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Alberta Flood Mitigation Funding Ignores River Ecology

Only three percent of the \$625 million announced yesterday by the Alberta government for the next three years of flood protection work will support flood and drought-buffering wetlands, forests and river corridors. 97 percent of the funds are assigned to projects to further harden river banks, or to build or expand weirs, dams and reservoirs. Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) asks the Alberta government to implement ecologically-sound watershed management principles to better protect Albertans from future floods and droughts.

“Budgets speak louder than words, and the Alberta government’s valuing of watershed ecology appears to be only symbolic,” says AWA conservation specialist Carolyn Campbell. “It is relying almost entirely on activities that reduce natural flood and drought resiliency and watershed health, while facilitating ongoing construction in floodplains.”

The proposed dry dam on the upper Elbow headwaters is of particular concern since it will likely further degrade an ecologically sensitive headwaters area that is important to absorb, purify and slowly release surface water and groundwater.

56 percent (\$350 million) of provincial flood mitigation funding in the next three years is directed to community projects that appear to mainly encourage narrowing and hardening of river channels within a small portion of the flood plain. 41 percent (\$254 million) of funding is for new or enlarged artificial water diversion or impoundment structures.

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