

Preliminary river plan 'feasible'

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The average flow measured near Red Deer's CP Rail bridge in June for the five-year period through 1988 was 1,620 cubic feet per second, said Roger Drury of the Alberta River Forecast Centre.

On a normal summer day, the city consumes water at the rate of 15 cubic feet per second, Gordon Stewart, city public works manager, said.

"The plan at the present time is preliminary because we don't have all the answers," Mr. Grover said of the water transfer scheme. "But all the indications that we have are that it is feasible and we should go ahead with phase two to determine all of the problems that there are."

The water resources commission, which less than five years ago held public hearings on the South Saskatchewan River basin, concluded that the river could support a water transfer plan, Mr. Grover said.

And he said initial studies by Alberta Environment suggest water can be withdrawn at the rate proposed without adversely affecting other downstream users.

A preliminary engineering investigation and design of a preferred canal or pipeline route will also form part of the stage two study, scheduled for completion in a year.

At that point, the committee should be in a position to decide if the proposed water transfer plan is economically and environmentally sound, Mr. Grover said.

Although Mr. Grover acknowledged the idea could not be pursued without the flow regulation provided by the Dickson Dam, he dismissed the notion that irrigation is the main purpose of the plan.

"There will be some irrigation for the purpose of raising feed which is in very short supply in the area," he said.

But the main goal of the multi-purpose plan is to supply water to the normally dry Berry and Sounding Creeks for livestock watering while boosting dwindling municipal water supplies and increasing the region's recreation potential.

The committee studying the plan was set up late last year when the special areas board and the Prairie Association for Water Management raised their concerns with several MLAs and cabinet ministers who were visiting the area.

Ernie Isley, then minister of public works, supply and services and now minister of agriculture, Glen Clegg, Dunvegan MLA who is water commission chairman, Shirley McClellan, MLA for Chinook, and Tom Musgrove, Tory member from Bow River, met with the group.

Mrs. McClellan, whose constituency takes in the special areas, is a member of the steering committee.

"I don't think it is a pie in the sky idea at all," the associate agriculture minister said. "I am fully supportive of their (the committee's) work in getting an assured supply of water to stabilize the area."

The Prairie Association for Water Management, a nearly four-year-old umbrella group formed to develop water strategies, and the special areas board are also represented on the committee along with the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration and Ducks Unlimited.

An in-office study by Alberta Environment identified four possible ways to transfer water south.

Three of the alternatives involve digging a 90-km long canal. The

least preferred option is a \$194-million pipeline from the river just upstream of the Dry Island Buffalo Jump Provincial Park.

The precise size of the canal depends on the amount of water it would carry, however, preliminary estimates indicate it could be five metres wide and nearly two metres deep.

The most attractive of the three suggested canal alternatives is the Nevis route because of lower projected construction and operating costs. It has an estimated \$86-million price tag, including the two-km pipeline from a pumping station at a site at the Red Deer River just east of Ardley.

The Big Valley canal route, beginning southwest of the village, carries an anticipated \$99-million construction cost while the longer Stettler plan would cost \$104 million.

Mr. Grover said the provincial government would be counted on for most of the construction dollars, but argued a drought-proofing plan would reduce the annual bill for provincial drought assistance in the special areas.

He said the special areas board has spent about \$200,000 on its application to the provincial energy board for a 14.9-megawatt \$34-million power station at the Dickson Dam.

But approval of the application over rival bids from three private firms would give the water transfer scheme added momentum, Mr. Grover said.

He said profits from selling the electricity to TransAlta Utilities would be used to cover the energy costs of pumping water from the Red Deer River, thereby making the proposed pumping station self-sufficient.