

July 7, 2011

Environmental Impact Assessment for proposed Special Areas Water Supply Project in East Central Alberta

Assessment will examine potential environmental, social, health and economic implications

Edmonton... The Government of Alberta is beginning a voluntary three-year Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process that will examine the potential diversion of water from the Red Deer River to the Special Areas region in East Central Alberta, as well as parts of the County of Stettler and the County of Paintearth.

“We are voluntarily conducting an EIA to ensure an open and accountable process,” said Minister of Municipal Affairs, Hector Goudreau. “Gathering the relevant information will help ensure a good decision is made on whether to proceed with the proposed project.”

The Special Areas region of East Central Alberta has experienced a long history of water shortages. Low precipitation and a lack of secure water supply have been impediments to economic diversification and stability in the region. The areas, under direction of Alberta Municipal Affairs, were established by the province in 1938 due to the extreme hardship of years of drought in the 1930s. The three-person Special Areas Board manages more than 1 million hectares of public land and provides municipal services, such as construction and maintenance of local roads and parks, and emergency and protective services, to the region.

“Households and livestock in the drought-prone areas of East Central Alberta are in need of an improved water distribution system,” said Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Jack Hayden. “We need to carefully examine the Special Areas Water Supply Project to determine if it represents a viable way to bring a sustainable water supply to rural communities in the area.”

Potential benefits of the project would include increased reliability of water supply for household and domestic use; stock watering; municipal and industrial use; waterfowl and wildlife conservation and enhancement; recreation, and a limited amount of irrigation.

If constructed, the Special Areas Water Supply Project would be part of the provincially owned water management infrastructure and would be owned and operated by Alberta Environment.

The projected cost for Phase 1 of the EIA is estimated at \$1 million.

The Alberta government is working to build a better Alberta by fostering economic growth, strengthening our health and education systems, investing in infrastructure, supporting safe and strong communities and ensuring a clean and healthy environment.

Backgrounder: Information on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process

Media inquiries may be directed to:

Ag Media Line
Alberta Agriculture and Rural Development
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To call toll-free within Alberta, dial 310-0000.



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Information on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process

What is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)?

An EIA examines the environmental, social, health and economic implications of a project. For water management projects, the EIA is the first step in a regulatory process to obtain formal approval for the project to proceed and the specific conditions under which the project can operate. This is a well-established process that has been used for several water management projects in the past.

How does the EIA process work?

The EIA will be done in two phases. The first phase involves gathering the information required by the terms of reference and submitting an EIA report to Alberta Environment. Phase 1 is complete once Alberta Environment determines the EIA report is complete. Phase 2 involves a review of the project by the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) and possibly the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency to determine whether proceeding with the project is in the public interest.

How long will the assessment take?

Phase 1 will take approximately three years to complete while Phase 2 will take approximately one to two years to complete.

How much does the assessment cost?

Phase 1 will cost approximately \$1 million and includes data collection, technical review, responding to supplemental information requests, completion and publication of the EIA report. Phase 2 would cover the NRCB review of the report, and preparation for and attendance at a possible NRCB public hearing.

Is public consultation part of the EIA process?

Yes. The public will have a minimum 30 days to provide comment on the EIA's proposed terms of reference, which will be posted at <http://environment.alberta.ca/01495.html> during the next few months. A public consultation plan is being prepared for the assessment and will include open houses, meetings with stakeholders, and other consultation activities throughout the assessment.

- 30 -

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