

Frequently asked questions:

Milk River diversion failure

Why were Milk River irrigators ordered to cease licenced water diversions?

Under the *Boundary Waters Treaty Act*, (the Treaty) the Accredited Officers (AOs) for the St. Mary and Milk rivers measure and apportion water to Canada and the U.S. The natural flow, as measured at the eastern crossing (Alberta-Montana border east of the Town of Milk River), is apportioned according to procedures determined by the AOs.

Based on historical flow analysis, Environment and Parks had predicted that natural flows could be available to support a portion of irrigation demand during July and August, but with a greater than 10% probability of no flow available.

On July 15th, we were notified by the AOs, that flows were rapidly declining and a shutdown would soon be required to comply with the Treaty.

What is the role of Environment and Parks?

Environment and Parks must implement the direction of the Accredited Officers, who are responsible for apportioning the water between the U.S. and Canada according to the Treaty. We will continue to provide regular updates, including if flow becomes available.

What is the role of the government of Canada?

The Government of Canada, coordinated by Global Affairs Canada, appoints a Canadian Accredited Officer for the St. Mary and Milk rivers to oversee the measurement and apportionment of waters of the St. Mary and Milk rivers in accordance with a 1921 Order of the International Joint Commission. Global Affairs Canada, and the U.S. Department of State, also provide funding to the International Joint Commission for work of boards and task forces along the international boundary.

What is the water supply outlook for this summer?

AEP's River Forecast Centre forecasts below average to average natural flow conditions for [the Milk River basin](#), but with a large degree of uncertainty related to precipitation in southern Alberta. The Eastern Crossing generally has more water than at Milk River during June, but through July/August has less water due to higher channel losses during the height of the summer.

How will the province keep licence holders informed?

AEP will post updates on our [boundary waters treaty webpage](#). The water supply outlook and information regarding Milk River flows can be found on our [Alberta Rivers website](#) or the Alberta Rivers app.

AEP has collaborated with the Milk River Watershed Council of Canada (MRWCC) to develop an e-mail distribution list of MRWCC members and licenced Milk River water users. AEP and MRWCC will use this list to provide further updates to Milk River water users directly.

How are the repairs on the canal infrastructure in Montana progressing?

The Milk River Joint Board of Control (JBC) is overseeing the project, with assistance from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Repairs to the canal began on June 22, and are progressing well. Completion is still estimated by September.

Since this infrastructure is located in the USA, what is the role of Environment and Parks?

Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) staff continue to be in communication with the JBC, USBR and the State of Montana regarding the repairs.

AEP plays a role in providing Milk River water users information in regards to the water supply outlook on the river under natural flow conditions.

Is there any risk to drinking water supply?

AEP understands that the Town of Milk River has several months of water storage capacity should water shortage conditions persist. AEP does not anticipate a risk to drinking water supply at this time.

What does this mean for recreational uses like canoeing and kayaking?

Natural river flows in the Milk River are not high enough during the summer months for canoeing and kayaking. Flows need to exceed 12 cubic metres per second and such flows normally only occur during the spring runoff or when the St. Mary Canal diversion is operating.