

Water Dispatch

water information and commentary

June 2008

Financial Sustainability Planned by WID Board

The WID is in a better financial position today than it has been in many years. The settlement from the provincial government, the license transfer to MD of Rocky View and two grants from the provincial government definitely moved the WID into a new financial reality.

However, it's important for WID ratepayers to know that even without these financial boosts, the WID Board worked hard to improve its financial position and set the district on a sustainable path.

"Really understanding our business from a financial point of view started about five years ago," says Board Member Dale Dolphin. He adds that Irrigation Council and provincial government representatives noticed the change and reacted favourably.

"I honestly think the business practices we put in place made the grants we received from the province possible," he says. He credits the recent financial progress to the hard work of Board members and, largely, manager Jim Webber.

"Putting a strong team in place made this possible," he insists.

One of the perennial difficulties for the WID stems from its original set up that created a system with low irrigation acres per kilometer of canal. As funding and irrigation rates correlate to irrigated acres, the

Something to Think About

We live in a rapidly changing social environment and the WID has an important role to play in the growth, prosperity and sustainability of its region. This requires a strong, visionary board with diverse skill sets and perspectives. The current WID Board has these attributes, but individu-



Recreation at Chestermere Lake is one service the WID can provide urban centers. Photo: C. Lacombe

als can only serve for so long before they must pass the reins. WID spent many years receiving funding from all sources below the amount necessary to properly maintain and rehabilitate its infrastructure.

The Board recognized the limited ability to support the infrastructure through ratepayers alone and began investigating ways to generate income from other sources.

This led the Board to develop the vision of becoming an urban water utility as well as an irrigation district. Rapid growth brought challenges for the entire region and the WID Board decided the district could be part of the solution to some of the water management challenges.

"If we want to be part of the solution, then we have to seriously accept change in our

community as irrigators," Dolphin says.

Dolphin says opportunities still exist for the WID to do more, "We can change the face of the whole region. WID will grow in agriculture and other opportunities." The constantly expanding urban population offers the District opportunities to work with urban planners to protect the core irrigation business of the Board and benefit ratepayers through creating wealth for the district and the community through urban utility services. The opportunity to provide stormwater, drinking water, recreational and oil industry services to urban centers can offer the WID a chance to take some financial pressure off the irrigation ratepayers.

WID board position is an excellent learning tool for anyone that might want to get involved. He points out that many farmers today are university educated and have strong skills they can offer the district.

"People who bring agriculture and business together on our board offer a great asset to our organization," he says.

Future Water Sharing in WID

The WID Board recognizes that, as a large license holder in a closed river basin, the future can hold opportunities for the District to share water with small users and provide valuable water utility services.

The big question for everyone is how that can happen in today's water market. The recent experience of working with the MD of Rocky View initiated the WID Board and management to the lengthy and somewhat complicated process for an irrigation district to transfer water license allocations to another party. It also cost time and money for the Board to follow all the steps mandated by the Irrigation Districts Act.

The Irrigation Districts Act stipulates the required meetings with water users, specific information to exchange; requirements to ensure the District's full public has all the information regarding the change and the plebiscite vote.

"It's quite an elaborate process; it's probably more than the Water Act," says Jim Webber WID manager. He adds that the WID Board is quite aware of its role as Trustees for the water users and that the water users have the ability to use their votes to disagree.

"In a market place where there is such an urgent need for water and flexibility in handling water, the system needs streamlining," Webber says. He points out that the information exchange, multiple appeal opportunities and broad-spectrum public input involved creates huge costs and slows the process. His concern is that this will stall economic development in southern Alberta. "From a WID perspective, the license transfer process is just not worth our time (to do it again)," Webber reflects.

The WID would prefer to be able to serve other customers through the existing license. As an example, to double Rockyford's existing license would require 110 acre-feet of additional license (less than it takes to operate a pivot for a season). The cost of the license and transfer process would likely be prohibitive for the Village.

The challenge for small communities in irrigation districts will be whether the provincial government allows irrigation districts to serve their future water needs.

An application to amend the EID license to serve small customers without having to sell them a license created a public backlash and sent the process into question. The provincial government will announce a decision whether or not it will allow irrigation districts to serve other customers. Until that decision becomes public, no irrigation district will know what they might be able to do for the communities within their borders.

Webber explains that WID system rehabilitation will create water savings for the district. He suggests that under the right regulatory system, the WID could manage its water allocation to supply most municipal needs for years to come and still grow the agricultural community. He points out that this is exactly what the Water Act was designed to do. However, the current water allocation debate is calling into question the processes put in place to ensure everyone has access to water.



Current WID License Facts

- 160,400 Acre-feet priority date 1903
- Final License issued in 1921
- 117,600 Acre-feet applied for in 1999, still under review
- 95,000 Acres under irrigation This is WID's current irrigated acre cap
- 713 Acre-feet allocated to yard & garden and stock watering agreements for a total of 475 agreements @ 1.5 acre feet per agreement.
- 5 Municipalities supported through WID works

New Ditchrider in Crowfoot!

Ditchrider Contacts		
Brian Sander	Water Master	325-0493
Dwight Gittel	Chestermere	899-4638
Don Brownlee	Carseland	899-4641
Pat Smith	Gleichen/Cluny	325-4642
Wes Sproule	Rockyford	325-4640
Peter Birkinshaw	Crowfoot	325-4639
Jeff Maude	Strathmore	325-4601

Chronology of WID Water License Events

1921: The federal government granted Canadian Pacific Railway Company a license to draw 627,178 acre-feet from the Bow River to serve 218,980 acres.

1930: The Natural Resources Transfer Agreement caused the provincial government to enact the Water Resources Act to administer water licenses in Alberta.

1944: Water users of the WID negotiated the transfer of the CPR western block to the water users headed by a Board of Trustees. The transfer included all infrastructure, equipment, agreements and responsibility for water delivery previously administered by CPR.

1963: After a review of all Alberta water licenses, the provincial government issued a new license for 160,400 acre-feet to serve 50,000 acres. There was no consultation with WID landowners or Board members at this time. No signed documents exist with WID representation.

1963 - 1992: The WID Board of Trustees exceeded the 1963 diversion license approximately 100 times with no comment from the provincial authorities.

1992: The provincial government told WID Board and administration to remain within their allocation and forced the administration to seek legal counsel regarding the status of the water license. Legal advisors told the Board of Trustees the provincial government's unilateral reduction of their license was invalid and the 1921 license remained in affect.

1993: The WID Board of Trustees began negotiations with Alberta Environment. AENV committed to forwarding a proposal to the Board by December 1995.

1996: A proposal by AENV suggested no changes to the license agreement or conditions for the WID.

1997: The WID Board filed a legal suit against the provincial government related to Calgary Stormwater access to the Western Headworks Canal and the Federal License. The courts bundled the stormwater and the Federal case and addressed the stormwater issue first.

2003: Court rules in favour of WID Board claim against the province for the stormwater issue. The courts turned to the Federal license issue.

2004: Rather than engage in an expensive legal fight, the WID Board offered to negotiate

2005: The province chose not to ratify a drafted mediated agreement.

2006: WID reactivated the court process. At this time, the province took another look at the mediated settlement, and with a small adjustment for inflation, offered the Board a settlement.

2008: The WID Board accepted the offer resulting in an \$85 million cash settlement transferred to WID.

Calgary Weir Project

The project to redesign the weir at the Western Headworks intake on the Bow River keeps being delayed. The challenge for the group involved is that they cannot move forward until all the funds for the project are in the bank. However, every time they reach the fund raising goal, the price goes up because of local inflation. Manager Jim Webber represents the WID in all discussions regarding this project.



This is the Bow River at the WID Headgates today. The area will change significantly if the weir project ever goes ahead. WID will always have a representative on the committee to ensure its interests remain forefront in any project changes. Photo: C. Lacombe

WID Welcomes One Home

The WID Board, management and staff welcomed home an old friend with newly gained skills this winter. Robin Glasier rejoined the ranks of professionals working on behalf of WID ratepayers. While away from the district over the past few years, Glasier solidified her skills as a land agent and now brings her expertise to bear on behalf of WID in all land management issues.

“She’s doing a great job. It makes me wonder how we got along without her,” says Jim Webber, WID manager.

Waters of Wheatland Survey

Wheatland County invites residents to respond to an online survey for Waters of Wheatland. There is a Garmin GPS prize draw to win by completing the survey. The quick survey takes about 10 minutes to do. Visit www.wheatlandcounty.ca to take the survey.

Alberta Environment (AENV) Water Forecast

As of May 1, AENV forecasts natural runoff volumes for March - Sept. 2008 as below average to average in the Bow River basin. They expect volumes to be below to much below average for the Bow River at Banff and below average for the Bow River at Calgary. They expect below average to average into the Cascade Reservoir and for the Highwood River. Spray Lakes Reservoir, the Kananaskis and Elbow Rivers expect average runoff. Current natural runoff volume forecasts range from 80 to 96% of average in the Bow basin. Significant precipitation of 30 to 80 millimeters May 7 - 9 in much of the basin should further increase these forecasts in June. The first two months of the forecast period recorded natural runoff volumes ranging from 57 to 87% of average.

2008 Infrastructure projects

Two major projects will dominate the 2008 construction season for the WID Operations Department – Phase One of the Cluny rehabilitation project and 12 more kilometers of A Canal rehabilitation. Also during this season, the Operations Department will continue to install SCADA monitoring equipment in the C Canal system and automate gates in various locations.

The Cluny project Phase One will build 12 kilometers of the main line consisting of five kilometers of 48-inch pipe; which is the largest pipe made anywhere. In total, the project will use about 12 kilometers of 42-inch pipe on the main line and laterals.

“We’re going to do over 20 kilometers of pipe this coming season,” says Erwin Braun, WID Operations Manager. The District will install over 20 more kilometers of pipe during the second year/phase of the project. The Cluny project has three places where they have to cross Hwy 1.

“For some reason, they won’t let us dig through the highway,” chuckles Braun. This means that the project has to auger and bore through the ground under the highway. He hopes they can get that done this summer.

Before they start, they have to map all the gas lines and go either over or under them. Braun says when done, the project will increase delivery capacity an additional 5,000 acres. He adds that these would be acres moved from elsewhere in the district by interested parties.

“There’s been really good support and interest from the landowners and that’s important,” Braun adds.

The 12 kilometers of Secondary A canal consists of Hwy 24 down and across Hwy 22 and north toward Strathmore

“It looks like in a few years, Secondary A canal will be rehabilitated all the way to Strathmore.”

With the recent influx of cash, the WID Board is doing some long-term capital planning broken into 3-year plans. Braun anticipates that the District will move from spending about \$2.5 million per year to about six or seven million per year.

“That means we can do a lot of canals in short order.” The Board will accelerate the program,” Braun says.

WID supports on-farm efficiency projects

This stock water dugout eliminates the need for a constant flow delivery. A water savings project that also solves problems associated with constant tail water running onto neighbouring lands (scouring, washing etc.). WID stock photo

In 2007, over 20 WID water users took advantage of the cost sharing program offered by the Board and put infrastructure in place that will save about 2,900 acre-feet of water per year. The projects ranged from flood to pivot irrigation conversions, operational size dugouts, yard and garden storage and a variety of stock watering systems.

“Overall the process works. We’d like to see more applications for projects,” says Brian Sander, WID Water Master

The goal of the program is to maximize the efficient use of water licensed to the WID. On-site storage allows the district to manage canal flows for maximum benefit of all water users on the system.

“It’s in the best interests for all users to have storage for all stock or yard water in the inevitable event that water levels in a lateral ditch or canal are low or turned



off during the season due to little or no demand,” he explains. Stock and yard agreements contain a clause that stipulates the water user provide a two-week storage facility. What size two weeks storage ends up being is very specific to the requirements of the facility. The important thing to realize is the impact a dugout has on water conservation, not only on an individual basis, but collectively through the entire District. “I encourage users to contact their area supervisor to initiate the process,” says Sander

The district funded \$25,000 toward these projects and the owners contributed an aggregate of \$14,500 in 2007.

Who Knew?

Athtar - The Ugaritic god of irrigation, associated with the morning star. He was placed on the vacant throne of Baal by the god El.



Here’s an example of an unexpected Operations Department emergency that took place last season. Not quite your average covered bridge. Photo by Erwin Braun