

## **AltaLink completes investigation of dead ducks near Oldman Dam**

*Chris Davis*

As reported here on January 8, 2014, a number of dead ducks were found underneath AltaLink electricity transmission lines adjacent to Highway 785 south of the Oldman River Dam ([click here for that story](#)).

AltaLink spokesman Scott Schreiner says the company has completed their investigation of situation. Schreiner confirmed 345 dead birds were found, 244 mallards and 1 grey partridge. "We believe it was a combination of high winds and lowered visibility that caused them to hit the lines where bird diverters were in place, and where they weren't," said Schreiner.

To attempt to mitigate the situation Schreiner said AltaLink was at the site yesterday installing new wind diverters on new lines and on lines that already had diverters. He also said AltaLink would be increasing patrols "from an environmental perspective" in the area to monitor the situation. Bird diverters are devices that attach to power lines. They flap in the wind to warn the birds that the hard to see lines are there.

Schreiner said that AltaLink's Avian Protection Plan was the first of its kind by a utility company in Canada. "One of the things we do is identify high risk areas," he said, adding that AltaLink installs diverters and patrols such areas to monitor environmental impact.

Schreiner said the power line was strung in spring of 2012 and has been powered since later that same year "and this is the first incident of this type that we're aware of".

"It's certainly unique in terms of our entire system. We take it seriously, which is why we launched the investigation the day after we heard about it."

Retired scientist and area environmentalist David McIntyre took pictures of the site on December 31, 2013 one of which is republished at the top of this article. He's long made known his opposition to the positioning of the power lines in question and also acts as an informal spokesman for some of those concerned about the situation. McIntyre said he had an informal meeting with biologists from AltaLink and Stantec last Monday to discuss their findings, which McIntyre said mirrored his own observations.

"I didn't go to the site with the biologists, but we were on site-separated by several hundred meters, one day at the same time, and concurred that within one half-hour period, more than 2,000 ducks flew overhead, and directly over the problematic, currently strung, transmission line, under which hundreds of dead ducks were found."

According to McIntyre there are approximately 5,000 mallards and 5,000 Canadian geese below the dam on any given day in the winter months. Problematic for him is that the transmission line west of 785 and the one under construction roughly eastward which parallels the river valley is in the direct line of flight for fowl flying to and from adjacent grain fields. "You didn't have to be a biologist to see we have a tremendous number of birds wintering this area and that's going to be a big problem for them. I find it amazing that AltaLink would build lines there if they had done any kind of environmental assessment. The

red blinkers should be going."

Mcintyre believes this was not an isolated incident. "It's crystal clear to me it was multiple collisions. There may have been many incidents. Unless it lands on someone's doorstep, we may never hear about it." He also voiced his concern about the effect the situation could have on eagle migrations in spring, when "thousands of Golden Eagles migrate up the crest of the Livingstone Range". He worries they will be attracted to dead ducks as a source of food, "And now it's more than a dead duck issue."

### **Eyewitness accounts**

In early December we began receiving reports by local citizens about dead duck sightings, but were unable due to inclement weather to verify those claims at that time.

After publishing our story on the situation on January 8, 2014 I solicited and received feedback via Facebook from eyewitnesses to the situation. "Its such a sad sight to see. Every day on my way to work," said Tina Jay Spear. "There seems to be more and more each time. We saw a lot throughout November and December. We thought one day it was raining birds, on one of our drives a couple of ducks fell right in front of us as we were driving. Scared me, what a sight to see."

"I remember driving to the Heritage acres area in December and seeing all the dead ducks too. They where all over the place. I will update you tomorrow on what the exact day it was," said Dylan Barber.

"The other day me and my wife were driving by there going home, we seen over 12 dead birds alongside the ditch," said Patrick Bad-Eagle.

"(I) Drive past there everyday going to and from work, this has been going on since late November. The ducks are down in the river valley and they fly up the coulees. Once they come up over the road hwy 785 on extremely windy days, they get blown back into the power lines. Everyday we have +70 km/hr winds you will see the dead ducks," said Robert Dale Plante. "This has not been one or two events, this is a daily issue on extremely windy days."