

July 2024



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 third of the series. For more information on the study, see the [first](#) and [second](#) newsletters in the series.

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 a recently added extension of up to one year, to determine if improvements can be made. The Study Board will present its report to the [International Joint Commission](#) no later than June 2026. The Commission will review the report and make recommendations to the governments of both countries for their consideration.

News Alert!

As many are aware, on June 17, 2024, both of the St. Mary Canal's 90-inch diameter steel pipes (siphons) used to carry St. Mary River water across the St. Mary River failed, forcing the immediate shutdown of the Canal. The Study Board is aware of this issue; however, sees no immediate consequences for the study, and the study will continue as planned. The failure of the siphons highlights the need for this study and its potential recommendations to help offer additional resiliency during situations like this. The Study Board sends its sympathies to all that have been affected by the siphon failure.

The International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study Board and its advisory groups recently returned from Lethbridge, Alberta where they had their most recent set of face-to-face meetings. The months prior were busy with meetings, advancing the study's technical work, and the news of an up to one year long extension of the study.

In-Person Study Meetings

Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

The Study Board held its second set of in-person meetings in Lethbridge, AB from June 4 to 6, 2024 with its advisory group members, which includes the Public Advisory Group (PAG), Indigenous Advisory Group (IAG), and the Government Forum (GF). The goal of the Lethbridge face-to-face meetings were to provide an opportunity for the various advisory groups to discuss, collaborate, and provide feedback on the work of the Study Board, while also taking the opportunity to better get to know each other and learn more about each other's perspectives.



Study Staff pose for a photo after a day of meetings in Lethbridge, AB (Credit: IJC Staff)



In-Person Study Meetings

Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

The week of meetings in Lethbridge, AB included meetings with the Board and its advisory groups as well as separate breakout sessions for individual advisory groups to discuss items in greater detail.



Study Meetings in Lethbridge, AB (Credit: IJC Staff)

The discussions were largely technical in nature, as the Options Formulation and Evaluation Group (OFEG) presented technical work underway and led discussions with Study Board and advisory group members on performance indicators, modelling, and scenarios to get their feedback.

To deepen the Study Board's understanding of the dynamics and challenges in the area, the Lethbridge meetings included tours of water infrastructure led by irrigators and farmers, a visit to Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe) lands, and a public townhall meeting.

On June 4th, following a morning of meetings, the Study Board and its advisory groups were hosted by the St. Mary River Irrigation District's (SMRID) Board of Directors on a tour of the district and its irrigation infrastructure, including a stop at Chin Reservoir to learn about the reservoir expansion project underway. Thank you to David Westwood (SMRID General Manager) for coordinating the tour.



View from Chin Reservoir West Dam (Credit: IJC Staff)



SMRID's Board of Directors leading a tour of the irrigation district (Credit: IJC Staff)



International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study – News

The groups also visited The Perry Family Farm and learned from Chris Perry (President) about the role of water and irrigation in growing their crops, as well as the farm's progressive efforts to conserve water and generate energy. The group was also met by Randie Davenport (Plant Manager) and Danielle Anderson (Ag. Manager) of the McCain Foods processing plant, who provided an overview of their work with local irrigators and farmers.



The Perry Family gives the study team a tour of their potato farm (Credit: IJC Staff)



The Study team visits Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe) lands to learn more about the Blood Tribe Agricultural Project (Credit: IJC Staff)

On the morning of June 5th, the study groups had the opportunity to visit and learn more about the Blood Tribe Agricultural Project (BTAP) to develop a stronger understanding of what the water of the St. Mary River means to the Kainai Nation and how it is used on the land. Thank

you to Len Ring (Ring Irrigation Engineering) and Levi Blackwater and Staff (Blood Tribe Agricultural Project) for hosting the study team.

Later that evening, the Study Board hosted a public town hall meeting where the Board presented a high-level overview of the basin, apportionment and study background and progress. The Board is extremely appreciative of the nearly 200 people who attended the meeting, asked insightful questions, and provided valuable feedback for the Board to consider.

The Study Board is already eagerly looking to plan its next set of in-person meetings and public meetings in the basin.



Public town hall meeting in Lethbridge, AB (Credit: IJC Staff)



International Joint Commission Spring Semi-Annual Meeting

Washington DC, United States

The International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study Board attended the International Joint Commission (IJC)'s Spring Semi-Annual meeting, which was hosted in Washington DC in early April.

The Semi-Annual meeting provides a greater opportunity for IJC Boards to meet and interact with the Commission to discuss the work being undertaken by boards and their advisory groups.

The Study Board provided an update on the work of its advisory groups, technical work to date and projected timelines for the remainder of the study. Overall, IJC Commissioners expressed a high degree of interest and provided excellent feedback for the Study Board to consider.



International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study Staff attending the IJC's Spring Semi-Annual Meeting (Credit: IJC Staff)

Extension Announcement!

On May 30, 2024 the ISMMRSB announced that a request to the IJC for an extension on the study was approved. The Study Board was given up to one year of additional time to complete its work and fully consider the results of its technical work and input from its public, Indigenous and governmental advisory groups.



International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Study Staff presenting to Commissioners at the IJC's Spring Semi-Annual Meeting (Credit: IJC Staff)



The Road Ahead...



As the Study Board looks ahead at the coming months, they are already planning their next set of in-person meetings, which are tentatively planned for Fall 2024. 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:

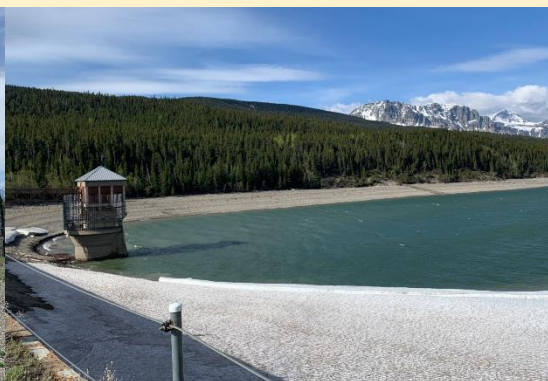
- [Work Plan](#)
- [Apportionment](#)
- [Geography and Infrastructure](#)
- [Performance Indicators](#)
- [Using Models to Assess Changes to St. Mary – Milk Rivers System](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - AE](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - CH](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - IO](#)
- [TWG One Page Summary - SEA](#)
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Ideas for additional fact sheets? Contact the Study Board directly via email: smmr@ijc.org

www.ijc.org/smmr



St. Mary Diversion Dam and headgate
(Credit: IJC Staff)



Lake Sherburne Reservoir, Montana
(Credit: ECCC Staff)



Drop Structure No.5 on the St. Mary Canal
(Credit: ECCC Staff)

