severe weather caused birds to hit power lines, study says

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A total of 345 birds - mostly mallard ducks and at least one grey partridge - were killed after they hit a transmission line in southern Alberta during severe weather conditions in mid-December, an investigation has concluded.

Earlier this month, AltaLink was alerted to dozens of dead ducks and immediately sent a team to investigate. "Our evidence indicates 345 birds were involved with our power line," said AltaLink spokesman Peter Brodsky, who added it is believed a low ceiling and high winds lowered the flight path of the birds.

He said it's the first incident involving the line, which was built in June 2012.

The dead birds were found Dec. 31 by retired scientist and nearby resident David McIntyre, who has met with AltaLink's team.

"I am really, really surprised ... that we were in agreement with everything," he said, adding he's also heard reports of an injured eagle in the area of the transmission line.

McIntyre said he doesn't believe it's a one-time event.

"These ducks had died in multiple incidents over a period of time," he said. "They didn't die in one incident. That, to me, is huge in this."

Another major concern, he said, is that thousands of ducks and geese spend the winter in the area below the Oldman River dam.

"Those birds daily have to negotiate wires that are right next to them so ... it's huge how much they have to invest to climb up to go over those lines, and it's also crystal clear they can't see in inclement weather." Brodsky said the company is in the process of marking the lines with diverters, which will help deflect the birds, and will continue to monitor the line. "The investigation of the incident has wrapped up based on what we found in the area," he said, noting there's no signs it has been a recurring problem. "Our indication is that it's an isolated incident."

McIntyre, however, suggested the line shouldn't have been built in the area, suggesting the company needs to start looking at underground lines - an option AltaLink said is costly, but can happen at the request and cost of the customer involved rather than the general ratepayer.

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