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FIRM OPPOSITION TO MILK RIVER DAM

The following letter is part of the submission of Natural 2000, c/o Students Association, Lakeland College, Vermillion to Klohn Crippen Consultants Ltd. regarding the Milk River Dam.

We are writing to inform you that Natural 2000 is firmly opposed to the construction of a new dam in the Milk River area. The feasibility of a new Milk River Ridge Dam is currently being studied, as directed by Environment Minister Lorne Taylor. We opposed the damming of the South Saskatchewan River just over one year ago (another project studied under the direction of Minister Taylor), and virtually all of our objections to the Meridian Dam also apply to the Milk River Ridge Dam. We have attached a copy of our submission on that project for your information and wish to stress the minimal guidelines formulated by the San Francisco Declaration of the International Rivers Network: The Position of Citizens' Organizations on Large Dams and Water Resource Management contained therein.

A project similar to the Milk River Ridge proposal was studied in the 1980s but was shelved due to financial constraints and environmental concerns. Since this time, dams have only become more expensive to build and the pressure on our environment has only intensified. Spending taxpayers' money to once again verify this seems wasteful to us.

The environmental concerns are very similar between the two dam projects. The Milk River Ridge dam would destroy extremely rare, internationally significant, provincially "protected" heritage grassland, home to rare and threatened species. The economics of the two dam projects are also similar. Hundreds of millions, if not billions, of taxpayers' dollars spent on the dam would benefit only a very small number of Albertans in low value irrigation agriculture. This seems unconscionable when other Alberta farmers are trying (and often failing) to compete without benefit of such a massive subsidy.

It strikes us that the Milk River Ridge Dam would, in effect, be an expensive short-term solution to a very long-term problem. Alberta's water resources are disappearing. Our glaciers are rapidly melting as a result of global warming. Glaciers are a key source of water needed to fill the proposed reservoir. Global warming is also causing us to receive less rainfall in the continental interior and to lose more water to evaporation. Furthermore, we are "mining" water from our aquifers at an accelerating rate, without even knowing how much groundwater we actually have. We think it is abundantly clear that our water resources are badly over-allocated, and rather than pursuing projects that would allocate yet more water, we believe Alberta must begin to reduce its water use. We must protect what water we have left by pursuing methods to use our precious water resources more efficiently.

We understand that the Milk River Ridge Dam study was requested by local residents for the dual purpose of increasing irrigation and providing water for towns like Milk River. We sympathize with the residents as we too are enduring devastating drought conditions. We hope that they will join with us in calling for a provincial water strategy that makes the best and fairest use of Alberta's water resources in an ecologically sustainable manner. The tax dollars being spent on re-verifying that this dam is not feasible would be better spent on educating all Albertans (public, agriculture and industry) in water conservation. We, as Canadians, hold a shameful record in the world for water wastage, and it is high time we correct this. Natural 2000 will be carefully studying the province's water strategy, expected in March, for a new direction in water management, away from the futile attempt to continuously increase supply from a diminishing resource, to finally curbing and amending demand to live within our water means.



