

Concerns rising over Priddis Creek proposal

By Don Patterson
Interim Editor

Concerns are rising among residents and landowners along the Priddis Creek about a report looking at the possibility of diverting water into the creek from the Elbow River during a flood.

In a report submitted to the Provincial Flood Recovery Task Force, Alberta WaterSMART suggesting the provincial government take a closer look at the possibility of a diversion into the Priddis Creek.

The idea of diverting water from the Elbow River through Priddis Creek to Fish Creek is one that dates back to 1900 and was revisited in 1986.

The report outlines previous recommendations to divert water into Priddis Creek west of Bragg Creek in the event of a flood. The water would flow through the Priddis Creek, into Fish Creek and empty in the Bow River. The organization is also proposing a reservoir along the creek in the Priddis area.

Kim Sturgess, CEO of Alberta WaterSMART, said the report is only a review of historical work looking at proposals to prevent flooding along the Elbow River and the report does not make any specific rec-

ommendations beyond suggesting further study of the idea.

"This is a social policy decision that the government needs to make and it's incumbent on everybody involved to ensure that group of decision makers have the best, most thorough, complete information possible," she said.

The diversion is discussed further in the report of the Bow Basin Flood Mitigation and Watershed Management Project. The report states the diversion could be an option in the medium term, by 2018. It also recognizes concerns about potential affects on landowners.

However, the report has raised eyebrows among Priddis-area residents who say such a project should not go ahead.

"At this point I can't see this as a solution to have the complete affect of the mitigation for one community offset onto another one," said MD councillor Suzanne Oel. "I don't agree with that."

The report notes a 1986 study proposed diverting as much as 345 cubic meters per (CMS) of water from the Elbow River to Priddis Creek.

Oel said this is too much for the Priddis Creek to handle.



JORDAN VERLAGE/OWW

MD of Foothills councillor Susanne Oel looks over the confluence of Priddis Creek and Fish Creek. She is concerned about a proposal to divert flood water into the creek from the Elbow River.

In June of last year, water levels on the Fish Creek near the hamlet of Priddis peaked at 200 CMS, while the normal range doesn't extend much beyond three CMS.

"That amount of water would completely flood every community downstream of there because there's no way those communities could receive 345 cubic meters per second,"

she said.

Should the project go forward for consideration, Oel said the public needs to be involved in the planning process and landowners that are willing to go along need to be compensated.

She said the real solution is to get people to move out of floodplains.

Residents along the creek are speaking out against the idea. Priddis-area resi-

dent Judy Sproule said the idea may be good for Bragg Creek, but it could be disastrous for Priddis.

"Why would you relieve a problem in Bragg Creek and create a problem in Priddis," she said.

Sproule said Fish Creek already floods on her property and the proposal would only make it worse.

Priddis area resident John Mackenzie said the

proposal doesn't make sense. He said it would destroy productive agricultural land along Fish Creek to protect communities along the Elbow River.

Sproule's home is in the Fish Creek valley and he works to protect and maintain land along the creek to prevent it from eroding away. With the amount of water considered in the plan, he said it would increase the likelihood the creek would change course and erode his property.

"It could start changing course and that creek, instead of being a quarter mile away from our place, could be going right through the middle of our very highly productive land that's taken a long time to get that black, carbon heavy soil on top," he said.

Kyle Fawcett, Associate minister of recovery and reconstruction of southwest Alberta, said he hasn't read the report and isn't familiar with details of proposals to divert floodwater to Priddis Creek. He said the Province is reviewing a number of possible projects to mitigate future flood damages and the Priddis diversion is one of a number of ideas that would be considered.

"It would be considered as one piece of a larger puzzle if there was some merit to it," he said.