

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #1
December 11, 2008

In a joint announcement, Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer and Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach approved the Terms of Reference for the St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative. 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 access to this shared water. The Initiative will focus on the timing and access by both jurisdictions to their share of the water from the two rivers under Article VI of the Boundary Waters Treaty (1909).

The Terms of Reference also establishes a twelve member Joint Initiative Team of local water users and government officials from both sides of the border. Over the next 18 months, team members will 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 held their inaugural meeting in Lethbridge, AB on December 10 & 11. Team members received a two-day immersion in the geography, climate and hydrology of the St. Mary and Milk River Watersheds. Presentations were also given on the U.S. and Canadian systems of water allocation and use, Montana's federal reserved water right compacts, and the Master Agreement on Apportionment (1969) between the government of Canada, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Subsequent meetings will alternate between Great Falls, MT and Lethbridge, AB.

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.