

APPENDIX A

Results of BLESS Summer 2003 Bird Survey

Table 1. Birds Identified on Sturgeon River, lagoon and Big Lake, Spring 2003					
Common Name	Scientific Name	Total individuals	Average per sighting	Maximum in one sighting	Minimum in one sighting
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	97	8.8	29	1
American Wigeon	Anas americana	12	3.0	4	2
Northern Pintail	Anas acuta	6	6.0	6	6
Blue-winged Teal	Anas discors	39	7.8	14	1
Gadwall	Anas strepera	6	3.0	4	2
Northern Shoveller	Anas clypeata	13	2.2	4	1
Common Goldeneye	Bucephala clangula	136	12.4	50	2
Bufflehead	Bucephala albeola	41	8.2	20	2
Canvasback	Aythya valisineria	637	57.9	226	3
Lesser Scaup	Aythya affinis	1236	123.6	435	5
Greater Scaup	Aythya marila	5		5	5
Redhead	Aethya americana	48	8.0	18	2
Ruddy	Oxyura jamaicensis	68	13.6	40	3
Common Merganser	Mergus merganser	18	3.6	7	1
Redbreasted Merganser	Mergus serrator	2		1	1
Ring-necked	Aythya fuligula	29	14.5	27	2
Eared Grebe	Podiceps nigricollis	8	2.7	5	1
Pied-billed Grebe	Podilymbus podiceps	9	3.0	4	1
Red-necked Grebe	Podiceps grisegena	30	10.0	20	5
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	49	4.9	10	2
Tundra Swan	Cygnus columbianus	60		60	60
American Coot	Fulica americana	347	31.5	87	2
Common Loon	Gavia immer	2		2	2

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Common Name	Scientific Name	Total individuals	Average per sighting	Maximum in one sighting	Minimum in one sighting
Double-crested Cormorant	Phalacrocorax auritus	1		1	1
Franklin's Gull	Larus pipixcans	33	8.3	16	2
Bonapart's Gull	Larus philidelphia	2		2	2
Ring-billed Gull	Larus delawarensis	100	33.3	80	10
Great Blue Heron	Ardea herodias	1		1	1
Black-crowned Night Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax	6		6	6
Northern Harrier	Circus cyaneus	1		1	1
Red-tailed Hawk	Buteo jamaicensis	2		2	2
American Crow	Corvus brachyrhynchos	7	2.3	4	1
Common Raven	Corvus corax	2		1	1
American Kestrel	Falco sparverius	2		1	1
Brewer's Blackbird	Euphagus cyanocephalus	5		5	5
Red-winged Blackbird	Agelaius phoeniceus	20	10.0	10	10
Wilson's Snipe	Gallinago gallinago	2		2	2
Barn Swallows	Hirundo rustica	4		4	4
Killdeer	Charadrius vociferus	1		1	1

Table 2. Species identified in the Spruce Woods	
Migratory species	Breeding species
Least flycatcher	Blue-winged teal
American crow	killdeer
Black-capped chickadee	least flycatcher
House Wren	American crow
American Robin	black-capped chickadee
Yellow Warbler	white-breasted nuthatch
Chipping Sparrow	ruby-crowned kinglet
Fox Sparrow	American robin
Song Sparrow	red-eyed vireo
	yellow warbler
	chipping sparrow
	clay-coloured sparrow and
	song sparrow.
	house wren

Table 3. Some Declining, At-Risk or Unusual Species Observed in the Vicinity of the Proposed West Regional Road			
COMMON NAME	POPULATION	REASONS	PRESENCE AT BLNA
Trumpeter Swan <i>Cygnus buccinator</i>	At risk in Alberta (8)	North American population recovering from near extinction	Big Lake near outflow of Sturgeon River and on Sturgeon River (6)
Short-eared Owl <i>Asio flammeus</i>	COSEWIC species of special concern; may be at risk in AB (8)	Cause unknown (8)	Nests along north shore of Big Lake; hunts near BLESS shelter (3)
Sprague's Pipit <i>Anthus spragueii</i>	Dramatic population declines documented in recent decades(8)	Breeding Bird Survey data show very large declines in this native grassland-dependent species. Recommended as a "Species of Special Concern" in Alberta.	Breeding (3)
Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>	Declining throughout range in Alberta (8); undergoing significant wide-scale decline (1)	Drought-related disappearance of small ponds affects this species. Breeding Bird Survey data from Alberta suggest declining numbers over the last two decades.	Commonly found in 2003 along the Sturgeon River between outlet from lake and BLESS shelter (3)
Western Grebe <i>Aechmophorus occidentalis</i>	Local and uncommon in Alberta. Population believed stable (8)	Nesting colonies located in emergent vegetation.	Found sporadically along the Sturgeon River and is known to nest on BLNA (3)
Horned Grebe <i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Declining throughout range in Alberta (8)	Drought-related disappearance of small ponds affects this species. Breeding Bird Survey data show sharp decline in the last two decades.	Breeds in the reeds eastern edge of Big Lake and Riel Pond (2,3)
Pileated Woodpecker <i>(Dryocopus pileatus)</i>	Probably stable (8)	Requires mature to old-growth trees for nesting. Abandoned nest cavities provide essential habitat	Spotted (3)

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COMMON NAME	POPULATION	REASONS	PRESENCE AT BLNA
		for several other forest species. Maintenance of breeding habitat needs to be incorporated into forest management on both public and private lands.	
American White Pelican <i>Pelecanus erythrorhynchos</i>	Estimated that there are more than 6 000 pairs in the province. Number of nesting pairs increasing(8)	Population increasing but the number of active colonies is decreasing. Comprehensive colony protection essential. Concern of possible disease risk. Drought across other parts of prairies may have contributed to the increase in Alberta.	Uses the lake in large numbers during migration.
American Bittern <i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>	Unknown. Suspected declines in some areas of the province (8); declining due to habitat loss (1)	Relies on permanent to semi-permanent wetlands with well-developed emergent vegetation. Drainage, consolidation and cultivation of these wetlands are continuing threats.	Nests in the natural area. Seen in marsh by Riel Pond or marsh by NE lakeshore (2)
Great Blue Heron <i>Ardea herodias</i>	Size and number of colonies declining in Alberta (8)	Entire Alberta population is dependent on fewer than 100 known nesting colonies (8) Management of these key habitats and protection from human disturbance is essential.	Uses the marshy shoreline of Big lake (NE side) and Sturgeon River for feeding (2). Limited nesting occurs.

Table 3. Some Declining, At-Risk or Unusual Species Observed in the Vicinity of the Proposed West Regional Road			
COMMON NAME	POPULATION	REASONS	PRESENCE AT BLNA
Black-crowned Night-Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Population has increased in Alberta over past 20 years (8)	Colonial species reliant on marsh habitat. Requires special management.	Roosts in reed islands at east end of east basin (Big Lake) (1).
Forster's Tern <i>Sterna forsteri</i>	Rare. Breeding locations very local (8)	Protection of breeding sites important.	Nesting colony found (3)
Black Tern <i>Chilidonias niger</i>	Unknown. Documented declines in Saskatchewan and over large parts of North American breeding range(8)	Causes of population decline unknown. Relies on maintenance of larger marsh/wetland habitats.	Many observed, protective behaviour, nests and eggs found (3)
Osprey <i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Unknown (8)	Continued monitoring and protection of specific nest sites desirable.	May breed in area, several seen in 2003 (3)
Bald Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Population recovering over most of range (8)	A species once at risk throughout much of its North American range, now recovering. Low density in Alberta. Nests vulnerable to human disturbance.	Several sightings in one area, possible nest. In other years, seen hunting at lake's edge near viewing platform in April (4)
White-winged Scoter <i>Melanitta fusca</i>	Undergoing long-term decline (1). Uncommon breeder in Alberta. Waterfowl breeding population surveys for 1999 report over 11 000 birds in the province (8)	Found at most large lakes in Alberta, except in the Rocky Mountain and foothills regions. Waterfowl breeding population surveys indicate a significant long-term decline.	Nests. Seen at Riel Pond (1)
Surf Scoter <i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>	Rare/casual visitor during migration periods...declining (1)		Riel Pond (1)

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COMMON NAME	POPULATION	REASONS	PRESENCE AT BLNA
Canvasback <i>Aythya valisineria</i>	Decreasing (1)		Riel Pond (1,3)
Lesser Scaup <i>Aythya affinis</i>	Undergoing widespread decline (1)	Unknown	Riel pond (1)
Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	North American population described as "struggling" (1)		Large congregations during migration in east basin of Big Lake (4)
American Avocet <i>Recurvirostra americana</i>	Decreasing in Canada (1)		Mudflats by observation platform (3)

Sources:

- 1 – Amec Earth and Environmental Ltd, in association with EDA Collaborative Inc. 2002. Big Lake Natural Area Management Plan Phase I Report.
- 2 – Penner and Associates Ltd, 1996 in IBI Group, City of St. Albert West Boundary Road, Environmental Impact Assessment Study. Appendix D table 2.
- 3 – BLESS surveys
- 4 – BLESS 1995. Position Paper Part 1 Concerning the Proposed St. Albert Western ByPass, p.1
- 5 – Spencer Environmental Management Services Ltd. 2003. environmental Assessment of the West Regional Road Survey 2003.
- 6 – David Nadeau, St. Albert resident and experienced bird naturalist, pers. Comm.. Nov. 26, 2003.
- 7 – Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, "Alberta's Watchable Wildlife checklist Series – Glory Hills Birds"
- 8 – Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Species at Risk website.

Eyewitness Account at an Endangered Part of the Big Lake Natural Area

The following page is taken from the "Big Lake Environment Support Society (BLESS) Position paper (part 1) Concerning the Proposed St. Albert Western By-Pass", April 1995

"A few years ago, on a sunny April day, several BLESS members walked along the south shore of the Sturgeon river toward the point where the river leaves Big Lake. Accompanied by the prominent Alberta naturalists, Cam and Joy Findlay - who would later write about the day's events - these local conservationists strolled along the exact route that the Red Willow Park trail would cover during the following months, and past the exact location where the proposed Western By-Pass would cross the Sturgeon River, if approved.

As though anticipating these events, Big Lake put on a show that day that startled even these seasoned naturalists. remarking about the sounds of early Spring arrivals, like a noisy white-throated sparrow, the party stopped to watch as two bald eagles appeared from the north and headed across the lake, which was ice-covered except for openings along the edge. Suddenly, the lake exploded with a huge flock of ducks that had reacted to the eagles. As a wave of these ducks circled the BLESS party they were quickly identified as pintails. Two days later biologists from the Canadian Wildlife Service, responding to a call from BLESS, visited the lake and estimated the pintails to number at 10,000. The pintail, whose numbers in all of Alberta are estimated at about 100,000, is semi-protected in hunting regulations.

At the edge of the lake, a hundred yards or so from where BLESS plants to construct a viewing platform, the Findlays photographed three pairs of Canada Geese actively fighting over nesting sites. A small flock of tundra Swans, resting on their way northward, cruised slowly in to the lake from the north side of St. Albert. Walking back to where the by-pass is planned to cross the Sturgeon River, Joy stopped the group to explain that a beaver sitting on the opposite shore was spreading oil over its fur from a gland accessible with its hind paw. It was a great afternoon for observing nature at one of the few places where the public has access to Big Lake - a place that would be disturbed by the construction of the Western By-Pass.