



ALBERTA

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Drayton Valley-Devon*

AR 53284

October 30, 2013

Mr. Lyall Kortzman, President
Muriel Lake Basin Management Society
lisenden@telus.net

Dear Mr. Kortzman:

Thank you for your emails expressing your continued concern about Muriel Lake and your suggestion that we establish a task force of professional engineers to recommend remedial strategies for the lake. I recognize how important Alberta's lakes are in maintaining healthy ecosystems and the vital role they play for our economic development and our social well-being. I appreciate your concern for Muriel Lake.

Over the past several years, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development staff have conducted numerous investigations and studies related to Muriel Lake's water levels and fisheries conditions. Muriel Lake is relatively shallow with a large surface area and a small contributing watershed; therefore, the lake is prone to large, naturally occurring fluctuations in lake levels. Our staff have concluded that the declining water levels can be attributed to natural causes and the dry climatic conditions the area has experienced since the early 1980s. This is evident in other lakes in the region too.

Agriculture and Rural Development's data indicates that precipitation from September 2012 to September 2013 has been about 80 per cent of normal. This phenomenon of low precipitation in this area is expected to occur once every 6 to 12 years. Given the relatively low precipitation over the past year, the 8 centimetre decline in water level would be expected.

Currently, a moratorium is in place prohibiting water diversions for industrial withdrawals from Muriel Lake and all other water bodies within the watershed. A pipeline construction project several kilometers east of Muriel Lake generated concerns about impact to water flow. I understand that Environment and Sustainable Resource Development staff have followed up with you about these concerns by providing you with information from Enbridge and the Alberta Energy Regulator.

The declining water levels, coupled with increased nutrients can lead to increased algae blooms and abundant aquatic vegetation. When these biological materials decompose, they consume oxygen resulting in low oxygen conditions in the lake. In these instances we can see periodic partial fish summerkills or winterkills. This situation has occurred in many other lakes in Alberta.

Alberta Health Services administers an inspection program for public beaches and concerns about blue green algae. If you suspect a problem related to an algae bloom, or if you require information on blue green algae, you can contact Health Link Alberta at 1-866-408-5465.

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Environment and Sustainable Resource Development continues to work actively with the Muriel Lake Basin Management Society to address areas of concern. Staff have communicated regularly with society members and met to discuss key findings from our studies and investigations.

Significant work has been completed to date and I appreciate the input and co-operation from the Muriel Lake Basin Management Society. At this time, we don't think any substantial new knowledge will be gained by funding further studies to explain the causes of declining water levels or developing mitigation measures.

I am pleased that representatives from the society attended the community sessions we arranged for water conversations. Our department is in the process of completing the report of what we heard from the sessions and the extensive input we received. I can tell you it was clear that Albertans are eager for more information about our lakes. They have a strong stewardship ethic, and want to be part of the solution. We also heard that Albertans support enhanced, integrated approaches that provide a province-wide framework to lake management, while acknowledging the realities of natural local variation. We will continue to explore these ideas as the next step in the process with the opportunity for consultation and input from Albertans.

If you would like further information, please contact Mr. Abdi Siad-Omar, Senior Planner, in Edmonton at 780-427-7227 (dial 310-0000 for a toll-free connection), or at abdi.siad-omar@gov.ab.ca. Thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention.

Sincerely,



Diana McQueen
Minister

c: Abdi Siad-Omar
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development