

Petition launched for Cook Lake birds

Senior takes her mission public and online against planned power line

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By: **Johnnie Bachusky**





Bernice Stewart

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Innisfail senior Bernice Stewart has launched a petition against the planned transmission line over Cook Lake.

Stewart, who will soon be 74, launched an online 'Save Cook Lake's Sacred Swans' petition two weeks ago. The local senior, a passionate wildlife photographer, said she now has more than 365 signatures, including 69 collected at Co-op food store on Aug. 19. She also collected 47 at the Innisfail Farmers' Market on Aug. 18.

Stewart said she's pleased with the public response with her initiative, even if she can't provide interested citizens with all the answers.

"Some say they know about it as they have read the paper," said Stewart. "Others do hesitate to sign because they don't know enough about it. I ask them to read the information that is here and I tell them what I do know."

"I know what is going on at the lake. I see all these birds. I have documented the birds," said Stewart, who has been photographing the Cook Lake birds for the past 13 years.

Stewart's concern for the migratory birds at Cook Lake, a 700-metre-long spring-fed body of water one kilometre northeast of the town, was first made public in an Aug. 2 story in the Innisfail Province. Since then the plight of the Cook Lake birds, which include lesser scaup, American coots, blue winged teals, herons, Canada geese, bald eagles and trumpeter swans, has attracted province-wide attention.

However, construction on the AltaLink transmission line, which will cross the lake from west to east, is scheduled to start in October. The line, which was the company's alternate route for its \$51-million substation project, was approved in 2014 by the Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) following extensive public consultation and hearings.

AUC and AltaLink officials have told the media mitigation measures are in place to protect the birds, including the installation of shield wires that make power lines more visible to wildlife.

But Stewart and other opponents to the power line plan note that will still be a problematic obstacle for the birds as their flight path is from north to south.

Stewart said she will continue her petition, which can be viewed online and at the Innisfail Royal Canadian Legion, Jackson's Pharmasave and Sandstone Pharmacies, until the middle of September. She will then submit it to the AUC, AltaLink, provincial government and the media.

"I have even had people tell me today that what I am doing is a lost cause," said Stewart. "The thing is that I have to give it my best shot to be able to live with myself. I have been enjoying this place for a long time, and to see it go belly up and to lose the birds is just too much."

For more information on Stewart's campaign, citizens can call 403-227-5320.

jbachusky@innisfail.greatwest.ca