

**St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative**  
**Joint Status Report #4**  
**April 7, 2009**

**Status**

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team (JIT) toured a portion of the Milk River basin in Montana for a first-hand look at agricultural and municipal water uses in the basin. Water managers from Montana and Saskatchewan described how they cooperate to share water according to the needs of local water users. Team members learned that, in dry years, glacial melt water may contribute 1% - 5% of the total flow in the St. Mary River. JIT members also began the process of identifying the interests (or benefits) their jurisdictions would like to have, when they develop water management options. In addition, Members started to develop the criteria against which they will measure those prospective options. Team members ended their two-day meeting with a brainstorming exercise on what potential water management options could exist to improve both Montana's and Alberta's access to the shared waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers.

**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, Blackfoot Tribe, Ft. Belknap Indian Community, and the Milk River watershed in Montana.