

Premier buoyant over water level

☐ Getty still pushing for upgrade of lake near country home

By Ashley Geddes

(Herald Edmonton bureau)

DEC. 12
1990

EDMONTON — Premier Don Getty has dismissed calls to exclude himself from pushing for provincial funding to raise the level of water at Buffalo Lake adjacent to his country estate.

And while the \$15-million project has yet to undergo environmental impact hearings, Getty told the legislature Tuesday he's determined to see the lake upgraded to make it a recreation attraction for central Alberta.

"And we're going to do all the necessary things from an environmental point of view, and then we're going to make it happen," Getty said defiantly. "Isn't it too bad?"

The comment raised the ire of New Democrat tourism critic Jerry Doyle, who had questioned whether it was appropriate for Getty to be pushing for the project to proceed.

Doyle said there's an "appearance" that Getty could benefit personally from the project, since raising the water level will increase the value of land surrounding the lake for tourism and recreational use.

Doyle also questioned whether Getty has overruled Environment Minister Ralph Klein, who says the project will be subject to a full environmental impact assessment before any go-ahead is given.

A series of government studies over the last decade rejected proposals to raise the water level on economic and environmental grounds.

However, new life was pumped into the plan when a new Alberta Environment study was released within months of Getty's byelection victory in the Stettler riding, where the lake is located.

That study contradicted the earlier studies by concluding Red Deer River water could be diverted into the lake without harming the environment or lake water quality.

A consultant was then hired to conduct an environmental impact assessment.

The consultant's final report has yet to be released, but the draft report concluded the water diversion wouldn't harm water quality.

The report also noted there would be few economic benefits to the project, except for some recreational interests around the lake.

Getty told reporters he's optimistic the project will proceed and that it will meet environmental standards.

"It's going to be a great project for central Alberta," he said.

Klein later downplayed Getty's comments, insisting a final decision on the project won't be made until hearings are held next year.

"But if it's environmentally unsafe, then it simply won't happen," Klein said, suggesting Getty was only speaking as MLA for the area.

Getty recently built a home overlooking the lake.