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Irrigation Secretariat

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August 12, 2004

Rt. Hon. Herb Gray  
Chairman, Canadian Section  
International Joint Commission  
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<b>IJC / CMI OTTAWA</b>
ACTION: McAuley
INFO: Clamen / MV / WH
Chair Gray
AUG 16 2004
<b>FILE / DOSSIER</b>
31-4-9 (9)

**Re: IJC Review of the 1921 Order – St. Mary and Milk Rivers**

I am writing on behalf of Irrigation Council regarding the consultations that are taking place as a result of Montana's request to open the 1921 Order related to the sharing of the water in the Milk and St. Mary Rivers.

Irrigation Council is an Alberta agency established under the *Irrigation Districts Act* (the Act). Irrigation Council's powers and duties are outlined in Section 51 of the Act. The Council makes recommendations to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development on issues related to maintaining a strong, efficient and sustainable irrigation industry and acts as an appeal body in accordance with the Act.

In addition, Irrigation Council approves projects and assists in setting policies and procedures for the administration of the Irrigation Rehabilitation Program. This ensures accountability of the public's ongoing investment to rehabilitate irrigation district infrastructure.

Based on the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty and the 1921 Order, Canada and the United States have successfully shared the water in the Milk and St. Mary Rivers for almost 100 years. Because of the certainty provided by the 1921 Order, the Alberta government and individual Albertans have made significant investments to store, convey and deliver water for irrigation, industries, municipalities, recreation, wildlife habitat and power generation.

The hearings leading to the 1921 Order outlined the needs for both countries to have certainty on the division of water, so that proper and sustained development could occur. Planning and development activities can only be carried out because of the stability provided by the 1921 Order. Long-term planning and development are necessary to make beneficial use of the waters of these streams.

Agricultural irrigation in Alberta is in excess of 1.6 million acres and represents over 60% of the irrigated area in Canada. Of that, 1.3 million acres are located within Alberta's 13 irrigation districts and 300,000 acres are in private irrigation developments. The vast majority is within the South Saskatchewan River basin. The southern tributary rivers (Waterton, Belly and St. Mary Rivers) provide the water needs of eight irrigation districts that serve over 565,000 acres, plus the 25,000-acre Blood Tribe Irrigation Project and over 21,000 acres of private irrigation.

The total irrigation district owned infrastructure has a replacement value of over \$2.5 billion. Alberta's Irrigation Rehabilitation Program, which began in 1969, has been used to rehabilitate over half of the more than 7,600 km of irrigation district conveyance works. To date the amount invested under this program (Alberta government plus irrigation district contributions) is over \$750 million. Approximately 40% of that is for the four irrigation districts served by the St. Mary River.

Rehabilitation of the irrigation infrastructure, combined with improvements to on-farm irrigation systems, has significantly improved water use efficiency, allowing for more acres to be irrigated and higher crop production per irrigated acre, without increasing the amount of water used. Over the past 15 years, in addition to the cost shared funding, individual producers in the region have invested approximately \$250 million of their own funds in on-farm irrigation equipment alone.

If the United States were to hold back an additional 50,000 acre-feet of water, this would translate into the loss of almost 50,000 acres of irrigation development in the area served by the St. Mary River. In addition to the major effect this would have on the irrigators and other users of water from the St. Mary River, the resulting negative economic implications to southern Alberta would be significant.

Albertans realize that the limit of water supply has been reached in some watersheds and is being approached in others, as the economy and population continue to grow. The solution to this looming problem comes by improving our ability to capture and store water during high flow seasons, as well as improving water use practices through water conservation efforts. Alberta is committed to being a leader in using water efficiently and effectively.

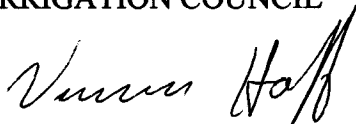
The 1909 Treaty and the 1921 Order of the International Joint Commission provide the framework for people on both sides of the border to come together and responsibly share the water resources upon which we depend.

***Irrigation Council does not support opening the 1921 Order.*** It has provided stability to producers, planners, and regulators in working on a progressive approach to making the most beneficial use of the available water supply. We do however support a continued dialogue and effective partnership between both countries that works within the framework of the existing 1909 Treaty and the 1921 Order.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this very important process.

Yours truly,

IRRIGATION COUNCIL



Vern Hoff, Chairman

cc: Hon. Shirley McClellan  
Hon. Dr. Lorne Taylor