

Serving over 370,000 acres



**Presentation To  
International Joint Commission  
On Behalf Of**

***St. Mary River Irrigation District***

**July, 2004**

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*Members of the Commission:*

The St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID), Canada's largest Irrigation District, delivers water to approximately 2,300 water users in the area south of the Oldman River and the South Saskatchewan River between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, Alberta. Originally conceived as early as 1898, it was subsequently surveyed in 1918 to be part of a project of almost 550,000 acres. This was confirmed by an Underwood McLellan Associates (UMA) report in 1977. The project is made up of four (4) Irrigation Districts – Taber Irrigation District (TID), Raymond Irrigation District (RID), St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID) and Magrath Irrigation District (MID), today capped at 517,000 acres. The SMRID was capped at 372,000 acres in 1991 following extensive review of the entire project by the Alberta Government. Any further growth of the SMRID would be based solely on efficiency gains made through water conservation techniques as a result of delivery system improvements and utilization of new and innovative equipment availability, i.e., drop tube, low volume, low pressure pivot or similar equipment.

Construction of the project started slowly in 1896 and by September of 1900 water reached the City of Lethbridge. Since the start of the project, ownership progressed through four (4) stages – Alberta Railway and Irrigation Company (A.R. & I.) 1894 - 1946, with Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) taking control

after 1908, the St. Mary & Milk Rivers Development (SMRD) 1946 – 1968 (a Crown Corporation) and finally as the St. Mary River Irrigation District (SMRID) since 1968, an irrigator owned Irrigation District operating under the Alberta *Irrigation Districts Act*, with seven (7) elected members on the Board of Directors, a General Manager and sixty-four (64) staff members.

The passage of the 1894 North-West Irrigators Act was responsible for the creation of the original concept and has led to the development we see today. As early as 1902, an International Joint Commission was utilized to deal with apportionment discussions which culminated as the Treaty of 1921, some 19 years later. This long-standing agreement is the basis for irrigation development in Southern Alberta and has worked very well in managing and allocating available water to the two signators.

Storage reservoirs, owned and operated by the Province of Alberta, provide the water source for release to the SMRID who own and operate five (5) additional off stream reservoirs throughout the system with a total storage capacity of over 300,000 acre feet. The water made available irrigates 372,000 acres through 1,400 km of earthen and concrete canals and nearly 700 km of underground pipeline. District water licenses from Alberta Environment total 722,000 acre feet.

The District operates approximately 3,250 turnouts to over 1,700 farm units and supplies domestic water to over 2,300 water users. In addition, SMRID provides water to 14 separate cities, towns and villages, 10 different water co-

ops, 15 hutterite colonies and a large number of industrial and municipal users as well as providing recreational and wildlife opportunities on all of their reservoirs. SMRID is closely involved with Ducks Unlimited, Fish & Game Associations, and Partners for Habitat Development on 11 different water storage areas for the support of waterfowl and wildlife habitat conservation. Recreational opportunities that benefit from irrigation include some 14 parks and golf courses throughout the area.

Although the primary purpose of the SMRID is to supply water for irrigation; equally important is the supply of domestic drinking water to most farms, towns and villages within the area. Many of the fine recreational facilities in Southern Alberta can also be attributed to irrigation development as there are few naturally occurring bodies of water. Parks on most reservoirs provide swimming, boating, fishing, water skiing, wind surfing, picnic and camping facilities. The benefit to fish and wildlife populations is also significant due to the creation of wetlands for migratory birds, fish habitat and shelterbelts for wildlife.

The SMRID Main Canal supplying the District is 314 km in length with a capacity of 3,200 cfs at the start, decreasing in size as deliveries are made to Raymond and Taber Irrigation Districts and various secondary canals and storage reservoirs. At Medicine Hat, the capacity is down to 360 cfs. Originally built in the early 1950's, following completion of the St. Mary's River Dam at Spring Coulee, Alberta in 1951, the Main Canal has been reconstructed at a

cost of \$186 million (CDN) between 1982 – 1991 through funding from Alberta Environment.

The Main Canal structures have been automated and can be accessed remotely for more effective monitoring and control of water levels. Seepage controls, such as tile drainage, plastic lining or plastic cut-off curtains, have been provided in problem areas to conserve water and protect surrounding farmlands.

The SMRID has, at present, an annual rehabilitation and reconstruction budget of \$7.5 Million (CDN) to rehabilitate aging works (up to 100 years old) and an additional \$800,000 (CDN) annually to replace and repair failed concrete lined laterals (131 km in total). The District has assets valued at approximately \$568 Million (CDN) as of 2003 to service the irrigators and other users in the District.

Currently, the District is approximately 70% pivot irrigated (70% low pressure – high efficiency – US made) approximately 25% wheel line irrigated and approximately 5% flood or drip irrigated. Our varied climatic conditions allow for the production of some 65 different crops in the District of which approximately 30% are considered specialty (ie. potatoes, sugar beets, corn, canning peas and beans).

Additional utilization of water is made through the production of electricity at 3 sites on the SMRID Main Canal, with a combined nameplate capacity of 36

MW. The plants, valued at \$58.5 Million (CDN), are owned and operated by the Irrigation Canal Power Co-Operative Ltd. (IRRICAN Power), wholly owned and operated by SMRID, TID and RID and directed by a five (5) member elected Board of Directors.

In addition to the above noted users, Alberta has a large feedlot industry centered in the irrigation areas also dependent upon water supply availability. The producers are by and large irrigators of the Districts but there are a number of operations with private licenses that rely on conveyance or special arrangements with the District for crucial water to meet their needs. SMRID supplies nearly 10,000 acre feet of water for various livestock, private licenses and other assorted uses.

As a result of the diversity of production, secondary processing facilities have developed in our area providing jobs and security for our towns and cities. There are at present numerous world class industrial facilities in the District such as Rogers Sugar, Canbra Foods, McCain Foods, Lamb-Weston Processors, Spitz Seeds, Maple Leaf Foods, Sakai Spice, Lucerne Foods, Hostess-Frito Lay and Maple Leaf Hog Processors to name some of the larger ones.

These plants employ anywhere from 20 to 400 people each, depending on season and processing capability. All are reliant on good clean water for their processing needs and would in fact not be here if not for the assurance and stability the Apportionment Agreement has brought to Southern Alberta.

Drought has always been a threat to our semi-arid area and the early pioneers saw irrigation as a way of ensuring production, which would lead to settlement and growth of our area. The drought of 1999 – 2001 saw water supplies diminished and survival of crops and livestock become a major focus of all of Southern Alberta. Water rationing was instituted by the Irrigation Districts and all users were restricted in the amounts that were to be used. Severe restrictions were employed in 2001 with farm operations allowed a total of 10" per acre (normal 18"/acre) and urban and municipal users restricted to 60% of their licensed or historical use. All calculations used in determining these usage numbers were based on apportionment allocations of the 1921 Treaty and the U.S. share of all volumes was calculated as if the U.S. had, in fact, captured and utilized their available volumes. The 2002 season looked similar and in fact rationing was in place when early and plentiful rains negated the need for rationing. The 2004 season saw rationing in place at the start of the season and was only lifted on July 9, 2004 after a cool wet spring, which produced abundant water supplies. Both Northern Montana and Southern Alberta have similar climate conditions and are totally dependant on snow pack and rainfall for water supplies. The long-standing agreement has been the basis for our growth in Southern Alberta and has worked well for us. Uncertainty created by changes or potential change to the Joint Treaty would adversely affect the St. Mary Project, (four Irrigation Districts) and the financial stability of Southern Alberta. Approximately 150,000 people in the basins are dependent on an economy created by irrigation in the Lethbridge to Medicine Hat areas. A good stable water supply has been the reason for our growth and

is the basis for our recreational, wildlife habitat, industrial and municipal water needs. Without it, this area would not have prospered and developed.

We hope that the information provided above will be helpful and welcome questions regarding our irrigation development and history.

Following is a brief summary of our position:

1. Stability of the water supply past and future has been the basis of our development.

A state of the art water management system has been developed in Southern Alberta dependent on the status of the supply and control.

2. A stable, strong efficient working agreement between our countries has benefited both nations, 82 years of history.
3. Cooperation and collaboration on water management has been vital to deal with past and future problems.
4. Economic diversity of Southern Alberta has been dependant on irrigation related water usage.

A finite water supply has led to innovative and unique water management techniques that can be utilized worldwide and are a result of planning and working within a regulated framework.

**St. Mary River Irrigation District Board of  
Directors as of July 22, 2004**

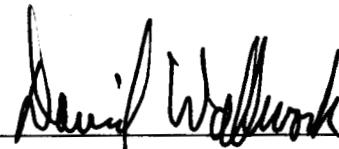
**Division 2 – R. James Csabay, Chairman**

Those lands within Ranges 18, 19 and 20 which are situated to the North of Highway 4 and to the South of Highway 5, but does not include those irrigators obtaining their water from the Main Canal in Twp. 9, Rge. 18, W4th.



**Division 5 – David Wallwork, Vice Chairman**

Those lands situated within Ranges 11 and 12, W4th.



**Division 1 – Walter Genesis**

Those lands situated south of Highway 4 and those lands within Range 21 lying to the north of Highway 4.



**Division 3 – Blaine Takeda**

Those lands within Ranges 18, 19 and 20 which are situated to the North of Highway 3 and also includes those irrigators obtaining their delivery from the Main Canal in Twp. 9 Rge. 18, W4th.



**Division 4 – LeRon Torrie**

Those lands situated within Ranges 13, 14, 15, 16 and 17, W4th.



**Division 6 – Gary Bierback**

Those lands situated within Ranges 8, 9 and 10, W4th and shall also include those lands lying within Twps. 10 and 11 of Range 7, W4th.



**Division 7 – Robert Nemeth**

Those lands situated within Ranges 5 and 6, W4th and shall also include those lands lying within Twps. 12 and 13 of Range 7, W4th.

