

Taber Irrigation District

Specialty Crop Country



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July 26, 2004

INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION (IJC)

Re: St. Mary and Milk Rivers Apportionment

The Taber Irrigation District is very concerned that the IJC would consider reopening the Boundary Waters Treaty and the 1921 Order of the International Joint Commission as it relates to the St. Mary and Milk Rivers. There has been significant development within the boundaries of the Taber Irrigation District (TID) based on water received from the St. Mary River system. In order to sustain this development and to move forward in the future, we need the assurance of continued water diversions from the St. Mary River.

The future economic viability of this area and the ability to plan for the future is dependent upon the stability and certainty of agreements that are in place. If the existing agreements are changed or even just reconsidered, a spirit of uncertainty will be created for the future.

Enclosed is the TID's submission to the IJC's hearings on the St. Mary and Milk River Apportionment.

Yours truly,

M. Kent Bullock, P. Eng.
District Manager

The Importance and Benefit of Water to the Taber Irrigation District

The Taber Irrigation District (TID) delivers water to 82,562 acres of irrigated land in the Taber area. Irrigated agriculture is the backbone of the economy in this area. Many specialty crops are grown because of the good soil, high number of heat units and most importantly, because of the water available for irrigation. If it wasn't for the water, there would be very little agricultural activity.

The Taber area is within the Palliser Triangle, which is a semi-arid area, receiving less than 12 inches of precipitation on average annually. Through major investments in dams, storage reservoirs and canals, surface water is diverted, stored and delivered to this parched land from the St. Mary River. This water is not only used to grow crops, but is used by communities and industries, and for recreation and wildlife habitat. This development has taken place based on the water available through apportionment agreements that are in place.

The TID has 331 kilometres of irrigation conveyance works. Over the last 35 years, most of these works have been rehabilitated through funding provided by the provincial government and the water users. Since 1969, there has been a total expenditure in the TID through the irrigation rehabilitation program of approximately \$45,000,000. Through this program the district's conveyance system is much more responsive and efficient. Delivery system capacities have been increased to provide adequate capacity and severance of land parcels, response times, seepage and return flows have been reduced through the relocation and improvements to canals and the installation of pipelines. The TID now has approximately 60% of its conveyance system in pipelines, 20% in lined canals and 20% in unlined canals.

The TID delivers irrigation water to:

- 877 irrigation parcels**
- 33 terminable agreement parcels, and**
- 6 annual agreement parcels.**

Water is delivered to an additional 300 small parcels for rural and household purposes.

TID also delivers water to other license holders/applicants within the Taber area. These include:

- 7 feedlot operations**
- 7 hog operations**
- 4 dairies**
- 1 poultry operation**
- 9 industries, including Lamb-Weston, Rogers Sugar, Old Dutch, Agricore Bean plant, Riverbend Gravel and Husky Oil**
- 3 recreational areas**
- 4 wildlife projects (Ducks Unlimited), and**
- 2 communities (Taber - pop. 7671 and Barnwell - pop. 548)**

A summary of irrigated crops grown in the TID is as follows:

<u>Crop</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Cereals	22,013
Forages	29,051
Oil Seeds	1,881
Specialty Crops (including potatoes, beans, sugar beets, corn, peas and onions)	26,919
Other	<u>2,698</u>
<u>TOTAL</u>	82,562

It is not only through the growing of these crops, but also through the processing of them, that the economy of the Taber area is benefited.

In 2001, and in the beginning of the 2002 and 2004 irrigation seasons, irrigation districts (including TID), private irrigators, communities, industries and others had to ration water because of water shortages within the St. Mary River system. This has had a significant impact on the economy of the Taber area and the rest of Southern Alberta. Further reductions in available water from the St. Mary River would be devastating to our area and would make the current level of development unsustainable.

The Taber Irrigation District is very concerned that the International Joint Commission would consider reopening the existing apportionment agreement between Canada and the USA as it relates to the St. Mary and Milk Rivers. The TID feels that the existing agreement has been carefully considered and that it is fair and equitable. To change the agreement now would have a very negative impact on the economy of the area and on the current level of development.