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Lake project delayed

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Provincial cutbacks have delayed a controversial plan to raise the level of Buffalo Lake.

The project's completion has been set back a year and about \$2 million has been chopped from its \$11.3-million budget, said project manager Ken Looten.

But environmentalists have maintained the plan should be scrapped entirely because it's a waste of money.

They argue that habitat, like the endangered piping plover bird, will be destroyed when the lake level rises.

However Angus Braseth, chairman of a project management team, said area residents want the project finished as soon as possible.

"Naturally people are upset (at the delay), but they understand there is a money shortage. We have to wait another year, but we've already been waiting 40-50 years."

He said residents look forward to having the highly fluctuating lake levels stabilized.

The project would increase water supplies and provide more recreation opportunities on the lake, he said.

Mr. Looten said initial plans were to raise the lake by as much as 75 cm next summer. Now he's looking at 1995 or 1996.

Work to raise the lake's level is part of a \$15.2-million water management project that began in 1985.

Entering its last stages, parts of the project had to be downsized or altered because of provincial cuts, said Mr. Looten.

For instance, rather than having a automated spillway, a structure on a dam to let water through, it will be manual, he said.

Mr. Looten said there is some concern the changes will increase future maintenance costs, but doesn't believe that will be the case.

Premier Ralph Klein has indicated the project will be finished.

Mr. Looten said work will be done at a slower rate because money is getting tighter.

"Every project manager like myself is going to have to fight to get a fair share."

Mr. Looten does not believe former premier Don Getty's departure from the Buffalo Lake area is related in any way to the project slow down.

A pumphouse to take in water from the Red Deer river was just completed, and work will begin on pipelines next year to transport water.