

Waterfowl group left out of lake project

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of The Advocate

After suggesting the government appoint a management team to guide the Buffalo Lake stabilization project, Ducks Unlimited was shocked to be left off the roster.

The conservation group was absent from the list of names announced by Environment Minister Ralph Klein last week. The list included two government officials, three local councillors, a farmer and members of three lake-side community groups — all project supporters.

"I really think it was an oversight and I'm really hoping it will be corrected," said Kim Schmitt, the south-central manager for Ducks Unlimited Canada.

"I can't believe it any other way."

Buffalo Lake and the surrounding wetlands is one of the top three areas for waterfowl in the prairie provinces.

To ensure it stays that way, Ducks Unlimited has spent about \$3 million to help pre-

serve waterfowl habitat.

The Buffalo Lake stabilization project will change water levels in the area by diverting water from the Red Deer River to Alix Lake and then through Parlbay Creek to Buffalo Lake.

At a cost of \$13 million, the project, which lies in Premier Don Getty's riding, has been widely criticized for benefitting too few Albertans at too great a cost.

Concern about possible effects of the project on prime waterfowl habitat fueled Ducks Unlimited's push for a management team.

Mr. Schmitt pitched the idea to Alberta Environment project managers attending the public hearings held in Alix last May.

On Monday he said he's still hopeful for a spot. After spending eight years in the area, "we really feel we've got something to offer."

Rod Love, executive assistant for Environment Minister Ralph Klein, said the de-

partment didn't realize the conservation group was upset.

"Ducks Unlimited hasn't contacted us."

He said the minister would likely be open to the idea of adding a representative from the conservation group to the team.

Red Deer River Naturalists president Mike McNaughton said the selection process has slighted all environmental groups.

"My gut reaction is, being in the premier's riding they wanted things nice, neat and tidy."

Mr. Love said the team was chosen to represent a good cross-section of stakeholders in the stabilization project.

"Everybody's got their own ideas as to what is an environmentalist or conservationist."

"Ask any farmer and he'll tell you he's the original conservationist."

An overwhelming majority of people in the area support the project so choosing three opponents for the management wouldn't make any sense, Mr. Love said.

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