



Alberta Wilderness Association

## Irrigation Expansion Action Alert



Photo by Cheryl Bradley

Dear valued AWA members,

For those who are unaware, AWA has been one of several concerned parties working to have an environmental impact assessment conducted for a nearly \$1-billion irrigation expansion project in southern Alberta. The South Saskatchewan River Basin Irrigation Infrastructure Expansion Project – now rebranded as the Alberta Irrigation Modernization Program – is the largest irrigation expansion in Alberta’s history, and has been proceeding seemingly without any consideration for environmental impacts to date.

We have expressed our concerns about this project on numerous occasions

since it was first announced back in October 2020, and it was recently featured in an article by Lorne Fitch in our Wildlands Advocate magazine, available [here](#).

With legal assistance from Ecojustice, the group of concerned environmental interests submitted letters to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC), formally requesting environmental impact assessments for the entire project and specifically for the three reservoirs proposed under this modernization program. Our request highlighted many of our key concerns including in-stream flow needs for aquatic ecosystem health, impacts to native grasslands, altered groundwater flows, and impacts to species at-risk.

As a result of our letters to IAAC, these three reservoir projects are now listed on the Impact Assessment Project Registry available at the following links: [Deadhorse Coulee Reservoir](#), [Snake Lake Reservoir](#), and [Chin Reservoir](#). Once listed, the Minister has 90-days to respond with his decision on whether these projects should be designated for an environmental impact assessment or not. Listing is not a guarantee that these projects will undergo an assessment, but this is some of the first good news we have had related to this project.

Now that these projects are listed on the registry, there is opportunity for the public to submit their concerns which would then get posted as supporting documentation alongside each project. **We are asking AWA members to please consider submitting their own letters to IAAC**, as a way to demonstrate to Minister Steven Guilbeault that there is broad public concern with these projects, and a desire for these projects to be designated for impact assessments. Our hope is that a greater display of public support might help persuade Minister Guilbeault to designate these projects for assessment.

To strengthen the content of these letters, we recommend referencing some of the concerns that we have expressed in our letters to IAAC, which include the following:

- Unknown location and extent for the irrigation expansion of 93,000 hectares;
- The potential environmental impacts to native grasslands, species at risk, and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Implications for in-stream flows, aquatic ecosystem health, and water conservation objectives;

- The cumulative effects of irrigation expansion, other human development, climate change; and
- Potential impacts to Indigenous communities within the South Saskatchewan River Basin.

**Please address your letters to the following:**

Impact Assessment Agency of Canada ([pnr-rpn@iaac-aeic.gc.ca](mailto:pnr-rpn@iaac-aeic.gc.ca))

cc. ECCC Minister Steven Guilbeault ([ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca](mailto:ec.ministre-minister.ec@canada.ca))

For any questions or concerns please contact:

Phillip Meintzer, AWA Conservation Specialist

[pmeintzer@abwild.ca](mailto:pmeintzer@abwild.ca)

Thank you.



Dedicated to the conservation of wilderness and completion of a protected areas network, AWA inspires communities to care for Alberta's wild spaces through awareness and action.

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