

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #3
February 20, 2009

Status

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team received presentations on each jurisdiction's water supply and management models, past and ongoing structural and water management investigations (including Montana's ongoing St. Mary Canal rehabilitation work, and past work on storage options in both basins), and additional topics requested by the Team (including losses along the U.S. St. Mary canal, and quantities of annual entitlements that were not able to be diverted).

With the last of the three 'information' meetings complete, the Team has received information on the geography, hydrology, agreements and irrigation systems used in both jurisdictions, as well as the above. The next stage of the process moves into discussion of the opportunities to gain better access to the shared water of the two river systems.

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 John Tubbs 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.