



# *Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee 2005 Newsletter*

## ***Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee Background***

Formally established in 2002, the Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee has the mandate to provide advice to Alberta Environment on the operation of the Vermilion River water management system. The committee serves as a communication link between Alberta Environment Water Operations staff, the local communities, and the landowners most directly affected by flow conditions on the Vermilion River. Regularly scheduled meetings also provide a venue for local stakeholders to comment and inquire on current concerns, issues and opportunities.

All four counties along the Vermilion River (Minburn, Two Hills, Vermilion River, and Beaver) are represented on the committee along with representatives from the Holden Drainage District, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Alberta Conservation Association, and Alberta Environment.



*Water over the gates at Morecambe structure, April 25, 2005.  
Photo: Len Greer*

## ***Localized Flooding calls Committee to Action***

Spring runoff resulted in elevated water levels in the Vermilion River, and localized flooding of agricultural land along particular reaches. Along one such reach upstream of the Morecambe structure and the community of Two Hills, concerns from local landowners prompted a special meeting of the Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee.

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, the committee met with staff of Alberta Environment's Water Operations Branch to assess the situation and discuss management options. The water level at the Morecambe structure at the time was 599.53 m ESL with 0.45 m of water flowing over the weir. Considering the water level had peaked on April 14<sup>th</sup> at 599.926 m ESL and was steadily receding, considerable discussion was held as to whether or not opening of the structure gates at this time was warranted. Note, full supply level of the structure (ie: height of the spillway) is 599.08 m ESL.

In the end, recommendations from the committee lead to the management decision to monitor the situation for one more week. If water levels after that week had not dropped to an acceptable level, Water Operations Branch staff would open the gates and operate the structure as deemed necessary.

One week later, as agreed, the gates of the Morecambe structure were opened. On May 20, with water levels at the structure measuring 599.204 m ESL, the gates were again closed. Monitoring of conditions by Alberta Environment continues. Management options and opportunities for fall release and drawdown of the reservoir are high on the list of topics for future meetings.

## ***Vermilion River Watershed Initiative***

*By Mona Lee Kirkland, Conservation Specialist for the  
Counties of Minburn & Vermilion River*

**The Vermilion River Watershed Initiative** (VRWI), a community-based stewardship initiative, began in August 2003. With the headwaters of the Vermilion River located near Holden in Beaver County and the Vermilion River emptying into the North Saskatchewan at Lea Park in the County of Vermilion River this initiative is being promoted in the following Counties: Beaver, Minburn, Two Hills and Vermilion River.

Working with a facilitator in the early part of 2005, the group of interested stakeholders and municipal representatives developed a vision and mission statement for this initiative; the long-term vision being “Working Together for a Healthy Vermilion River Watershed” and a mission to “**To Promote Understanding and Awareness of the Vermilion River Watershed Health**”. These two statements clearly set the foundation for this initiative, and will be used to guide future activities.

This is further reflected in the goals of developing awareness, both within the group and within the community, of issues that pertain to the Vermilion River watershed health. Proposed actions aim to promote an understanding of the function of the Vermilion River watershed and how we impact it, and to facilitate positive action to improve and maintain the health of the Vermilion River watershed.

Activities to date include: a watershed survey mailed out to over 5000 farm boxes and rural routes in September 2003; an open house in Innisfree in January 2004; and a summer tour conducted in July of 2004, that included a site visit to the Morecambe dam. To date, six publicly advertised meetings have also been held, where presentations from a host of invited speakers have highlighted a variety of topics of local interest ranging from riparian assessments and the Provincial Water for Life Strategy, to regulations for septic systems, and how to construct your own off-channel livestock winter watering systems.

To learn more call Mona Lee Kirkland (780) 853-8104 or Aimee Cook (780) 663-3730.

## ***Call-out System for Flood Events***

Using real-time hydrometric and meteorological stations to track both river and weather conditions, AENV’s River Flow Forecasting Team is tasked with forecasting floods and/or high flows in rivers and streams, and issues public advisories and warnings. Through the local call-out system threatened municipalities receive first notice of a potential flood advisory, along with Disaster Services, Emergency Response/Fire & Rescue Services, and AENV Water Management Operations Division. The second group to be notified consists of media and local MLAs.

Upon being notified of the advisory it is the responsibility of the individual municipalities to activate their response plan for floods. Most authorities use this advisory as a heads-up to further monitor and assess their local situation. If required, the disaster services response is activated to broadcast a message to the public by means of local radio and television stations. Similarly, flooding due to potential problems with a structure is addressed in AENV’s Emergency Preparedness Plan for each structure.



### ***Opportunity for Input***

Serving as a communication link between Alberta Environment, and the local communities, the Vermilion River Operations Advisory Committee is always interested in hearing from local stakeholders as to water management issues and opportunities. This is your avenue to provide input into the management of your local water resources.

- Barry Kutryk – Chairperson: (780) 366-2223
- Al Corbett – AB Environment (780) 960-8614  
*(toll-free by first dialing 310-0000)*