

# River water to raise 2 lakes

## TransAlta to pay \$12M Wabamun tab; province gets Buffalo Lake bill

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### Wabamun Lake

River water will be piped into two central Alberta lakes which have shrunk drastically in recent years.

But while a power company pays at Wabamun Lake, taxpayers will foot the bill at Buffalo Lake.

TransAlta Utilities will spend at least \$12 million to help restore the level of Wabamun Lake, 60 km west of Edmonton, which has fallen more than 70 cm since 1992. It will use water from the North Saskatchewan River.

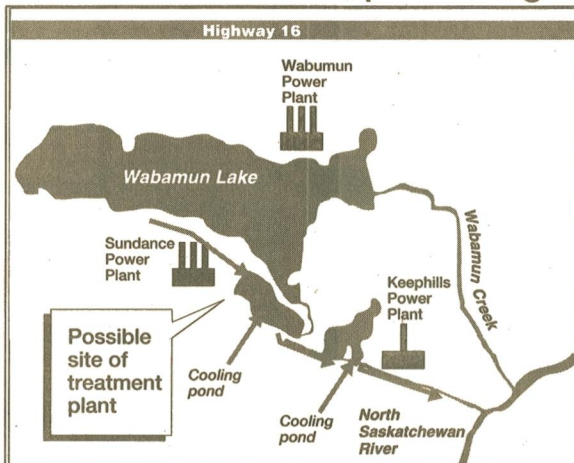
Drought conditions are mostly to blame for the falling lake level. But TransAlta — which generates most of Alberta's power at three coal-burning plants bordering the lake — admits it is responsible for more than 40 per cent of the drop.

The operating licences for its Wabamun and Keephills plants expire April 1, 1996. The licence for the Sundance plant expired last year. Alberta Environment has said it won't renew the three licences until the lake level problem is resolved.

TransAlta expects to spend at least \$10 million to build a treatment plant so it can pump water from the Sundance plant's cooling pond into the lake. It could cost more, depending on its capacity and the level of treatment. Other measures will cost about \$2 million.

The treatment plant's operating cost will be at least \$250,000 a year.

Water is already pumped from the North Saskatchewan River into the



Sundance cooling pond. Excess water — dirtied by the plant's boilers and natural pollutants — is now returned to the river.

Cooling pond water will have to be treated before it can be put in the lake, says Dwayne Dychkowski, manager of the Sundance plant. The plan has the approval in principle of a review committee of lake users and summer cottagers, he says.

The plant may be approved by residents and the Environment Department by Dec. 31. But it would be at least another 18 months before water starts flowing into the lake.

Water from the Red Deer River will start flowing next spring into Buffalo Lake, 110 km southeast of Edmonton. The project honors a promise to area residents by former premier Don Getty, who lives near Rochon Sands, a summer village on the lake's west shore.

Untreated water from the Red Deer River will be pumped over a height of land into a system of enlarged creeks draining into the lake. The capital cost is about \$9.5 million. Pumping will cost at least \$200,000 a year while the lake is being filled.

That's expected to take at least three years, says Ray Kerber, an Alberta Environment engineer.

The lake has dropped half a metre in the past six years.

Drought conditions have lowered it so much that Rochon Sands residents built a nine-hole golf course on land that was under water six years ago.

Screens will be used at the pump house to block fish not native to the lake. An acoustic device will also be used to scare fish away from the intake.

Studies show the river's water quality is better than the lake, which is quite alkaline, says Kerber. River water has more phosphorus but it's not expected to harm the lake.

Buffalo and Wabamun Lakes will be the second and third in Alberta to be stabilized by river diversions. Gull Lake has been stabilized at taxpayer expense since 1974, using water from the Blindman River. Pumping costs \$50,000 a year.

Using public money to restore Buffalo Lake is justified because all Albertans benefit, not just those with cottages on the lake, says John Lund. He's mayor of Alix, 15 km southwest of the lake, and a member of a lake stabilization advisory committee.

It will improve recreation on the lake which has a provincial park on its southeast shore. It would be no more reasonable to ask local residents and cottagers to pay for it than it would be to ask them to pay for primary and secondary highways in the area, he says.