



Birder Ken Thomson says the few Sandhill cranes that nest in Burns Bog would be wiped out if the South Fraser Perimeter Road is built.

David Blevins photo, from A Nature Guide to Bounday Bay by Anne Murray

South Delta Leader

Cranes in danger?

By Kristine Thiessen - South Delta Leader

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A Fraser Valley birder says if it's built the South Fraser Perimeter Road will wipe out a flock of Sandhill cranes which use Burns Bog as a nesting site.

"If they go ahead with what they're going to do they'll completely fragment their breeding and feeding grounds," says Ken Thomson.

Thomson, who has studied the cranes for more than 30 years, believes the Sandhill cranes in the Fraser Valley are actually a separate subspecies unique to the area.

These cranes, he says, "when they lose their nesting area through man's doings, that pair will never nest again, anywhere."

Thomson says a pair of Sandhill cranes will choose their nesting site in Burns Bog based on the acoustics of the area, because when they call to each other they do not want predators like coyotes to be able to locate their eggs.

"That road will for sure change the acoustics of the entire area, so just on that basis alone they would probably not nest again."

And while the Fraser Valley flock has not been deemed a separate subspecies of cranes by the general scientific community, Thomson is calling on the Ministry of Transportation to prove him wrong.

He has collected DNA from the eggs of Sandhill cranes in the Fraser Valley and says he has offered the DNA to the ministry to conduct tests to compare the cranes here to others that migrate along the Pacific Flyway.

"I can offer them a control group," he says, but adds he hasn't heard back from the ministry since making his offer.

"If I'm right, this means these are the last 30 birds on the planet like this. Number one, the road has to stop. These things are rarer than Whooping cranes."

If he's wrong, Thomson says he can live with that—but he still wants to save the flock. He became interested in the bird when he saw his first Sandhill crane at 12-years-old.

Lisanne Bowness, spokesperson with the Ministry of Transportation, says the ministry expects the cranes to continue to use the agricultural fields next to the protected Crescent Slough after the road is built.

"According to our environmental studies, the SFPR will not pose any direct impacts to the Sandhill Crane in Burns Bog."

Says Bowness, "A key commitment of the SFPR is to develop long-term monitoring strategies to assess the effectiveness of potential effects on the sandhill crane and where necessary take additional steps to address project-related environmental affects."

But Thomson argues a long-term monitoring strategy will be of no help to the Sandhill cranes in the Fraser Valley.

"These cranes, you're not going to mitigate them."

Bowness said in an email the ministry is open to collaboration with any interested stakeholders, such as Thomson, “that could be used for better management of this important species.”

The South Fraser Perimeter Road is a project within the B.C. Gateway Program. The four-lane highway is meant to alleviate the increase in truck traffic expected to come with the expansion of Deltaport, and will run through South Delta farmland and around the edge of Burns Bog. The project received an environmental assessment certificate from the Ministry of Environment in late July.

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road kill—

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David Blevins photo from A Nature Guide to Boundary Bay by Anne Murray

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