

SHARING BOUNDARY WATERS

Canada and the United States recognize that each country is affected by the other's actions in managing lake and river systems along the border. Establishing a mechanism for cooperation was important for the two countries to manage these waters wisely and to protect them for the benefit of today's citizens and future generations.

The longest-standing and perhaps one of the most important bilateral environmental agreements between Canada and the US is the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909. The principles and mechanisms it established to help prevent and resolve disputes regarding quantity and quality of our shared waters provide the basis for their protection.

The International Joint Commission (IJC) was established in 1911 as an impartial binational commission to oversee implementation of the treaty. The treaty stipulates IJC's approval must be obtained for situations involving use, obstruction or diversion of boundary and transboundary waters that affect the water's natural level or flow. The treaty also allows the governments of Canada and the US to use the IJC as an independent fact-finding mechanism to carry out studies on matters of concern along the boundary and to make recommendations to both governments.

The IJC has six members; three are appointed by the President of the US, with the advice and approval of the Senate, and three are appointed by the Governor in Council of Canada, on the advice of the Prime Minister. Former North Dakota Governor Allen Olson is one of the six Commissioners.

The Commissioners must follow the Treaty as they try to prevent or resolve disputes. They must act impartially in reviewing problems and deciding issues, rather than representing the views of their respective governments. The IJC has set up more than 20 boards composed of experts from the US and Canada to help it carry out its responsibilities. In the Red River Basin, the International Red River Board (IRRB) maintains an awareness of basin-wide development activities and conditions that may affect water levels and flows, water quality and the ecosystem health of the Red River and its transboundary tributaries and inform the Commission about transboundary issues.

An annual IRRB meeting held in the Basin provides citizens an opportunity for citizens to be updated on its activities. Recent issues discussed have included the status of agency actions regarding ongoing flood impacts; transboundary water quality and aquatic ecosystem monitoring results; North Dakota, Minnesota and Manitoba reports on pollution sources, spills and pollution abatement; the Red River Valley Water Supply Study; and Devils Lake outlet operations.

Differing needs conflict from time to time. For Canada and the United States, the IJC is there to help ensure that all of us work together to find solutions to problems and to protect the ecosystems in which we live.

The IJC publishes reports and studies on the progress made and the challenges that remain in restoring and protecting our boundary waters. For more information on the IJC and IRRB meetings and activities, go to www.ijc.org.

Until the next Ripple Effect,

The Red River Basin Commission (RRBC)

The RRBC is a grassroots organization that is a chartered not-for-profit corporation under the provisions of Manitoba, North Dakota, Minnesota, and South Dakota law. Our offices in Moorhead, MN and Winnipeg, MB can be reached at 218-291-0422 and 204-982-7254, or you can check out our website at www.redriverbasincommission.org.

