



INDIGENOUS NATIONS WORKSHOP

Strengthens Cooperation and Beneficial Collaboration

The International Souris River Study Board (ISRSB or Study Board) held its second Indigenous Nations Workshop in September 2020. Due to public safety concerns related to COVID-19, the two-day workshop was held virtually. The virtual meeting platform afforded valuable discussion and productive interaction with the Study Board, International Joint Commission (IJC), State Water Commission (SWC), and Indigenous Nations.

The Souris (Mouse) River originates in Saskatchewan and flows through North Dakota and discharges into Manitoba. Because Canada and the United States share the Souris River, the International Joint Commission, which was created in 1909, helps the countries investigate issues and solutions regarding the transboundary waters.

Through the years, several bi-national boards have been established by the IJC to assist in the management of the transboundary waters of the Souris River Basin and its major tributaries. The International Souris River Board (ISRB) was created to ensure that a more eco-systemic approach is utilized in regards to transboundary water issues, compliance for the apportionment of river flows, oversight of flood operations, and to assist the IJC in preventing and resolving transboundary disputes.

In 2011, excess flooding from an unprecedented rain event in recorded history occurred and caused monumental flooding in the Souris River Basin. This created severe hardships including social, economic, and environmental repercussions in several areas.

The IJC appointed the Study Board, in response to the 2011 flood event, to help further investigate Souris River flooding, water supply issues, and impacts of climate change related to the basin. Ultimately, this will allow the Governments of Canada and the United States to utilize information and assess recommendations from the Study Board regarding the river. However, prior to implementing any official operating changes regarding the Souris River, established bi-national protocols must be strictly followed.

Staff at the Water Commission have diligently worked as an integral part of the Study Board in order to supply research and analysis concerning the basin. Numerous engagement activities and technical work have been provided by the SWC. John Paczkowski, Interim State Engineer, serves as the U.S. Co-Chair of the ISRB; Laura Ackerman, Chief of the Investigations Section at the Water Commission, serves as the U.S. Co-Chair of the ISRB's Resource and Agency Advisory Group; and Chris Korkowski, Water Commission Engineer, serves as the U.S. Co-Secretary for the ISRB.

In November 2019, the first Indigenous Nations Workshop was held to help diversify and take into consideration varying perspectives regarding the study. The workshop was held at the International Peace Gardens located in the Turtle Mountains of North Dakota and Manitoba. It was hosted by IJC and study staff and was largely held in response to various tribal representatives requesting involvement, and a joint gathering to discuss the study and address points of concern. Sixteen Indigenous representatives participated in the November 2019 Peace Gardens workshop, representing ten Indigenous Nations who have current or ancestral interests in the Souris River Basin.

Due to the considerable success of the first workshop, a second event was held in September 2020. The virtual workshop was hosted by the Water Commission, in cooperation with the IJC and Study Board, and nearly 75 constituents participated in the two-day sessions, including ISRB members, ISRB members, IJC staff, IJC Commissioners, and various other stakeholders. Fifteen Indigenous delegates participated in the workshop and represented approximately ten different nations.



The IJC and several bi-national boards support Canada and the United States investigate issues and solutions regarding the transboundary waters of the Souris River Basin.

Both workshops proved to be exceedingly beneficial and were specifically designed to update participants on the ISRB's work to date and to collect recommendations from participants on how to better include Indigenous Nations in IJC efforts. Discussion also generated the possible formation of an Indigenous Advisory Group and potentially adding board members to the ISRB to improve representation of Indigenous interests. The ISRB has authority to create its own advisory groups, but any addition of board members requires an appointment by the IJC.

Overall, the workshops provided invaluable Indigenous knowledge and insight on how the Souris River basin impacts Indigenous Nations. In the future, long-term collaboration, discussions, and sharing initiatives is expected to continue in 2021 and beyond.



Various Indigenous communities have current or ancestral interests in the Souris River Basin.