

Nechako Reservoir peaks, weeks of erosion still ahead

By DAVID PLUG

Free Press staff writer

Alcan says a record release from the Nechako Reservoir is "unlikely" now that water levels have finally peaked and are descending.

Alcan was considering increasing their release to a record 14,000 cubic feet per second as the water level behind the Kenney Dam reached less than half a foot below the normal maximum operating capacity.

The pressure to release 14,000 cfs has eased now that inflows to the reservoir are less than outflows.

The current release of 12,000 cfs is already eroding downstream riverbanks and an increase to 14,000 cfs would have significantly added to the damage.

Most of the erosion is in the Prince George area and the

environment ministry says property owners will have to get used to the problem.

Riverbanks in Miworth, North Nechako and Cottonwood Island will see continued erosion for the rest of the month, says Glen Davidson of the ministry's water management branch.

"The Nechako will continue running fairly high for most of July, but dropping slowly," says Mr. Davidson. "Until we get a lot less water down here in the Prince George area, the erosion problem will not stop."

There are about six or eight "pretty serious" spots in Miworth where some properties have lost metres of riverbank. When the river drops to normal levels, the tops of the present banks will likely slide, increasing the property loss. Several properties on North Nechako are also experiencing

erosion although houses are not threatened.

The flooding of Cottonwood Island Park is also of some concern with footpaths and bridges under water.

"The Cottonwood trail system is really taking a beating," says Mr. Davidson.

The erosion problems are not as large as some seen on the Fraser River in the past. Historically, some areas north of the pulp mills have lost 50 to 100 metres of sandy riverbank during floods.

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Library heading to the million mark

The Prince George Public Library is predicting a record year.

The library expects to loan out more than a million items in 1997 after seeing over 997,000 items borrowed last year.

The library's 1996 annual report shows a three per cent increase in loans, the fifth consecutive year with an increase. Circulation figures are already showing strong signs this year.

"Circulation is up 10 per cent in the first five months of 1997," says Tom Dielissen, chair of the library board.

With over 56,000 cardholders, the Prince George library places third highest among mid-sized libraries in Canada for percentage of population served.

Mr. Dielissen expects the community support to show up Sunday, August 24 for a walkathon to replace books damaged by a burst water main. Walk 9 Blocks With The 900 (the section of books damaged) is the theme of the fundraiser.

About 80 per cent of the 7,800 damaged books were restored. The library is still waiting for a final accounting of the damage from the insurer.

FLOW FACTS

The water release from the Skins Lake Spillway is currently 340 cubic metres per second (12,000 cubic feet per second). This release is expected to continue through July.

With favourable weather conditions, and the reservoir elevation showing signs of having reached a crest, it is unlikely that an increase to 396 cms (14,000 cfs) will be required. Alcan continues to monitor the situation in close cooperation with the WCO and the NFCP, with dam safety and flood control as the highest priorities.

- Inflows into the reservoir for July 1 (to July 3) have averaged 425 cms (15,000 cfs) per day.
- The flow of the Nechako River at Vanderhoof as of July 04 was 500 cms (17,600 cfs).
- Peak river flow to date was 534 cms (18,860 cfs) on May 19. It is unlikely that this peak will be exceeded.
- The reservoir is currently 5.6 inches (to July 4) from the top of its normal maximum operating level.

For more information, please call the local office of the Ministry of Environment, or Alcan's regional office in Vanderhoof at 567-5105 (Prince George: 561-1189). Skins Lake Spillway discharges are posted on Alcan's homepage at <http://www.sno.net/alcan>. Flow Facts information is also available 24 hours a day by recorded message in Vanderhoof at 567-5812.



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