

Supply—Northern Affairs

Thames valley conservation authority have sent delegations to Ottawa, for a long time without success, I might say. I know that the hon. member for Perth, who is now Minister of National Health and Welfare, the hon. member for Middlesex East, myself and other hon. members have constantly requested the government over the years to make a contribution toward the completion of this project.

I might say in this regard that the federal government pays 37½ per cent of the cost, the provincial government of Ontario 37½ per cent, and the remaining 25 per cent is paid by the municipalities concerned. The first part of this project having been completed in 1953 and having proved eminently successful, finally at long last in January of this year an agreement was signed with the Ontario government and by the middle of April engineering plans had been approved by the provincial and federal governments for the necessary steps to complete this project.

It is my understanding that engineering contracts have been approved for the Mitchell channel improvement scheme, the Woodstock channel improvement scheme, the Woodstock dam and reservoir and the Wildwood dam and reservoir. I also understand that work is already under way on these projects and that an actual start on construction is to be expected late this summer or early this fall.

I should like to take this opportunity to commend the minister and the government for being so farsighted as to take steps to complete this very valuable project. On completion the upper Thames river conservation authority will be a prototype or, if you wish to put it this way, it will be a "pilot project" which will serve as an example for similar projects in other parts of Canada that are thickly populated agricultural and industrial areas.

I should also like at this time to express the appreciation and thanks of everyone in the area to the members of the authority and their executive committees, and particularly to Mr. Gordon Pittock, the chairman of the upper Thames valley conservation authority. The untiring work and effort that these people have put into the completion of this scheme are highly commendable and they deserve the thanks of all the people in the area.

I see that the item in the estimates for this project this year is \$350,000 which will mean a nice start during the current year. The estimated cost of the completed project is a little less than \$10 million and the federal government's share is not to exceed \$3,600,000 over the next few years.

I should like to point out for the benefit of other members that there will be a great

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

many very direct benefits from a project of this type which may be given consideration in other parts of the country. First of all, it provides flood protection for the communities along the river. I can well remember that when I was a student at the university in London in 1937 about 7,000 people were flooded out. I remember losing all my notes for examinations, which was a sad state of affairs indeed.

In addition, this particular project will ensure that there is a greater water supply for the larger urban areas such as London, Stratford and Woodstock. One of the most important aspects of such a project is that it will ensure a more constant rate of flow of water during the dry season in the summer and fall months. This, of course, will greatly assist in the disposal of sewage from the various industrial plants in the municipalities and will prevent pollution of the river which retards the development of recreational and living areas and, indeed, industrial areas along the river banks. During the summer months the odour from the Thames river near Woodstock, London, Ingersoll and elsewhere is anything but agreeable, and a more constant flow of water will greater alleviate this most unpleasant problem.

The recreational use of the lands around reservoirs is, of course, something that is of great benefit to the people in the area. Land for recreational purposes in southwestern Ontario is at a premium because of the greatly increased population. I know that the Fanshawe dam at London has provided some delightful park areas for the people of London and I know that the dams being constructed near St. Mary's and at Woodstock will likewise provide a great deal of fine recreational land not only for the permanent residents of the area but for visitors as well. Also, of course, as these projects are basically conservation projects they will prevent the erosion of valuable agricultural lands during the spring run-offs and will provide a large reservoir of water which will help to maintain the water table throughout the area and the levels of the various farm wells. The value of this last factor is, of course, difficult to estimate. One hears different opinions about it, but there is little doubt that it will greatly assist the level of the water table in the area.

There are other indirect benefits to be derived from this project but I do not wish to take the time of the committee to go into detail. Likewise I do not see the necessity of dealing with the actual figures concerning the number of cubic feet of water that will be stored and so on. These details can, of course, be obtained by any hon. member from the department.