

Muskrat were noted near the mouth of the Sturgeon River during each of the site surveys. There was no evidence of beaver occupation of this section of the Sturgeon River during the 1996 surveys, and would not be expected to occur as permanent residents because of the lack of deciduous trees or willows along the shoreline that are needed for food and lodge construction.

The high elevation power lines at the mouth of the Sturgeon River and parallel to the shore of Big Lake and Riel Lagoon are a hazard for waterfowl, particularly during migration. Although these structures are used by some passerine birds as resting sites, the lines are likely to result in collisions and mortality for ducks and other waterbirds as they fly along the river to and from Big Lake. This wildlife hazard issue has been raised previously by Calverley and Kosinski (1986) and is still a concern in 1996 (B. Calverley pers. comm.). Calverley and Kosinski (1986) reported unacceptably high instances of waterfowl mortality due to the power lines from field inspections and have recommended mitigation to minimize this hazard.

4.2.3 Riel Lagoon

Riel Lagoon is an abandoned sewage treatment facility that currently functions as a stormwater retention pond. The lagoon consists of a rectangular levee retaining relatively deep water. The levee is steep sided and supports a low grass-forb cover. The lagoon contains a few pockets of submergent vegetation and very little emergent or shoreline marsh vegetation.

The lagoon has a low capability for breeding waterfowl or other aquatic birds. The high intensity of recreational use of this facility (i.e., walking trail along the levee and water based sports) during spring and early summer would further reduce its capacity to support breeding waterfowl. Breeding bird surveys found few grebes and ducks on the lagoon. Nonetheless, this impoundment attracts fair numbers of diving and dabbling ducks, gulls, terns and swallows for foraging and resting. We recorded 29 species of birds associated with lagoon habitat (Table 2). During the spring surveys, we noted that Black and Forster's terns, Bank, Barn and Tree swallows and Purple Martin appeared to prefer to hawk (forage) for insects over the lagoon rather than Big Lake. LeConte's Sparrows were recorded inhabiting the grassy levees.

During the inclement weather in fall 1996, the lagoon attracted a variety of birds that were resting and feeding on the sheltered waters. About 300 water birds were counted on the lagoon during surveys on September 11, 1996. These species included: Lesser Scaup, Mallard, American Coot, Bufflehead, Blue-winged Teal, Goldeneye, American Widgeon, Forster's Tern, Franklin's and Ring-billed Gulls. Two Greater Yellowlegs were the only shorebirds present.

4.2.4 Cattail Marsh

A productive cattail marsh, located on the south edge of Riel Lagoon lies along the alignment of the proposed West Boundary Road. This marsh is dominated by a dense stand