



WHAT'S NEW WITH THE
INTERNATIONAL RED RIVER WATERSHED BOARD

Binational Collaboration on Water

Introduction to IRRWB

Driven by the 1997 Red River Flood, the International Joint Commission (IJC) established the International Red River Board (IRRB) in April 2000 to help resolve transboundary disputes regarding the waters and the aquatic ecosystem of the Red River, its tributaries, and aquifers.

Key responsibilities of the IRRB included:

- » Maintaining an awareness of basin activities that affect stream flows, water quality and the ecosystem health of the Red River and its transboundary tributaries;
- » Providing a forum for the identification and resolution of existing and emerging transboundary water-related issues;
- » Recommending appropriate strategies concerning water quality, quantity and aquatic ecosystem health objectives;
- » Monitoring the water quality and aquatic health of the river;
- » Monitoring and reporting on flood preparedness and mitigation activities

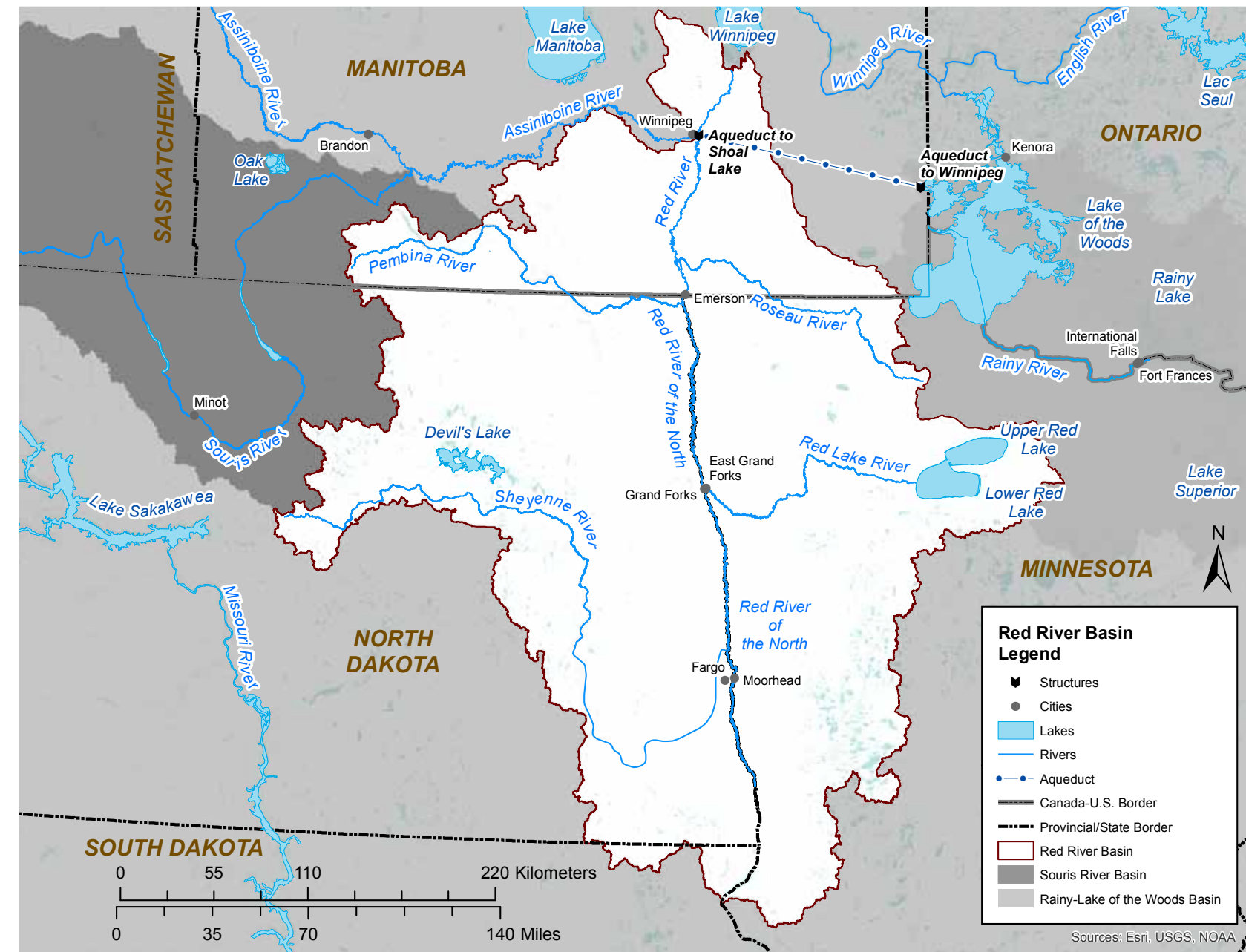
In 2021, the IJC promoted the IRRB to be a full watershed board, named the International Red River Watershed Board (IRRWB), and provided an updated Directive.

The change to a full watershed board includes increased Indigenous engagement, climate change considerations, and more emphasis on integrity of ecosystem health and public participation.

The IRRWB's objective is now to support the Aquatic Ecosystem Integrity of the Red River Basin.

Overview of IJC and Boundary Water Treaty

Canada and the United States created the International Joint Commission (IJC) to help the two countries manage waters wisely and protect them for future generations. The 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty between Canada and the United States provides principles for preventing and resolving disputes over waters shared between the two countries. The IJC has two main responsibilities: setting conditions for projects that affect water levels and flows on the other side of the boundary and investigating and reporting on questions or matters of difference between the two countries along the common frontier.



Basin Geography

The Red River flows north from its headwaters in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, across the international boundary, and discharges into Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba. Its drainage basin covers 116,500 square kilometers (45,000 square miles). The hydrology of the basin is complex and influenced by many natural and human forces. Streamflow tends to be highly variable from season-to-season and year-to-year. As a result, floods and droughts are major concerns.

How to engage with us

The Board welcomes students of all ages, their teachers, professors and advisors, as well as, the general public to our Annual Public Meeting, which is held each January during the Annual Conference of the Red River Basin Commission, a non-government organization that promotes a cooperative approach to water management in the Red River Basin and a collaborative partner of the IRRWB.

Bring your curiosity, questions and ideas about:

- » How governments work with the IJC;
- » How engineers and scientists collaborate to understand and protect aquatic ecosystem health;
- » How studying hydrology and monitoring water quality informs actions that helps improve the health of the Red River; and
- » How knowledge and perspectives shared by Indigenous Board members offer new opportunities to foster a healthier relationship with the river and all life in the basin.



Pancake Ice on the Red River

Highlights | Current Collaborative Initiatives

Collaborating with Indigenous Nations

The IRRWB recognizes the importance of collaboration with Indigenous peoples as the traditional owners and stewards of the land. The health of the river basin has a particular significance for the cultures, traditions, and well-being of Tribal Nations, First Nations and the Red River Métis. We also know that Indigenous peoples have much to contribute to the sound stewardship of this shared watershed. The governance they provide over their current territories makes them a valued partner and their rights related to traditional territories provides a perspective no one nation can achieve.

Activities & Achievement Highlights

- In the summer of 2021, the IRRWB formed an Indigenous Task Team to build and strengthen relations in the Red River watershed on both sides of the international border.
- A facilitated workshop to assist in establishing a working relationship between groups based in knowledge and trust was held in January 2023 for Indigenous participants to share their insight on the needs and priorities of their communities for integration into IRRWB board activities.
- Recommendations drafted as a result of the event are actively being considered by the IRRWB as part of its strategic planning process and will inform future workplans and activities of the board, creating a continuing and inclusive forum using science and traditional knowledge.

Water Quality: Nutrient Objectives/Targets for Nitrogen and Phosphorus

- With International Watersheds Initiative (IWI) support, the IRRWB developed and proposed nutrient objectives for nitrogen and phosphorus to the federal governments of Canada and the United States.
- The United States and Canada approved nitrogen and phosphorus concentration objectives and load targets for the Red River at the international boundary (Emerson, MB) in October 2022.
- Both governments are committed to achieve these goals.
- Approved nutrients objectives demonstrates great collaboration and partnership through the work of an IJC watershed board.
- Other transboundary watershed boards are hoping to replicate a similar success story within their own watersheds.
- IRRWB is working to identify nutrient reduction actions that responsible governments can take to achieve nutrient load allocations and water quality targets.



The Emerson station is used to monitor Red River water quality and flow at the Canada-US border.

Wastewater Optimization Work in collaboration with Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The IWI and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency funded a wastewater treatment plant optimization project to build a network of operators to explore low-cost practices that would reduce nutrients in the discharge through operational changes that don't require capital improvements.

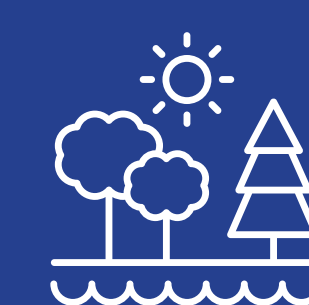
- The RRBC and partners hosted a series of workshops and facility visits.
- Several hundred operators from Minnesota, North Dakota and Manitoba participated in the workshops successfully building their network and learning about cutting edge ways to operate their own facilities.
- Site visits to a dozen facilities explored details of how to improve performance for very little cost or effort. No cost reports from the site visits included recommendations for prolonging the life, enhancing the effectiveness, and reducing the cost of facility operations.
- Reports for two of the plants included detailed recommendations that could be adopted within current operating budgets and would potentially substantially reduce nutrients in the discharge.
- The final report on the project was completed in May of 2023.



Red River, Winnipeg, MB

ijc.org/en/rrb

International Watersheds Initiative Operating Principles



Integrated
Ecosystem
Approach



Binational
Collaboration



Open and
respectful
dialogue



Involvement
of local
expertise



Adaptive
management
perspective



Public
engagement



Balanced
and inclusive
board
representation

The seven International Watersheds Initiative (IWI) operating principles that guide the work of International Watershed Boards