

DIFFICULT START TO 2011 IRRIGATION SEASON

The spring of 2011 has been a real challenge for District staff and irrigators, to say the least. This on the heels of the 2010 season which saw district works incur over 8 million dollars in damage due to excessive rainfall.



Photo Seven Persons Reservoir Courtesy Alberta Environment, April, 11, 2011.

Unusually high snow packs of up to 300% of normal and heavy snow accumulations on the prairies in 2011 led to heavy flooding in the Medicine Hat and Bow Island areas prior to irrigation start-up. District staff worked hard to clean snow out of canals to help alleviate flooding and blockages due to snow and ice jams. Despite our best efforts we were unable to save the spillway at Seven Persons Reservoir due to the usually high volume of runoff directed over the earthen structure for a prolonged period. We are currently assessing the options on whether to repair or abandon the structure. Snow runoff also caused severe flooding in the Yellow Lake area causing numerous County roads to be flooded. We are trying to work with the Counties and M.D.'s throughout the District in regard to drainage. The District is not responsible for drainage from runoff although we receive it by default.

There were many tense moments as District reservoirs rose dangerously and we were unable to move water since our canals were full of snow in most areas. This has caused the District to investigate methods to provide emergency spill. Contributing to the problem was that landowners were pumping

water off their lands into District works. This is not allowed without the permission of the Manager of Operations and only as per the guidelines for pumping established by the NRCB.

In the past the District has established a firm start date for the delivery of water. However this year, due to little irrigation demand and the need to fix main canal sloughs, start up was delayed in some areas until orders were received. Remember to contact your Water Coordinator to order water. Don't assume we will load a pipeline or canal without any water orders!

We wish to thank those irrigators, who have suffered through another dreadful construction season, for their patience. It's hard to conduct rehab projects when it's a cold and wet as last winter.

Irrican Power is also facing a challenging year. Due to low irrigation demand, power generation is well below average production levels.

I think we can all say we're sick of this weather!

Pray for sun!