

Little Bow residents hear diversion details

Foothills: Proposal could handle up to 500 cubic meters per second of water

By Roxanne Blackwell

Staff Reporter

After being taken by surprise by the announcement in September, landowners along the Little Bow River were given an opportunity to hear what the provincial government has planned for a south Highwood Diversion.

Two closed meetings were held last week in Nanton and in High River, where 250 affected landowners were invited to take part in a discussion and get information on the two options that are being considered.

The proposed diversion would be seven kilometers long, 40-200 meters wide and able to handle approximately 500 cubic metres of water per second. The first option is a 'natural floodway enhancement,' which would route the water south at a price tag of \$31 million. The second option would involve building a damn further downstream at a cost of \$229 million.

Shirley Pickering, a resident along the Little Bow and chair of the Highwood Management Plan Public Advisory Committee, said she'd like the Province go back to the drawing board.

"At this point in time I



JORDAN VERLAGE/OWW

A bridge crossing over the Little Bow river sits washed out on 10 St. E just south of High River on Monday July 22, 2013. A south diversion has been proposed to divert water from the Highwood River down the Little Bow.

don't think we have sufficient evidence on the table to be able to select one or even decide if the south diversion is the correct idea," she said. "There's huge pressure to get this done quickly and sometimes quickly does not allow for a proper assessment so that would be my main concern, so we need to make sure that all of this is understood at the landowner level as well as a

political level."

Pickering said she felt there were red flags with the information, and doesn't feel like proposals recognized how much damage the Little Bow residents sustained in the 2013 flood.

"It says in the AECOM report that there was minor impact impacts on the Little Bow River during the 2013 flood and they say only one house was flooded, when in fact that is not true," she

said. "There were 10 houses that were flooded out and highly impacted as well as many other farm site corals and storage sites and crops that were decimated..."

"The option is for the Town of High River, they don't even look at how downstream people are impacted."

MD of Foothills coun. Suzanne Oel was also in attendance at the meeting,

and said while it was nice to get the dialogue going, there's still valid issues and concerns that need to be addressed before the Province makes a decision.

"When they heard the announcement in the news it was probably shocking to a lot of people, so this was a way to kind of back up from that and do it a little bit nicer and friendlier," Oel said. "I don't know how you can be friendly about telling

people they're going to take the water."

She said the residents have a lot of good comments and she hopes the Province continues to seek their input and consider how to mitigate the complications.

"We have these conversations about the greater good and it's real challenging whenever you're lower in population you end up being on the receiving end of somebody else's solution," she said. "I just know how much work it is to clean up... and now you're going to send stuff their way again. As long as you're a reasonable person I don't think you can get away without feeling pretty empathetic, but (Alberta Environment) has a good team there and they've really made themselves available."

The two options, which were designed by AECOM, are currently being reviewed by Deltares, a Dutch engineering firm who will determine which approach to take with a diversion.

A decision is expected to be made by March of 2015, with a year of environmental study to be done afterwards, before construction begins.