

**St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative**  
**Joint Status Report #5**  
**May 11, 2009**

**Status**

Members of the Montana and Alberta Joint Initiative Team (JIT) toured a portion of the upper St. Mary River basin in Alberta. Water managers from Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development gave JIT members a first-hand look at the St. Mary River Dam headworks, and irrigation and water management infrastructure in the basin. Representatives from three of Southern Alberta's irrigation districts were on hand to provide additional information.

At the meeting, details of the Boundary Waters Treaty (1909), the Order (1921) and the Letter of Intent were reviewed by the technical team leads. Further, the technical team leads gave an update on the status of the water management model and the data that will be used to characterize the system. Lastly, the JIT members started a review of the water management options that may be recommended, how those options would address jurisdictional interests, and the evaluation criteria that would be used to evaluate, compare and rank an option to determine how well that option allowed the jurisdiction to achieve its interest.

**Background**

The St. Mary & Milk River Water Management Initiative is being conducted under a Terms of Reference approved by Premier Stelmach and Governor Schweitzer in January 2009. Under the Terms of Reference, Montana and Alberta agree that the shared water of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers is an important resource to both jurisdictions and that there are opportunities for the two jurisdictions to work together to improve their timing and access to this shared water. Alberta and Montana have shared the water from the two rivers for 100 years, under Article VI of the Boundary Waters Treaty (1909).

The Terms of Reference establishes a twelve member Joint Initiative Team of local water users and government officials from both sides of the border. The Team has been asked to explore and evaluate options for improving both Montana's and Alberta's access to the shared waters of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers, and make joint recommendations on preferred options to both governments for their consideration and approval. A report containing the joint recommendations is due to both governments in the fall of 2010.

The Joint Initiative Team is co-chaired by Robert Harrison from Alberta Environment, and John Tubbs from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Other team members include representatives from the Milk River Watershed Council Canada, Oldman Watershed Council, Alberta Agriculture & Rural Development, the office of Montana's Lt. Governor, Blackfeet Tribe, Ft. Belknap Indian Community, and the Milk River watershed in Montana.