



File photo/St. Albert Gazette

BIRD SAFETY – Reflectors are attached to power lines west of Riel Pond. Power line company AltaLink will install about 1,000 of these reflectors on the power lines that cross Big Lake to cut down on bird collisions.

ENVIRONMENT FILE

Fireflies come to Big Lake

An Alberta company plans to put more than 1,000 reflectors on a transmission line crossing Big Lake to stop birds from hitting it.

City council decided to hold off on moving a 128-kilovolt transmission line away from Big Lake during its budget talks last winter. The line crosses the northeast corner of the lake, an area frequented by birds, and has been criticized for killing birds and interfering with plans for Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park. The city's budget lists the line move as an unfunded project for 2013.

AltaLink is still committed to helping the city move the line in the future, said company spokesperson Leigh Clarke. As an interim measure, it has just decided to put some 1,065 reflective flappers on the line to make them more visible to birds. "We think it's a prudent investment in order to reduce bird collisions."

The company tested these flappers in 2005 by putting 75 of them along a one-kilometre stretch of line using a helicopter. Some were fluorescent spirals designed to make the wires easier to see; others were paperback-sized orange, white and red "Firefly" flappers that glowed faintly in the dark. Both were placed on the thin shield wire at the top of the line, which seemed to be the one birds hit the most.

The reflectors worked, Clarke said, so the company will plunk down \$50,000 to put spirals and flappers along the remaining two kilometres of line within Lois Hole Park. These reflectors will go on both the shield wire and the actual transmission lines below it. "You're going to have a pretty good wall of flappers." There will also be a sign near the line that explains how the reflectors work.

This is a very positive step, said Jason Cooke, chair of the city's Environmental Advisory Committee. "Given that the lines are going to remain where they are for the foreseeable future, that should certainly be an improvement in terms of minimizing bird strikes." He applauded the company's efforts to reduce the line's environmental impact.

The installation won't happen until this winter, Clarke said, as they need solid, frozen ground to get at the lower lines. The money for the reflectors will come out of the company's maintenance budget.