

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #12
February 25, 2010

Status

The Joint Initiative Team (JIT) reviewed the results from hydrological model runs completed since their January meeting. The Team has reduced the number of potential water management options to be evaluated from twenty-some to primarily two, and Montana proposed an option to evaluate the impact to each jurisdiction if the proportion of shares was changed. All potential options are intended to help each jurisdiction acquire better access to its entitlement.

The potential options are: (1) administrative – a credit-based system where water must flow into and be credited to a jurisdiction before there can be withdrawals against that credit, and (2) structural – storage alternatives, and the rehabilitation and sharing the capacity of the U.S. St. Mary diversion canal. Each jurisdiction outlined its proposed credit-based system and potential alternative details to modify and refine it. The potential implications to the shares were modelled for both rivers and are being further refined. The goals for the structural options include helping Montana improve its water management, and moving both Alberta and Montana towards accessing 100% of their shares.

The Technical Team clarified a number of aspects of the proposals. The Technical Team will now undertake more detailed modelling to better define the potential impacts of the options and the refining details. That information will be presented at the next Joint Team 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.