



**Alberta Irrigation**

<p><b>IJC / CMI OTTAWA</b>          ACTION: McAuley          INFO: Mr/MH/MC/Gough          Chair Gray/Barget          SEP 08 2004</p> <p><b>FILE / DOSSIER</b>          3-1-4-9 (a)</p>
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Alberta Irrigation Projects Association  
 909 Lethbridge Centre Tower  
 400 - 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
 Lethbridge, Alberta, T1J 4E1

Phone (403) 328-3063

Fax (403) 327-1043

E-Mail: [info@aipa.org](mailto:info@aipa.org)

URL: <http://www.aipa.org>

30 August 2004

Mr. Herb Gray  
 Chair, Canadian Section  
 The International Joint Commission  
 234 Laurier Avenue West, 22nd Floor  
 Ottawa, Ontario  
 K1P 6K6  
 CANADA

Mr. Dennis Schornack  
 Chairman, United States Section  
 International Joint Commission  
 1250 23rd Street, NW, Suite 100  
 Washington, D.C.  
 20440  
 USA

Dear Sirs:

**RE: Request by the Governor of Montana to Review the 1921 Apportionment Order for the St. Mary River and Milk River**

Thank-you for holding the public information and fact gathering meetings in Montana, Saskatchewan and Alberta the last week of July. The meetings were conducted fairly and presentations made by individuals and organizations from each region were handled well. The members of the International Joint Commission [IJC] and their staff are to be commended for their efforts.

In follow-up to the verbal presentation made by the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association in Havre, Montana, we wanted to take the opportunity to highlight why we believe there is no advantage to opening up the 1921 Apportionment Order.

1. **Alberta has invested significantly in the development of water management infrastructure in order to make full beneficial use of the water provided to it under the 1921 Apportionment Order.**

There are 13 Irrigation Districts in southern Alberta, irrigating more than 1.3 million acres of farmland each year. These districts are governed by Boards of Directors, elected by irrigators. They operated independent of government. [In addition, almost 300,000 acres of land are irrigated by individuals outside of the organized Irrigation Districts.]

Irrigation Districts have and continue to invest significant effort and dollars into the modernization and rehabilitation of canal systems that have been in use for more than 100 years. A recent study has estimated the replacement value of the canal networks exceeds \$2.5 billion. This is in addition to major water management infrastructure that is owned and operated by the Government of Alberta that is valued in excess of another \$2 billion.

These levels of investment do not include the amount invested by individual irrigators in their own  
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on-farm irrigation equipment. Throughout all of Alberta's Irrigation Districts, irrigators have invested more than \$500 million in the last 15 years bringing new technology and irrigation practices into effect.

2. **Water conservation, beneficial and wise use are being implemented throughout irrigated agriculture. Irrigators today are using, on average, a third less water per irrigated acre than just 15 years ago.**

Earlier this year our Association sent the IJC copies of our recently completed report, *Irrigation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. These reports outline in detail the changes and gains that have been made by Irrigation Districts and their irrigators over the past 10 years. The research is science and research based, is credible and significant. Work to provide ongoing enhancements continues to take place.

It should be noted, that the extensive computer simulation modelling that took place to determine the future growth potential for the irrigation sector only considered the use of the water currently allocated under the 1921 Apportionment Order, not any of the surplus flows that Canada has received due to the inability of Montana or its water users to capture or divert the full volume of their allocation.

The Government of Alberta also recently completed its Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability. This strategy has set out aggressive targets for industry, municipalities, individuals and government to achieve water savings to support future economic growth and improved environmental conditions. The strategy benefits from extensive public consultation and support, and is built on the long-term understanding of water availability, including the apportioned flows of the St. Mary River and Milk River.

3. **The Alberta economy, as well as its communities, quality of life and environment are directly linked to how water is managed.**

While only about 5% of Alberta's arable lands are irrigated, they provide almost 20% of the gross agricultural production. There is a high level of value-added agri-business that has invested in southern Alberta across a wide sector of irrigated agriculture. These investments have been made in support of the high quality products grown under irrigation. The volume of water under the 1921 Apportionment Order is critical to existing investments and production as well as vital to future economic development.

The same water management network and river flows that meet the needs of irrigated agriculture supply water to more than 50 communities in southern Alberta. In this semi-arid region of western North America, water is what makes communities viable. Future growth in communities and their economies is being secured through increased water conservation.

Almost all water-based recreation in southern Alberta takes place at irrigation facilities. Prior to the turn-of-the-century development of irrigation infrastructure, there was virtually no naturally standing water. Today, more than half of the sport angling in southern Alberta takes place on irrigation reservoirs. Provincial, municipal and regional campgrounds have been established to meet recreation demands.

The irrigation network is also critical to wildlife and wetlands. More than 80,000 acres of critical

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wetland habitat is supported by the irrigation supply and drainage network. These wetlands support wildlife, waterfowl and a wide range of biodiversity. In addition to the wetlands themselves, another 150,000 acre of uplands [lands surrounding or in close proximity to the wetlands] are actively managed to support wildlife and livestock, providing integrated environmental and economic benefits.

4. Governments, agencies and water users in the United States have not yet invested in the same level of infrastructure and institutional arrangements that lead the way to enhanced water conservation and greater water security.

There is no disputing that the interests of water users on both sides of the border are common. In fact, even the interests of First Nations in Canada and the United States are similar. It is clear that Canada has benefited from a more aggressive and deliberate approach to capturing and using the water allocated to it under the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty and subsequent 1921 Apportionment Order. In our view, until the United States has done everything within its domain to develop and use the water allocated to it, any review of the Apportionment Order is premature.

5. Cooperative approaches to resolving important and critical water management issues are far more effective than legal or confrontational approaches.

The accredited officers from the United States and Canada have indicated that in recent years the day-to-day accounting for water and operational approaches to managing the Apportionment Order have varied and improved. Seeking a change in the 1921 Apportionment Order prejudices the enhancements that can be achieved through improved cooperation between agencies. Clearly, the lack of modern water management infrastructure in Montana reduces the range of solutions that can presently be achieved through cooperative means.

Alberta Irrigation commends the International Joint Commission for the consultative approach it has taken to the request by the Governor of Montana. We are, however, convinced that the 1921 Apportionment Order, put in place following lengthy discussions, and relied upon for the development of water resources in southern Alberta, should remain in place as is.

Alberta has demonstrated that harnessing the efforts and resources of governments, agencies, communities and individuals in support of a healthy water management infrastructure is a key underpinning to future success. Hopefully, the attention brought by Governor Marz to these water issues might provoke governments and water users in Montana and the United States to secure improved funding for infrastructure that could give them a better chance at capturing and using the water presently allocated to them.

Again, it is our view, based on strong evidence and practice, that the 1921 Apportionment Order remain in place. Thank-you for allowing us to participate in this important initiative.

Yours truly;

  
Jim Coabay, Chair

  
Morris Zeinstra, Vice-Chair

  
David Hill, Executive Director

Alberta Irrigation Projects Association  
Suite 909, Lethbridge Centre Tower  
400 - 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue South  
Lethbridge, Alberta, T1J 4E1



**Alberta Irrigation**

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Phone: (403) 328-3063  
Fax: (403) 327-1043  
E-Mail: [david.hill@alberta-irrigation.ca](mailto:david.hill@alberta-irrigation.ca) or [david.hill@aipa.org](mailto:david.hill@aipa.org)  
URL: <http://www.aipa.org>

Facsimile Message

Date: 31 August 2004

To/Fax Number: International Joint Commission  
Canadian Section ..... 1-613-993-5583  
United States Section ..... 1-202-736-9024

From: David Hill

Pages [including header]: 4

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Attached to this fax please find the submission of the Alberta Irrigation Projects Association regarding the recent information gathering meetings in Montana, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Again our thanks for being able to participate in this important initiative.

Please do not hesitate to contact this office should you have any questions, or require any other information.

Yours truly;

David Hill  
Executive Director