

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #14
July 21, 2010

Status

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team (JIT) completed their review of approximately 100 water management options that have been developed over the past 12 months. These options can be broadly broken down into those that can be implemented through administrative procedures, and options requiring construction or modification of infrastructure. Alberta and Montana co-chairs took turns summarizing the core information each jurisdiction gleaned from the hydrological modeling results. The teams shared their vision of success for the current Initiative and presented their recommendations for preferred water management options. Team members agreed that there was sufficient commonality in the two proposals to warrant further investigation of an option that combines the proposals.

The Joint Initiative Team established a subcommittee to explore a proposal to blend Alberta's preferred option for the 11 driest years (1st quartile) with Montana's preferred option for the 2nd and 3rd quartiles. Team members agreed that access to water in the wettest years (4th quartile) is not an issue. The subcommittee is to report back to the full JIT membership by mid-October. Members of the subcommittee include the Montana and Alberta co-chairs, water users from both jurisdictions, and the technical team leads.

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.