

Natural Resources Conservation Board News Release

Highwood Storage and Diversion Plan Joint Review Panel Issues Progress Report #3

Edmonton, July 20, 2001 -- The Highwood Storage and Diversion Plan Joint Review Panel today released a report that summarizes the results of a public meeting held in High River on June 2, 2001 to discuss Alberta Transportation's progress in completing its proposed Highwood Storage and Diversion Plan.

At the meeting, Alberta Transportation reported that it was still investigating three potential sites for offstream storage and that it still expected to submit a revised diversion plan, with or without storage, by March 2002. Alberta Environment reported that a Public Advisory Committee had been established and was working to complete Phase 1 of the Highwood Management Plan by the same deadline.

Various members of the public expressed concern about the limited progress of the Public Advisory Committee and the adequacy of Alberta Transportation's analysis of the potential offstream storage sites. Some participants also suggested that the roles of the Public Advisory Committee, Alberta Environment and Alberta Transportation need to be better defined if the deadline is to be met.

In its report, the Panel concluded that, in order to meet the March 2002 deadline, Alberta Transportation needed to complete its comparative assessment of the three storage sites as soon as possible. The Panel directed that this assessment be submitted within 60 days of the issuance of its report. The Panel concluded that early completion of the comparative assessment of storage sites would allow the Public Advisory Committee to focus its efforts on developing the Highwood Management Plan. The Panel intends to hold another public meeting in the Fall of 2001 to review Alberta Transportation's analysis of the storage options.

The Panel was established jointly under the *Alberta Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* on March 22, 2000. The Panel's mandate is to examine the environmental, social and economic effects of developing offstream water storage in the Highwood River basin and proposed changes to the diversion plan for the Highwood River.

A previous joint review panel originally considered the issues of offstream storage and the diversion plan in 1997. However, the previous panel concluded in its report of June 1998 that, although additional offstream storage was required to address current and future water demands in the Highwood basin, there was insufficient information to consider these issues adequately. Consequently, Alberta Transportation (originally Alberta Public Works, Supply and Services) was asked to complete additional studies, as set out in NRCB Board Order 9601-1, within 12 months.

Copies of the June 2001 report are available from the NRCB, 4th Floor, Sterling Place, 9940 -106 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2N2, or by telephoning (780) 422-1977.

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The Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) provides a fair, open and impartial forum for Albertans to take part in the review of natural resource development projects such as forestry, recreational, water management and tourism projects.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (Agency) is a federal agency reporting to the Minister of the Environment. Its mission is to provide Canadians with high-quality environmental assessments that contribute to informed decision-making in support of sustainable development. Environmental assessment

is a planning tool used to identify the possible adverse effects of development projects on the environment.

Information can be found on the NRCB's web site at www.nrcb.gov.ab.ca or on the Agency's web site at www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca.

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