

SUBMISSION TO THE INTERNATIONAL JOINT COMMISSION  
ON BEHALF OF MILK RIVER BASIN WATER CO-OPS

Over the last 15 or so years, rural homes across Southern Alberta have enjoyed a constant and guaranteed water supply for their homes and livestock operations. Specifically, there are 5 water co-ops in the Milk River basin area of the County of Warner alone, all of which are fed in some way by the Milk River or aquifers along the Milk River.

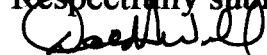
Prior to and during those last 15 years, farmers have seen their natural water supplies dry up or become degraded to the point that the water was not suitable for human, and in some cases, even livestock consumption. Wells on many farm sites are not even an option any more. With the assistance of federal and provincial money, rural water co-ops have answered that need in many farming communities. Professionals were consulted to plan the most efficient, safe (to the environment and the water supply) and economical way to deliver water to as many country folk as feasible. As such, underground water lines now link numerous farms (ranging from 10 to 100+ in each co-op) to a constant, safe and guaranteed water supply. The infrastructure in place is, indeed, impressive.

Having a safe water source is a draw for rural dwellers; hauling water to live is expensive and impractical. Thus, it can be said that a guaranteed water supply increases the quality of rural living. On the economic side of things, many farmers can venture into areas of livestock production that previously were unthinkable due to the lack of safe and sufficient water.

Since the conception of these water co-ops, those that depend on aquifers surrounding the Milk River have experienced water quantity and quality decline, attributable largely to many years of drought and a lack of managed, continual flow on the Milk River. As this trend continues, water co-ops will rely more on the Milk River directly to meet their member's needs. A decrease in water share could be devastating to our rural water co-ops and the families they serve.

With quantity guaranteed in the Boundary Waters Treaty Act apportionment agreement, the issue remaining is the quality of management of everyone's share of water to ensure that we can guarantee plenty, good quality water to all that benefit from the Milk River. We have shown that we are innovative in using our water resources, are cautious of the environment and water supply in doing so and that we have government support (on several levels) to build the infrastructure necessary to adequately manage water supplies. A constant guaranteed flow would mean that water co-ops could increase water quality naturally and better judge usage for all.

Respectfully submitted



Donald Welsh

Water Co-op Representative, Milk River Basin Water Management Committee