

Federal court sides with Springbank dam opponents, calling on environment minister to weigh in

Diversion project would consume 1,461 hectares of land at a cost of about \$250 million

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The Federal Court of Canada says Ottawa must decide whether there should be a public review of a controversial plan to build a reservoir in Springbank, just west of Calgary, siding with landowners opposed to the project.

The dam is designed to protect Calgary from Elbow River flooding,

The landowners argued federal Environment Minister Catherine McKenna must make the final decision on whether the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency reviews the project or whether there should be an independent study.

Last week, Federal Court Judge Douglas Campbell agreed, setting aside the agency's [decision last June](#) that an assessment of the dam project would be conducted by the agency itself.

"The minister is to personally decide the redetermination," the judge said in his ruling in favour of the application submitted by members of the group [dontdamnspringbank.org](#).

The decision could delay the project, which would consume 1,461 hectares of land at a cost of about \$250 million.

In a flood year, the project would see water from the Elbow River diverted into a canal toward a reservoir on land currently owned by people like Lee Drewry.

He could see his land bought by the province to make way for the project, which would be located about 15 kilometres west of Calgary — south of the Trans-Canada Highway, east of Highway 22 and north of Highway 8.

'Misguided project'

Drewry said he's pleased the federal judge has sided with the landowners. "It's another setback for what is a really misguided project," he said.

The landowners argue another flood-mitigation option, which involves building a permanent reservoir in the McLean Creek area farther to the west, is a better choice.

That plan was rejected on the basis that it would be more expensive, harder to build and cause more damage to environmentally sensitive areas.

Mayor wants flood protection for Calgary

Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi said he wants the Springbank project to get going because it's needed to protect Calgary from another flood on the Elbow River.

"It's always been clear that there would need to be something on the federal side here as well," he said.

"I'm just hoping that the minister will understand that a lot of good work has been done already and proceed as quickly as possible."

Alberta's infrastructure minister, Brian Mason, said in a statement he is reviewing the court decision, but that he wants the project built as quickly as possible to protect people from floods.

In 2013, rain drenched southern Alberta, causing the [worst flooding in decades](#).

Rivers bulged and overflowed onto city streets, forcing tens of thousands of residents to evacuate their homes. The flooding caused as much as \$6 billion in damage — the most costly disaster in Canadian history.

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