

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #6
June 29, 2009

Status

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team (JIT) toured a portion of St. Mary Diversion and Conveyance Works on the Blackfeet Reservation in MT. Water managers from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation gave JIT members a first-hand look at the storage and conveyance system responsible for diverting water from the St. Mary River to the North Fork of the Milk River. Reclamation's fisheries biologist updated JIT members on the status research on bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) in the Montana portion of the St. Mary basin.

At the meeting, the Technical Team leads updated the JIT on the status of the water management model. The Technical Team is testing and calibrating the model so that it mimics, as closely as possible, actual operations of the system during the 1959-2003 period. JIT members described seventeen potential water management options for the Technical Team to evaluate with the water management model over the next 3 months. For each water management option evaluated, the Technical Team will determine the volume of water each jurisdiction is able to access under the option. Modeling results will be reviewed by the JIT at its fall 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 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.