

# TO THE INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION

## **Comments on the “International St. Mary and Milk Rivers Administrative Measures Task Force” Report by M. Kent Bullock, Manager of the Taber Irrigation District**

The Taber Irrigation District delivers water to 82,200 acres of irrigated land in the Taber area. Irrigated agriculture is the backbone of the economy of 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.

Some of the crops grown under irrigation in the Taber area are sugar beets, corn, potatoes, beans, peas, onions, oil seeds, forages and cereals. In addition to the specialty crops that are grown, there are lots of value added industries in the area, which are dependent on water, that is delivered through the irrigation system.

With more specialty crops being grown, the demand for water has increased and the timing for the water has shifted. More water is needed later in the season because of crops such as sugar beets, potatoes, corn, etc. This has made the need for water storage to capture the spring flows and hold the water for later in the season more critical. Just as critical, is the need for the later summer flows that are in the rivers. Therefore, changing the balancing period for flows diverted from the St. Mary River in the United States to longer periods, such as annually from the current 15 day period, would have a very detrimental effect on our water supply. Canada would receive spring flood flows that could not be utilized or stored because of a lack of infrastructure to store the water, and would be lost to Saskatchewan, while receiving less flow in the summer when the water could be used. Already by using a 15 day balancing period, the United States is being benefitted beyond the original intent of the 1921 Order. The 1921 Order is based on sharing the instantaneous flows and as such there was to be no balancing period. However, because of the impossibility of making infinite adjustments to the diversion rate every minute of every day, a 15 day balancing period was agreed upon from a practical point of view in order to manage the water and has been the practice for the last 85 years. With today's technology, it would probably be feasible to reduce the balancing period to weekly or perhaps even daily, which would be closer to the spirit of the 1921 Order.

Also, by going to a longer balancing period, the river flows coming into Canada would be reduced later in the season to make up for the short fall in diversions in the spring, which would negatively impact the aquatic health of the river.

I am very concerned that the International Joint Commission would consider changes to the existing 1921 Order that would negatively affect Canada and particularly the St. Mary River Irrigation Project, which includes the Taber Irrigation District. The TID feels that the existing agreement and water management practices have been fair and equitable. At the public meeting in Havre on May 23, 2006, there was continual reference made to the 1909 Boundary Waters

Treaty with respect to the equal apportionment of the water from the St. Mary and Milk Rivers. However, it was taken out of context. The next sentence states “It is further agreed that in the division of such waters during the irrigation season, between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April and 31<sup>st</sup> of October, inclusive, annually, the United States is entitled to a prior appropriation of 500 cubic feet per second of the waters of the Milk River, or so much of such amount as constitutes three-fourths of its natural flow, and that Canada is entitled to a prior appropriation of 500 cubic feet per second of the flow of St. Mary River, or so much of such amount as constitutes three-fourths of its natural flow”. This was due to the existing commitments and development on each of the rivers at that point in time. This arrangement was made to give more beneficial use to each country.

To make changes to the 1921 Order on how the water is apportioned, which could reduce the usable water coming into Canada through the St. Mary River, would have a very negative impact on the economy of the Taber Area and on the current level of development that has taken place over the years. It would also create doubt on both sides of the border, that any agreement could be trusted in the future. Without confidence in the future, no one will want to make investments that depend on a predictable water supply. A change in the apportionment of water from the 1921 Order will also create stranded investment in the current level of development.

I would like to thank the Task Force for all of their work. I believe that a better understanding of the issues and concerns has been achieved and that it is essential that the 1921 Order remain in effect. I also support that the existing or preferably a shorter balancing period be used.