

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #11
January 25, 2010

Status

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team (JIT) reviewed the results from several hydrological model runs completed since their December meeting. These runs included various options for increased storage in Fresno Reservoir, opportunities for sharing the St. Mary Canal, and new off-stream storage on the Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana.

Team members agreed that the remaining options should be discussed in the context of the potential to implement them in the short, medium, or long-term. Both Teams agreed in principle that some form of annual balancing is the most promising short-term option, rehabilitation of the St. Mary Canal should be pursued in the medium-term, and new or increased storage is a beneficial long-term solution. Both jurisdictions recognize the right of the other jurisdiction to capture its full share of water through the construction of storage or by administrative means.

Both Teams will now define, in their own terms, the principles and guidelines that should be followed in refining the parameters of the short, medium, and long-term options. Developing a joint set of principles and guidelines will be discussed at the February 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, Blackfeet Tribe, Ft. Belknap Indian Community, and the Milk River watershed in Montana.