



Calgary River Communities Action Group

Clark: Flood mitigation an opportunity for NDP to show leadership

By Greg Clark

The second anniversary of the 2013 flood gives us a chance to reflect on the impact this life-changing event has had on our community. In the days and weeks after the flood, we showed the world what we're made of. Thousands of people pitched in to help total strangers dig out their basements, and neighbours with less damage helped those worse off than themselves.

We showed the world, but more importantly, we showed each other, what it means to be an Albertan. And while we should remember the positives that came out of the aftermath of the flood, we must not be complacent.

Another flood is coming, we just don't know when.

It is well documented by experts the world over that climate change makes events like the 2013 flood more frequent and more severe. And while it looks like drought is a bigger risk this year (although we're not out of the woods yet), it's another sign that our weather will swing from flood to drought and back again.

That means we must mitigate both problems, and fast.

Let us never forget the five people who lost their lives in the flood, and count ourselves lucky the number was not much higher. Think also of

the first responders who risked their lives running toward danger while the rest of us found safety.

And think about the economic impact: the 2013 flood was the most expensive natural disaster in Canadian history and the flood waters came within inches of entering downtown from the south via 2nd, 4th and 5th streets. If that happens, the damage could be in the tens of billions and the lost business and impact on the thousands of people living and working downtown would be immeasurable.

The provincial government has conducted extensive studies on how best to protect downtown Calgary and communities upstream and downstream from the inevitable next flood. Of the three options — Springbank, McLean Creek and the Glenmore tunnel — it is clear the Springbank offshore reservoir offers the greatest protection, in the shortest time, for the lowest cost.

And despite claims that McLean Creek can be completed in a similar time frame at a similar cost, the environmental review for a project that would dam a river containing protected species of fish, in grizzly bear country, in pristine wilderness, would take considerably longer and has no guarantee of approval. Springbank, on the other hand, is proposed for land that has been under human cultivation for over a century and requires much less intervention in the flow of the river.

Springbank also has a significant financial return; the money invested will save hundreds of millions, or even billions, of Alberta taxpayer dollars, not to mention ensuring downtown Calgary, one of Canada's economic engines, remains a safe and stable place to do business.

As the project moves forward, it is critical that landowners in Springbank are treated with respect and within the bounds of the law. As with countless other projects (the recent expansions of Glenmore Trail and 16th Avenue, to name just two), there are times when the greater public good means private land is acquired by government. This is one of those times.

Combined with funding already committed to protect Bragg Creek and Redwood Meadows, as well as the work committed for High River, the Springbank offstream reservoir will protect the lives and livelihood of hundreds of thousands of Albertans.

Work must also continue on the proposed McLean Creek dam and the Glenmore tunnel. I agree with Mayor Naheed Nenshi: we likely need more than one upstream mitigation solution to prevent a flood equal to or greater than the one that hit in 2013, and all projects should remain under consideration.

We also need a plan for the Bow River, for drought mitigation, and for the long-term water needs of a rapidly growing region. I encourage the provincial government to work with officials from the City of Calgary to determine if a new retention dam can address both flood and drought mitigation on the Bow River, or if separate flood and drought mitigation projects are needed.

Two years after the worst natural disaster in Alberta history, it is time for action. This is an opportunity for our new provincial government to show leadership and demonstrate their commitment to Calgary and southern Alberta.

We must not delay. Every spring brings risk.

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