

Cochrane Eagle

Deadline for feedback on public notice causes confusion

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Rocky View County has applied for government approval on a permit solution to Cochrane Lake's flooding woes, but concerns have been raised about the application's notice.

Some are concerned after the county appeared to have published the notice – the application under the Water Act for the construction of permanent flood mitigation infrastructure to pump water from the lake to Horse Creek – a number of days after the deadline for residents to submit formal concerns to the regulatory body.

The notice, published in Rocky View Weekly and the Eagle Aug. 11 and Aug. 13 respectively, described how “any person who is directly affected” by the application could submit a statement of concern to Environment and Parks Regulatory Approval Centre within seven days of providing the notice.

On Alberta Environment and Parks' webpage “Alberta Water Act Public Notices,” the deadline for RVC's notice was Aug. 7. Thirty-year Cochrane Lake resident Gloria Wilson said the notice's deadline to submit statements was unclear. Wilson said she went on the page to see the Aug. 7 deadline but was left confused since the notice was published in the Rocky View Weekly a few days past the deadline.

“Was that seven days from July 30 or seven days from date of the newspaper?”

Grant Kaiser, RVC communications manager, explained that residents could still submit concerns after Aug. 7 despite the notice being published four and six days after the government-listed deadline.

Kaiser said that the timeframe to submit statements lasted from the day it was published to seven days after to accompany the slower pace of information dissemination in rural communities.

“When you got a notice in Calgary, it will be in tomorrow's paper. When you got a notice in a rural community it doesn't happen for a week.

“We're dealing with weekly media in the county not daily media.”

Kaiser explained the line “providing the notice” meant by publishing it and argued it was unequivocal. “Anybody reading any individual ad would be pretty clear.”

Wilson and Sarah Leete would disagree.

Leete, president of the Little Creeks and Rough Fescue Appreciation Society, did end up filing a statement Aug. 19, but said she was also left confused in regards to the deadline.

She pointed out that it was published two separate times (Aug. 11 and 13) and no actual date was on the notice.

“It's just like Alice in Wonderland quite frankly.”

Wilson concurred: “There was never a finite deadline date on there.”

The Eagle confirmed with the regulatory approval centre that the timeframe existed within seven days of the most recent publication. They also confirmed they received a number of concerns.

Division 2 councillor Jerry Arshinoff said that even with the timeframe, the timing of the notice's release is problematic since people are away during the summer season.

"Generally, people don't pay that much attention during summer, especially the people with little kids. A lot of people will miss it... and wouldn't be looking for the notice now as they would be other times.

"It still remains the amount of time that anybody would have to respond, it's miniscule."

Currently, the temporary pipeline installed two years ago for intermediate flood mitigation remains in ground at the site.

Kaiser said Alberta Environment and Parks gave the county permission to install the pipeline before a permanent solution was determined.

He added that the county was planning on using the pipeline as part of the permanent solution with pending approval of the application.

Wilson decided against filing a complaint, on the grounds that the notice was merely a 'hollow gesture' by the county.

"Let's say they got 100 responses to that public notice of people objecting. What are they going to do anyway if people object?"

"It's not worth the paper it's written on."

As it stands, the deadline has now passed for residents to file statements of concern.