



INTERNATIONAL SOURIS RIVER STUDY MOVING FORWARD

BACKGROUND

Unprecedented flooding in the Souris (Mouse) River Basin in 2011 focused attention on the International Souris River Board (ISRB) to review an international operating plan related to reservoir operations in the basin, with specific emphasis on flooding and water supply. The operating plan was established in the 1989 International Agreement for Water Supply and Flood Control (Agreement) between the governments of Canada and the United States. The operating plan established under the Agreement is for four mainstem reservoirs on the Souris River, which include: Rafferty, Grant Devine, Boundary, and Darling Dams. In response to the 2011 flood events, public and government agencies involved in flood protection, particularly in North Dakota, requested that additional protection measures be evaluated beyond what was currently provided under the Agreement.

In addition, the ISRB was to review the operating plan contained in Annex A of the Agreement, and propose a plan to both federal governments on how to review and update the current agreement. The ISRB

previously completed a Plan of Study in 2013, which proposed how to evaluate the Agreement and submitted it to the International Joint Commission (IJC), the intergovernmental agency under which the ISRB was formed. The IJC was established by the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, and allows Canada and the United States a common platform to discuss and investigate transboundary water issues. The ISRB serves as this platform for Canada and the United States for discussion about the Souris River.

In September 2017, after a series of meetings and task force initiatives between the governments of Canada and the United States, the IJC formed the International Souris River Study Board (Study Board) to complete the Plan of Study proposed by the ISRB, with specific emphasis on flooding and water supply in the Souris River Basin. The IJC can create temporary study boards such as this for the purpose of completing studies; while permanent river boards, like the ISRB, handle the day-to-day aspects of river management.

STUDY ENGAGEMENT

The IJC established a Public Advisory Group (PAG) to increase public engagement and incorporate public information into the Study. Rather than reporting to the Study Board, the PAG reports directly to the IJC on the progress of the study from the public's perspective. This creates a check on the Study Board, to ensure it is working in the public's interest.

The Study Board established the Resource and Agency Advisory Group (RAAG) to act as a conduit for federal, provincial, state, and municipal input, as well as industry engagement. The RAAG is in the process of soliciting feedback from all necessary entities in order to obtain the best possible results for modeling. This information will then be used in models to evaluate alternatives for the study.

The Study Board and IJC are also engaging with First Nations, Tribes, and Metis in Canada and the United States to understand their interests in the Souris River Basin and management of the river. There is also the goal of understanding interest in establishing a longer-term relationship with the ISRB and IJC.

STUDY PROGRESS

The Study Board is in the process of developing alternatives to the current operating plan. Alternatives are being developed in five modeling phases, and the Study Board's technical teams are currently wrapping up the third phase and moving into the fourth phase. Modeling scenarios from the first three phases have been presented to both the RAAG and PAG. Once modeling results are completed for the fourth phase, the Study Board intends to obtain feedback from its advisory groups in a series of workshops being set up in November 2019.

Earlier this year, the Study received a one-year extension to the timeline, with the final report now due in February 2021 - rather than February 2020. Upon the study's completion, the Study Board will submit its recommendation to the IJC. The IJC will then submit the plan to the governments of Canada and the United States for their consideration and approval.

When completed, the outcomes of this cooperative international effort will hopefully result in improved flood resiliency, and water supply management for residents living in the Souris River Basin.



Rafferty Reservoir near Estevan, Saskatchewan, during the 2011 flood.