

# **2004-05 Annual Update to the Minister of Environment**

## **Vermilion River Water Management Systems Operations Advisory Committee**

**June, 2005**

### **1.0 Background**

The Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee was formally established in 2002 in response to the recommendations of the Vermilion River Operations Review Stakeholder Committee submitted to the Minister of Environment in December 2000. The establishment of the operations advisory committee formalizes a communication link between Alberta Environment, Water Operations staff and the landowners most directly affected by flow conditions on the Vermilion River. The committee has the responsibility for providing advice to Alberta Environment on the operation of the Vermilion River water management system.

Represented on the committee are the Counties of Minburn, Two Hills, Vermilion River, and Beaver, the Holden Drainage District, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta Conservation Association, and Alberta Environment.

As a requirement of the committee's Terms of Reference, an annual report is to be drafted and submitted to the Minister, as well as to the local communities. So as to bring the annual reporting in line with the government fiscal year, please note that the following report summarizes the activities of the committee over a 15-month period ending March 2005. Water Management Operations staff from Alberta Environment - Central Region, have also included a summary of operations thus providing a complete overview of water management activities in the basin.

### **2.0 Committee Work Summary**

The Committee met in February and August of 2004, and February 2005 to discuss issues and opportunities of water management in the basin, and also to provide a venue for local stakeholders to comment on and inquire into current water management practices.

#### **2.1 Capacity Building**

Scheduled meetings provided opportunity for committee members to familiarize themselves with the basin, current water management/infrastructure operations, and other local water management initiatives and support agencies. Presentations included: an overview of the provincial Water for Life Strategy; an update on efforts to develop a water management plan for the Battle River; an update on the Vermilion River stewardship initiative; information on the Vermilion River basin as NAWMP's (North American Waterfowl Management Plan) proposed integrated watershed management model; and an introduction to the goals and objectives of the Northeast Alberta Water Coalition.

## **2.2 Education and Awareness**

A newsletter summarizing the Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee's activities in 2003 and objectives for 2004 was drafted and distributed to local communities and stakeholders. A newspaper article titled "*Low Flows Provide Time for Planning*", was submitted to 7 local newspapers, and confirmed printed in at least two. Efforts to promote community awareness of the committee and its activities will continue in 2005-06.

## **2.3 Call-Out System for Flood Events**

The current draft of Alberta Environment's public notification procedure for flood events on the Vermilion River was presented to the committee. The objective of the notification system is the establishment and adoption of a practical and efficient call-out protocol to provide advanced flood notice to communities and landowners along the Vermilion River.

A fan-out list depicting the series of notifications to occur should any problems arise with either of the structures themselves was also distributed to committee members.

## **2.4 Reporting of Water Act Infractions**

Despite having in the past, reported to Alberta Environment local water act infractions, incidents, and public complaints, the committee clarified their role as that of advisory to the provincial government on issues of water operations. In future, public complainants will be referred to AENV 24-hour Emergency/Complaint Line.

## **2.5 Committee Structural/Procedural Issues**

Barry Kutryk was re-elected as chairperson for the advisory. The committee also adopted a policy restricting the term of chairperson to a maximum of three consecutive 1-year terms.

Curtis Horning of AENV – Spruce Grove replaced Terry Krause as the Secretary/Coordinator for the committee. Leonard Greer was introduced as the new Operations Technologist and primary contact for water operations in the Vermilion area.

## **3.0 2004 Operating Season Summary - Alberta Environment Water Management Operations**

General maintenance on the Vermilion River channel was completed as part of the 2004 scheduled water management operations.

In cooperation with the Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee, the department has been actively working on Emergency Response Guidelines. The regional Emergency

Preparedness Planning Committee has also reviewed and approved the drafted guidelines that will be adopted by government and local authorities.

In 2003, the Dam Safety section of Alberta Environment commissioned a consultant to conduct a safety review and inundation study for the Vermilion Dam and associated structures. In 2004-05, Alberta Environment used the findings of the review to establish further operational upgrades and to address current maintenance needs.

#### **4.0 Alberta Environment's Operational Objectives for 2005**

Alberta Environment is recommending that the 2002 Vermilion River Operating Guideline continue for 2005. The guideline appears to address most of the stakeholders' concerns (other than the continued lack of water) and no evaluation of the guideline was possible in 2002 or 2003 due to the significant low flow conditions in the Vermilion basin. Late fall runoff in 2004 did not allow for a full review of the operating guidelines principles, but did confirm the need to consider a riparian release in the fall. Alberta Environment will continue with its comprehensive operation and maintenance program for all department owned works within the Vermilion basin.

With the approval of the Emergency Response Guidelines, these guidelines will become the basis of further consultation to ensure the notification system provides the information needed for the Vermilion System. Alberta Environment will continue to work with stakeholders to refine the notification/call-out system.

In 2005-06, Alberta Environment and Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation will have a consultant review the capital works requirement noted by staff and in the recent Dam Safety Review. The design work for these needs will continue through 2006-07. Alberta Environment will continue to work in cooperation with Alberta Infrastructure and Transportation to maintain all Alberta Environment project works within the Vermilion basin.

#### **5.0 Operations Advisory Committee Objectives for 2005-06**

The committee, through its semi-annual meetings, will in 2005-06 continue to focus on facilitating communications between local stakeholders and Water Operations staff in the Vermilion basin. Effective water management under early spring and mid-summer flood conditions remains the committee's greatest concern, however issues of water quality associated with recent low flow events are emerging in committee discussions.

Discussion surrounding the Watt Lake project and its potential implementation will carry on in the upcoming year. Participation in the fledgling Vermilion River Watershed Stewardship Initiative has been identified as complimentary to the water management goals and objectives of the Operations Advisory Committee, and will provide an extended avenue for committee members to contribute to local solutions addressing the broader watershed issues. In line with this initiative, the committee will also continue to support NAWMP in its efforts to integrate agency and stewardship initiatives within the Vermilion River.

Finally, the Operations Advisory Committee will continue to pursue the recommendations outlined in the original Vermilion River Operations Review Stakeholder Committee's report to the Minister.