

St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative
Joint Status Report #9
October 29, 2009

Status

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team (JIT) reviewed preliminary results from additional model runs team members requested during their September meeting. These additional model runs included a modified filling curve for Sherburne Reservoir, modifications to the current Letter of Intent allowing the U.S. to accumulate a larger early season deficit on the St. Mary River, seasonal and annual balancing periods, off canal storage on the St. Mary Canal, and a re-examination of storage on the Milk River in Alberta.

JIT members discussed and came to agreement on a process for evaluating all the potential water management options in order to screen the list to a set of preferred options for recommendation to the Governor and Premier. Initial screening of options is planned to take place in January 2010. JIT members also discussed the possible development of a joint international water management body that could continue some of the work of the current JIT. As proposed, this body would provide a link between water users and the water management agencies in each jurisdiction. Water users on each side of the border would benefit if Montana and Alberta continue to work together in a flexible, cooperative, and coordinated fashion.

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.