

Ponoka first in line for Red Deer River water

By LISA JOY/ Editor

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After years of discussions and planning, water from the Red Deer River will be flowing through Ponoka's taps May 1.

"We're going to be going on a stage process," said John Van Doesburg, administrator for the North Red Deer River Water Service Commission.

"We will be zoning the community, starting with Riverside first and then moving to other parts of town for the next 10 days."

The transition to Red Deer River water is welcome news, says Mayor Larry Henkelman.

"I definitely think it will be good for the community especially down the road in the future. It assures us of a decent water supply for the next 20 years."

Henkelman says the town's ground water wells have been evaporating. "Ours has been going down the last few years especially with the drought."

The transition for getting on tap with Red Deer River water will involve flushing the lines and emptying the reservoirs.

"We'll drain the reservoir down to a reasonable level so there is still fire protection if something happens," said Van Doesburg. "Soon as we get down to a reasonable level in the reservoir, then we will start introducing Red Deer water."

"Residents will not notice any pressure changes so that all of a sudden there's no water," he added. "Gradually over a day or two the Red Deer water will be the main water in the system."

Residents shouldn't notice any discoloration or bad taste, says Van Doesburg.

"This water is clear. It's pristine. Turbidity will be zero. There might be a little taste difference at the beginning."

Ponoka is the first community on the water line to hook up to the estimated \$35 million computerized system that will be operated out of Red Deer.

"After we have a good flow of water to Ponoka then we will work our way back," explained Van Doesburg. "Blackfalds has only one reservoir so it's not a good place to start and could be an issue. But we have a lot of backup in the Town of Ponoka. There are three reservoirs."

The new system will be monitored for problems.

"With the pressure coming in we'll have to test it out and change a few things around," said Van Doesburg. "There's a massive computer system that will run the system and we'll make adjustments as we go along. Two of us will have access to it, myself and the lead operator out of Lacombe. We'll be able to turn valves on and off to reservoirs as need be."

The 62-kilometre regional pipeline has been in the works since 1996 after five municipal partners united to develop a supportable source of water to supply the needs of the rapidly growing communities. It will provide treated Red Deer River water purchased from the city to Ponoka, Lacombe, Blackfalds and the counties of Ponoka and Lacombe.

Ponoka County is expected to eventually hook up to the line.

"They have identified sites for us. It's not just sticking a tap out of the ground. We have to make sure the reservoir is there and a system so it will run properly.

"They are looking at this the right way," he added. "The County is doing a good job."

Henkelman says the water flowing through the lines will be treated different than the town's former system and residents who are on kidney dialysis or who have fish tanks should take adequate precautions.

"People probably will notice a difference."

The water will have reduced alkaline and sodium levels. The water hardness will increase slightly. Water will be treated with the City of Red Deer's disinfection process called chloramination. It utilizes both chlorine and ammonia to disinfect water. It produces low levels of disinfectant by-products such as trihalomethanes which are suspected carcinogens that form when chlorine combines with natural organic substances in water.

But, like chlorine, chloramines need to be neutralized in water for those on kidney dialysis. Also for aquariums, live seafood tanks, laboratories requiring high-purity water and those who process photographic materials.

"Some people will taste it but the water is safe," said Van Doesburg.