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EID Amendment Application Turned Down

Public concern appears to have halted, for now, the possibility of a major transfer of authority over Bow River water reallocation from the Government of Alberta to the Eastern Irrigation District. Alberta Environment announced on October 26, 2007 that it will “examine” its current policy on water license amendments in the South Saskatchewan River basin. In the meantime, it has deferred its review of the Eastern Irrigation District (EID) application to amend its water licenses.

In October AWA requested that Alberta Environment reject the EID application (*WLA*, October 2007). This Alberta Environment decision is at least a temporary victory for AWA’s view that the provincial government must remain involved in reviewing the reallocation of water licenses from their historic purpose – mainly agricultural irrigation, along the Bow – to other purposes and users. Had the EID been allowed to change the “purpose” of its water licenses as broadly as it had requested, very large quantities of Bow River water could have been reallocated to industrial or commercial uses, for example. This reallocation could have occurred without public input or the possibility of a water conservation holdback for instream flow needs.

Regarding this decision, Environment Minister Rob Renner explained that “with most of the South Saskatchewan River Basin closed to new license applications, concerns have been raised about the Alberta government maintaining its authority to oversee water resources.” AWA will continue to watch this situation and insist that Alberta Environment oversee water license transfers in the public interest and with regard to aquatic ecosystem needs.

- *Carolyn Campbell*

