

Commentary

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS HAVE NOT BEEN MET

Wrangle continues over Souris dam

by DENNIS BUECKERT
The Canadian Press

Come summer, Keith Robinson hopes to paddle his canoe through some of the driest territory in Canada, on a waterway so shallow and uncertain that in places the water almost disappears.

It's called the Souris River, and he loves it.

"If you're paddling on the river, you basically don't know you're on the prairie — it's sort of like being in a different world," says Robinson, who manufactures canoes in the town of Souris in southwestern Manitoba.

But he worries this haven will soon be changed forever because of the Rafferty-Alameda dam project, which the Saskatchewan government is building on the Souris River system, hundreds of kilometres upstream.

An initial appraisal by federal Environment Department officials suggests Robinson has good reason to worry.

When the \$150-million Rafferty-Alameda dam project is completed, its twin dams will hold back much of the water that now flows in the Souris — a river that winds south from Saskatchewan into North Dakota and then back up into Manitoba.

The dam project is huge by Prairie standards.

The Alameda dam, expected to be finished in the spring, will be as tall as a 10-storey building and about 1.5 kilometres long. The Rafferty dam, virtually completed, will create an artificial lake some 60 kilometres long.

The project will create two reservoirs just north of the U.S. border near Estevan, Sask. These will provide water for irrigation, recreation and industrial development, and cooling water for a \$600-million coal-fired power station.

tion. The reservoirs will also store water for spring flood control.

The U.S. government is contributing \$50 million to the project because it will provide flood protection for the city of Minot, N.D.

Some estimates place the total cost of the development, including related facilities such as the coal-fired power station, at more than \$1 billion.

George Hood, president of the Souris Basin Development Authority, the Saskatchewan agency building the project, says it has received a full environmental assessment by the Saskatchewan government.

He is angered by Ottawa's attempts to conduct its own review under federal guidelines.

"We don't know why they continue to pursue this line of action on Rafferty-Alameda when on virtually every other major project they have recognized that these environmental assessment guidelines don't make any sense," says Hood, the resentment simmering in his voice.

"Quite clearly they are singling Saskatchewan out. I think the federal government is getting some bad advice."

However, federal officials have criticized the Saskatchewan review as inadequate in many areas.

The initial appraisal by the federal Environment Department said the project may have serious environmental effects. The appraisal warned:

— The recreational value of the Souris River would be diminished by increased growth of weeds and algae, the result of slower moving, shallower water.

— With reduced volumes of water, sewage discharges from towns along the river could cause serious pollution problems.

— A decline of waterfowl habi-

The Rafferty-Alameda dam project

PURPOSE:

The project will provide water for recreation, irrigation, and industrial purposes. There will flood control for Minot, N.D., and other areas.

Main components:

Rafferty dam on the Souris River near Estevan, Sask.; Alameda dam on Moose Mountain Creek, a tributary of the Souris.

Related developments:

A \$600-million Shand coal-fired power station near Estevan will be cooled with water from the Rafferty reservoir; a new coal mine will provide fuel for the power station.

Cost:

The U.S. government is paying about a third of the \$150 million cost of the project. Saskatchewan will pay for the rest.

Area to be flooded:

About half the size of Regina — 6,180 hectares.

Environmental impact:

It will reduce downstream flow in Souris River, reduce water quality, and reduce habitat for ducks and other wildlife.

Rare or endangered animals possibly threatened:

Baird's sparrow	Ferruginous hawk	Piping plover
Burrowing owl	Great grey owl	Whooping crane
Cooper's hawk	Loggerhead shrike	Prairie long-tailed weasel
Eastern bluebird	Peregrine falcon	

ty could result in a loss of 4,400 ducks annually in Canada and 22,000 in North Dakota.

— The project will reduce populations of the several rare or threatened wildlife species, including the ferruginous hawk and Baird's sparrow.

— Habitat will be reduced for 19 rare plant species considered to have national significance.

— Creation of the reservoirs will release naturally occurring

mercury from soil due to a process called mercury methylation. As a result, fish downstream could become contaminated.

The federal appraisal, published in August 1989, was carried out on the orders of a federal court judge after the Canadian Wildlife Federation took Ottawa to court for not following its own environmental assessment procedures.

Despite all the concerns, former

Rafferty at a glance

By The Canadian Press

Facts on the Rafferty-Alameda dam project in southern Saskatchewan:

Cost: \$150 million. U.S. government is paying about a third, Saskatchewan the rest.

Main components: Rafferty dam (named after a railway siding) on the Souris River near Estevan, Sask.; Alameda dam (named after a town) on Moose Mountain Creek, a tributary of the Souris.

Purposes: Provide water for recreation, irrigation and industrial purposes; flood control for Minot, N.D., and other areas.

Related developments: \$600-million Shand coal-fired power station which will be cooled with water from the Rafferty reservoir; a new coal mine to provide fuel for the power station.

Area to be flooded: 6,180 hectares, about half the size of Regina.

Environmental impact: Reduced downstream flow in Souris River, reduced water quality, reduced habitat for ducks and other wildlife.

Rare or endangered animals possibly threatened: Baird's sparrow, burrowing owl, Cooper's hawk, eastern bluebird, ferruginous hawk, great grey owl, loggerhead shrike, peregrine falcon, piping plover, whooping crane, prairie long-tailed weasel.

environment minister Lucien Bouchard issued a licence for the project on the same day the study was released.

That led to a second court case, and an even stronger judgment, ordering Ottawa to carry out a full environmental assessment by an independent panel, with public hearings.

To date that assessment has not been done. A panel was set up to do it, but resigned in October to protest continuing construction of the project. As yet, a new panel has not been named.

Environment Minister Robert de Cotret is going back to court in February seeking an order to stop construction of the project until the environmental review is done.

Many environmentalists see the Rafferty-Alameda case as a symbol of whether Canada is serious about environmental protection.

The struggle to date has not left them optimistic.

While the wheels of the court system slowly turn, Saskatchewan is pushing full steam ahead to finish the project. By the time the judgment is rendered on de Cotret's stop-work bid, the project could be virtually complete.

Saskatchewan maintains that a federal assessment is unnecessary because the project has already been studied to death. Critics think otherwise.

"There's been a lot of study that has been done on the Souris Basin over the past 40 to 50 years, but the effects of this particular project have not been done by anybody," says Joe Dolecki, a resource economist at Brandon University.

"There's been nothing on the system as a whole."

Dam would solve ranchers' water woes

by DENNIS BUECKERT
The Canadian Press

Orlin Hanson is a burly rancher who would fit easily into the cast of a western movie. He likes to pose for news pictures with his horse, attired in his cowboy regalia.

Hanson is a Republican member of the North Dakota state senate, and wields a lot of political clout. "When Orlin Hanson talks, things happen," says one admiring article in the Minot, N.D., newspaper.

He has also played a key role in promoting one of the most controversial water-management schemes ever undertaken in Canada — the Rafferty-Alameda dam project in southeastern Saskatchewan.

For Hanson, Rafferty is a lifelong dream. His ranch is in the Souris River basin, and he sees Rafferty-Alameda as the solution to many of the water prob-

lems that have plagued the area ever since it was settled.

"Do you have any idea how many meetings I've attended (to discuss water management in the Souris Basin)?" he asks during a phone interview. "I would imagine more than anyone in the two countries."

The Souris originates in southern Saskatchewan, curls into North Dakota, then back north into Manitoba. In dry years it virtually disappears, but in years when there's a lot of snow it can become a raging torrent.

Over the years, spring floods have been a major problem in Minot, which straddles the Souris about 100 kilometres south of the Canadian border. In 1969 a third of the city was under water for 40 days, and 13,000 people were forced to leave their homes.

"It's a very dramatic natural disaster that occurs," says Robert Schempp, Minot's city manager.

Schempp says that getting flood protection is the No. 1 priority for his city. It has been working on the problem in vain for some 35 years.

Minot tried for many years to get a flood-control dam built on the Souris at a place called Burlington, just north of the city. That project was stalled because of opposition led by a group called Citizens United To Save the Valleys.

One of the leaders of that group was Orlin Hanson.

The Burlington project was finally shelved after Saskatchewan announced it would go ahead with Rafferty-Alameda. Hanson makes no secret of his involvement in promoting the Saskatchewan project.

"In order to get water management you've got to go to the headwaters and control the water there," he says.

The U.S. government will pay \$50 million toward the cost of Rafferty-Alameda.

It's believed to be the first time the U.S. government has subsidized a water project located entirely in Canada. Critics in Saskatchewan say it's a bad deal.

"North Dakota is exporting the environmental costs of flood-control to Saskatchewan," says Rod MacDonald of a group called Stop Construction of the Rafferty Alameda Project. "That's what's going on with the Americans."

Ironically, given all the concern about flood control, the Souris River is virtually dry after several successive years of drought.

"The Souris River has been dry for three months," says Schempp. "There's not a drop of water in it."

If projections of climate change are correct, the southern Prairies will become drier and more drought-prone. Some suggest the risk of flooding may be a thing of the past.

HER POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS ARE UNMATCHED

'Wisp of a woman' big on the NDP

by LARRY JOHNSRUDE

CALGARY (CP) — Guess who contributes more money to a political party in Canada than any other individual.

A blue-chip Bay Street broker? Nope.

Maybe a suede-suited oil baron sipping Chivas in Calgary's Petroleum Club? Not even close.

Heck, Irene Dyck has never even SEEN the inside of a corporate boardroom.

Yet for the last dozen or so years, this diminutive 79-year-old woman has put any number of business bigwigs to shame with yearly gifts of \$100,000 to the party of her choice — the New Democrats.

"They've always been the party of the little guy," she explains in a strong voice.

It may seem unusual for someone as wealthy as Dyck to care about the little guy. But this wisp of a woman — she's four foot nine and 115 pounds — may be Canada's most reluctant millionaire.

Good fortune came out of the blue in 1975. The expansion-mad City of Calgary expropriated the milk farm she and her husband Jack, who died in 1982, owned on the city's northern outskirts. The land still sits undeveloped near the airport.

The Dycks got a cool . . . well, she doesn't like to say how much, only that it's more than she'll ever spend.

"It was just luck, it wasn't good management," she says al-



most apologetically. "I don't feel it's mine. I sort of feel somehow I've got to spend it wisely."

Dyck figures giving to the New Democrats — her cheques go to the federal party which turns a portion over to the Alberta NDP — and other deserving causes is a wise way to spend her money.

In Alberta, the provincial NDP is a Volkswagen to the Conserva-

At \$100,000 a year, Irene Dyck of Calgary, a lifetime supporter of the New Democrats, is the largest single supporter of any political party in Canada. She vows she won't stop until the NDP is in power in Alberta and Ottawa.

tive party's Cadillac. Without Dyck it might not even be able to afford new tires.

"It's not just the money she gives but it's also the work she has done," says Alberta NDP Leader Ray Martin.

"She has been the heart and soul of the party for many years." Dyck vows not to rest until the NDP is in power both in Alberta and in Ottawa.

Her pace would exhaust someone a fraction her age. Every Friday she can be found at the party's downtown Calgary office working as a volunteer. After hours, phone calls get forwarded to her home.

When she's not baking cakes for fundraisers, Dyck is canvassing the neighborhood, NDP flyers in hand.

Out-of-town New Democrats often stay at her modest working-class suburban home when they're in Calgary.

"We're still not to the point where we can afford fancy hotels," she says with a laugh.

Her NDP roots run deep.

Dyck taught school during the Depression in the nearby oil town of Turner Valley, where she met her future husband. A farm boy from Saskatchewan, Jack was quite taken with his home province's newest political sensation, Tommy Douglas and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, forerunner of the NDP.

It was a match made in political heaven.

They never forgave the upstart Social Credit party for sweeping the populist United Farmers of Alberta out of office in 1935 with promises of political reform and cash for Albertans.

A mischievous twinkle comes to her eye when Dyck recalls some of the high jinks she and her husband pulled. If they didn't oust the Socreds, at least they tried to make their lives miserable.

When Socred Leader William (Bible Bill) Abernethy was running in an Alberta by-election after his party's 1935 landslide win — he hadn't run in the general election — the Dycks dogged him mercilessly at political events. At one meeting they got the crowd so

riled, the new premier had to leave the hall through a back door.

Despite her natural smile and quick laughter, there's a side to Irene Dyck that's dead serious.

Her voice becomes tinged with anger as she recalls the unkept Socred promise of \$25 a month to every Albertan to help them through the Depression. She relates how a neighbor in her home town of Innisfree was expecting \$325 a month for his family of 13, which included two in-laws.

"When he didn't get it, he shot himself dead," she says, shaking her head. "He was a true believer in Social Credit promises."

A similar story underlines her belief in freedom of choice on abortion. The women's movement is another cause she supports financially.

"I had a girlfriend when I was 17. She was 15. Some horrible guy made her pregnant and she shot her head off."

The NDP is Alberta's official Opposition party and even managed to win an Edmonton seat in the last federal election — its first federal seat in the province. After a life spent fighting for the New Democrats in a province dominated by Socreds and then Conservatives, Dyck says it's encouraging to see some success.

Of course, she adds, having the cash to pay for the battle helps.