

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #10
December 4, 2009

Status

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team (JIT) reviewed the results from the remainder of the hydrological model runs they requested during their October meeting. These runs included the impact on irrigation delivery under the following water management alternatives: seasonal and annual balancing periods; with Alberta participating in the U.S. St. Mary canal using different water-sharing scenarios; for the theoretical number of acres that could be irrigated reliably with a maximum water supply; and the amount of water each jurisdiction would be entitled to under a water-sharing arrangement different than the 1921 Order. The Team was also presented an update on the First Nations water rights by the representatives of the Blackfoot Tribe, and Ft. Belknap Indian Community.

The Technical Team leads presented a summary of all 70 model run options made to date. They answered questions to clarify details on the potential water management options. JIT members discussed the criteria to be used to evaluate and screen the number of potential options. The evaluation criteria include a numeric element to calculate 1) the percent share and volume of water that an option could provide to each jurisdiction, and 2) irrigation reliability, and a non-numeric element where best professional judgement will be used to assess other potential impacts of providing better access to the shared water of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers. JIT members then reviewed and agreed to eliminate about 23 potential options (both technical and administrative) from further evaluation. Final, detailed review of the remainder of potential options will be pursued at the January 2010 meeting.

Background

The St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative is being conducted under a Terms of Reference approved by Premier Stelmach and Governor Schweitzer in January 2009. Under the Terms of Reference, Montana and Alberta agree that the shared water of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers is an important resource to both jurisdictions and that there are opportunities for the two jurisdictions to work together to improve their timing and access to this shared water. Alberta and Montana have shared the water from the two rivers for 100 years, under Article VI of the Boundary Waters Treaty (1909).

The Terms of Reference establishes a twelve member Joint Initiative Team of local water users and government officials from both sides of the border. The Team has been asked to explore and evaluate options for improving both Montana's and Alberta's access to the shared waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers, and make joint recommendations on preferred options to both governments for their consideration and approval. A report containing the joint recommendations is due to both governments in the fall of 2010.

The Joint Initiative Team is co-chaired by Robert Harrison from Alberta Environment, and Anne Yates from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Other team members include representatives from the Milk River Watershed Council Canada, Oldman Watershed Council, Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development, the office of Montana's Lt. Governor, Blackfoot Tribe, Ft. Belknap Indian Community, and the Milk River watershed in Montana.