



# The River Blend: St. Mary and Milk

The International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study Board publishes this semi-annual newsletter to help keep the public informed about the International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study. This is the sixth of the series. For more information on the study, see the [previous newsletters](#).

*For over a century, the United States and Canada have shared the waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers through agreements negotiated by both countries. Over time, changing conditions in the watershed including climate and the state of the infrastructure used to store and move water have impacted the extent to which each country can access their share. The [International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study](#) is a four-year effort (2021-2025), with an extension of up to one year, to determine if improvements can be made. The Study Board is on track to deliver its report to the [International Joint Commission](#) in the Fall of 2026. The Commission will review the report and make recommendations to the governments of both countries for their consideration.*

As 2025 came to an end and 2026 is beginning, the International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study Board (ISMMSRB) and its Technical Working Groups (TWGs) are busy progressing the study's work as the Board will be submitting its final report to the International Joint Commission (IJC) in the Fall of 2026. The Study Board has been meeting with its advisory groups throughout the 2025 summer and fall to ensure their feedback, perspectives, and viewpoints are captured in the recommendations being considered. The Board looks forward to sharing results of its work with the public through future engagements.

## Webinar and Meetings with Advisory Groups



Virtual

This past summer, the Board initiated a virtual seminar series for its advisory groups. These webinars served to provide advisory group members with key information to better understand water apportionment, the work of the Study's TWGs, and the structural and non-structural options being considered. Key topics included:

- Fundamentals of the Boundary Waters Treaty, the 1921 Order, apportionment of water by the Accredited Officers, and the calculation of natural flow,
- Structural and administrative options under consideration, and
- Water management modelling and performance indicator selection.



Virtual Webinar for Advisory Group Members

On August 22, 2025, the Options Formulation and Evaluation Group (OFEG) Leads led a demonstration of a *St. Mary and Milk Rivers Model Scenario Viewer* for advisory group members. This is the primary tool that the board will be using to assess modelling results in the study; and advisory group members were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the tool prior to the tool being finalized for internal use of the board.



## In-Person Study Meetings

*Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*



Study Board Members, Staff, and Advisory Group Members attending meetings in Lethbridge, Alberta (Credit: IJC Staff)

On September 10, 2025, the Study Board invited its advisory groups to an all-day meeting hosted in Lethbridge, Alberta.

The meeting largely focused on administrative and infrastructure options being considered and was an opportunity for advisory groups to provide feedback and ask questions of the Board.

This was valuable time for Board members as they developed a stronger understanding of the views of people in the basin and ways to better communicate study information.

The following day, Board members met to review the feedback from advisory group members and discuss upcoming technical work. The Board also worked on establishing a timeline of tasks and events as it approaches the end of the study and submission of the recommendations and final report to the IJC.

The Study Board is immensely grateful for the time and knowledge that advisory group members have dedicated to the study – without their perspectives and input, the study would truly be incomplete.



Study Board meeting in Lethbridge, Alberta (Credit: IJC Staff)

## ISMMSRB Appearance at IJC’s Semi-Annual Meeting

*Virtual*

On December 5, 2025, the ISMMRSB participated in the IJC’s Fall Semi-Annual meetings, which were hosted virtually this year. During its appearance, the Board provided Commissioners with an update on Study progress since last meeting with them in April 2025 in Washington, D.C. The Study Board’s presentation included updates on the status of the final report writing (which began back in December 2023), work of the TWGs, and public/advisory group engagement.

The Board also shared details about the multiple virtual and in-person events that were hosted for advisory group members to get them acquainted with the data visualization tool, which was developed by the OFEG. This tool will be used by the OFEG to summarize and present model outputs to the Study Board, including information on how structural and non-structural options may impact key performance indicators. The potential impact of different water availability and usage scenarios can also be explored through the tool.

The Board also highlighted the great success of the Board’s most recent in-person meeting with its advisory groups in Lethbridge, Alberta.



ISMMSRB virtual appearance with IJC Commissioners (Credit: IJC Staff)



## Technical Update

There has been significant progress made across all technical components of the study; and the Technical Working Groups (TWGs) have been working hard to advance their work.

### DATA VISUALIZATION TOOL

The *St. Mary and Milk Rivers Model Scenario Viewer* continues to be developed and improved by the OFEG. This interactive tool can display model outputs through key performance indicators (PIs), heatmaps, and side-by-side scenario comparisons. Additional interpretive information such as hydrographs and changes in irrigation water by year have been added to the tool. The visualization tool is used internally to support decision-making.

### TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP (TWG) UPDATES

A major milestone in the study is the completion of climate and hydrology modeling, which now enables the **Water Management Modeling (WMM) TWG** to simulate and evaluate the potential impacts of the structural and administrative scenarios on water management in the basin. Their work has focused on refining and aligning the WRMM and RiverWare models, and once both models consistently produce comparable results, the TWG will shift from historic streamflow inputs to modeled streamflow incorporating future climate datasets from the **Climate and Hydrology TWG**.

The Climate and Hydrology TWG has completed its primary modeling tasks, its State of Knowledge Report, and major contributions to the final study report. The **Water Apportionment and Administrative Options TWG** and the **Infrastructure Options TWG** have defined the scenarios to be modeled by the WMM TWG. As the WMM TWG finalizes the models and produces results, they work closely with the OFEG and other TWGs to analyze outputs and confirm that the models capture the nuances of each scenario. These outputs will then be evaluated using PIs developed specifically for the St. Mary and Milk Rivers basin to assess the potential impacts of each scenario.

The **Aquatic Ecosystems TWG** has completed a comprehensive State of Knowledge Report that advances understanding of aquatic ecosystems in the basin and identifies areas where further data collection will be required. A key contribution from this group is the development of a PI related to bull trout population growth, which is used to assess ecological impacts across scenarios.

The **Socio Economic TWG** has completed its study on the economic impact and value of water in the basin, which will be included in the final report. The group is also collecting data and conducting interviews to support the cultural analysis being carried out by Northeastern University and Montana State University Billings. The findings will provide essential context on the human centric implications of potential changes in the basin that may influence water management strategies.



# The Road Ahead...



As the International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study Board will be submitting its final report to the International Joint Commission by the Fall of 2026, the road map below captures some of the Board’s final meetings with advisory groups and engagement with the public.

See the figure below to see what the Board has in store for the next few months:



# Want to learn more? Have comments or questions?

**Scan the QR Code** for quick access to the Study Board’s website and fact sheets:

- [Work Plan](#)
- [Apportionment](#)
- [Geography and Infrastructure](#)
- [Performance Indicators](#)
- [Fall 2024 ISMMRSB Progress Report](#)
- [Using Models to Assess Changes to St. Mary – Milk Rivers System](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - AE](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - CH](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - IO](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - SEA](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - WAAO](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - WMM](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - OFEG](#)

Questions/Comments? Contact the Study Board directly via email: [smmr@ijc.org](mailto:smmr@ijc.org)



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