

**THE CITY OF RED DEER
POSITION PAPER on WATER
(December 5, 2005)**

PURPOSE

The City of Red Deer Position Paper on water sets out the City's positions regarding water and watershed management within the Red Deer River basin. The Position Paper addresses key areas in which the City of Red Deer has involvement and the corresponding interests therein.

BACKGROUND

The availability of water, both in quantity and quality, is of strategic importance to the environment and economy of the City and the entire Red Deer River basin.

Amongst the four major river basins in the southern portion of Alberta, the Red Deer River basin has by far the smallest supply of water. The natural flow of the Red Deer River is less than half of the Bow and Oldman Rivers (i.e. 49% of the Oldman River, 43% of the Bow River) and only one-quarter (26%) of the North Saskatchewan River.

Although water is a renewable resource, recent water management planning programs indicate that water supplies in southern Alberta are limited, particularly in years of lower than average river flows. This is especially so for the Bow and Oldman River systems, but is becoming a reality for the Red Deer River basin. Because of the relatively small size of the Red Deer River, the mounting pressures for uses of Red Deer River water both within and outside the Red Deer River watershed and the need to apportion water to Saskatchewan, it is important that the City of Red Deer is more vigilant, proactive and interactive in the management and use of water within the Red Deer River basin.

As the 'lifeblood' of the basin, a healthy Red Deer River is vital. Since the use of land and water throughout the watershed affects the quality of water in the Red Deer River and its tributary streams, the City also recognizes the need to be proactive in partnering with other communities and interests to promote and sustain a healthy watershed, which in turn will promote and sustain a healthy river.

CITY CONTEXT

The City's interest in water use and water management, both within the City and across the basin, is not new:

- throughout the years there have been major upgrades to the City's water treatment plant to provide higher quality potable water to a growing population and major upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant so return flows lessen impacts on the Red Deer River;
- in the 1970's, recognizing the need for flow regulation of the Red Deer River to assure better year round water supplies, the City participated in technical and public advisory processes which led to the building and operation of Dickson Dam;
- the City has actively participated on the Red Deer River Basin Advisory Committee since its inception in the year 2000 to assist the Province in the review of water management in the South Saskatchewan River Basin;

- in 2002 members of City Council and administration took part in a number of community open houses to provide input to the Province's Water for Life Strategy;
- having major concerns about the inappropriate use of significant amounts of raw water by the energy industry for deep well injection, in 2004 the City objected to and participated in appeals of an approved application for a water licence for deep well injection;
- the City has and continues to support regional water delivery solutions, for example by supplying treated water to the North Red Deer River Water Services Commission.

**POSITIONS on
PLANNING FRAMEWORK AND COOPERATION**

South Saskatchewan River Basin water management plan

The City:

- (1) supports the need for and completion of an updated South Saskatchewan River Basin water management plan since the Red Deer River basin is an integral part of the South Saskatchewan River Basin (SSRB);
- (2) will continue to be involved in the preparation of the SSRB water management plan through participation on the Red Deer River Basin Advisory Committee;
- (3) will review the draft SSRB water management plan and provide a formal response to the draft plan;
- (4) will seek involvement in the implementation of the SSRB water management plan on behalf of and in partnership with other communities and interests within the Red Deer River basin while representing City views and needs therein.

Red Deer River Basin integrated watershed management plan

The City:

- (1) recognizes that following approval of the South Saskatchewan River Basin water management plan, there is a need for a more detailed integrated watershed management plan for the Red Deer River basin;
- (2) will encourage the preparation and completion as soon as possible of an integrated watershed management plan for the Red Deer River basin, the process of which should actively engage stakeholders throughout the basin;
- (3) will seek involvement in the preparation and implementation of a integrated watershed management plan for the Red Deer River basin in partnership with other communities and interests throughout the basin, while representing City views and needs therein.

Interbasin cooperation

The City:

- (1) recognizes the need for consultation and cooperation among the four sub-basins in the South Saskatchewan River Basin (i.e. Red Deer, Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan downstream from the Bow-Oldman confluence), but in doing so will promote the collective voice of the Red Deer River basin as an equal partner in water management in the SSRB;

- (2) while recognizing the need for integrated water management among the four sub-basins to assist 'sharing of water' in times of need, will promote the primacy of Red Deer River basin water for use within the Red Deer River basin as a basic principle in managing waters in the SSRB;
- (3) upon completion of the South Saskatchewan River Basin water management plan, will review the plan to further identify the City's perspectives and nature of involvement in the cooperative management of the waters of the South Saskatchewan River system.

**POSITIONS ON
GUIDANCE AND STEWARDSHIP FOR THE RED DEER RIVER WATERSHED**

Red Deer River Basin Advisory Committee

The City:

- (1) supports the continuing significant roles of the Red Deer River Basin Advisory Committee to assist in the processes to prepare and finalize a water management plan for the South Saskatchewan River basin, including considering public and stakeholder input to the draft SSRB water management plan and advising on changes to the draft plan.

Red Deer River Municipal Users Group

The City:

- (1) recognizes the Red Deer River Municipal Users Group as an association of municipalities, primarily from within the Red Deer River basin, to serve as an integrated municipal voice for the use of Red Deer River waters within the basin and to seek timely and equitable funding for municipal and regional water systems, including upgrades, throughout the Red Deer River basin;
- (2) subject to (3) below, commits to continued membership on the Red Deer River Municipal Users Group to collaboratively engage with other communities on water use and management within the Red Deer River basin, while representing City views and needs thereon;
- (3) will from time to time review the City's commitments to the Red Deer River Municipal Users Group for financial support and services, including staff resources, based on the strategic business plan, management, activities and successes of the Red Deer River Municipal Users Group.

Red Deer River Watershed Alliance

The City:

- (1) recognizes the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance as the Watershed Planning and Advisory Council for the Red Deer River basin and its roles as a collaborative partnership of stakeholders interested in promoting a healthy Red Deer River watershed to ensure a legacy of ecological integrity and economic sustainability within the watershed;
- (2) subject to (3) below, commits to continued membership on the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance to collaboratively engage with other communities and interests to

assist the Alliance to fulfill its various purposes, while representing City views and needs thereon;

- (3) will from time to time review City commitments to the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance for financial support and services, including staff resources, based on the strategic business plan, management, activities and successes of the Alliance.

Alberta Environment

The City:

- (1) will encourage the Minister of Environment to commit the Department to long-term financing of the base operation of the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance since the Alliance is a water management partnership advocated in the *Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability*; it is recognized that commitments may need to be reviewed from time to time based on the strategic business plan, management, activities and successes of the Alliance;
- (2) will encourage the Minister of Environment to commit the Department to funding portions of special projects undertaken by and through the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance, especially those identified in *Water for Life: Alberta's Strategy for Sustainability* as these serve to implement the mandate of the Department in the management of water and watershed resources;
- (3) will encourage Alberta Environment, in association with the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance, to prepare and distribute annually a report on the Red Deer River (system), including but not limited to its water quality, flows, allocations, consumptive uses, issues, and planning and management overviews;
- (4) will seek to meet annually with the Regional Director to discuss water and watershed management in the Red Deer River Basin.

**POSITIONS ON
SPECIFIC WATER MATTERS**

Water quality [note: also see Water Allocation (2)]

The City:

- (1) recognizes the need to protect the water quality of the Red Deer River and its tributary streams, and will actively intervene when appropriate in the pursuit of water quality protection;
- (2) advocates that managing the water of the Red Deer River must be an appropriate balance between conserving the aquatic environment and the use of water;
- (3) will review and provide input to the recommended Water Conservation Objective for the Red Deer River upon release of the draft South Saskatchewan River Basin water management plan; in this regard it is important that specific provision be made in the Water Conservation Objective for the reach of the Red Deer River between the City's water supply intake and the location(s) of return flow(s);
- (4) recognizes that the Water Conservation Objective could be revised in the future if science shows that water quality needs can be met with a lesser flow;
- (5) will advise Alberta Environment, in association with the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance, to continue to monitor and report annually on the water quality of the Red Deer River system.

Water allocation

The City:

- (1) subject to (2) below, advocates that the management of water use within the Red Deer river system provides for total allocations that exceed 50% of the median annual flow of the river, but net use (i.e. consumptive use) does not exceed 40% of the median annual flow;
- (2) advocates a review of the water allocation limit of greater than 50% when allocations reach 40% of the median annual flow, and again at 45% if further allocations are advised, to ensure the continuation of an acceptable health of the aquatic environment and the reliability of junior water licences;
- (3) will actively intervene in water licence applications when appropriate to promote the beneficial, efficient and effective use of water within the basin;
- (4) encourages the use of water transfer mechanisms as provided for in the Water Act and the public listing of water allocation licences to assist interested parties in arranging transfers;
- (5) will consider the possible need to request the Minister of Environment to establish a Crown reservation of unallocated water in the Red Deer River for non-irrigation water uses.

Water apportionment

The City:

- (1) recognizes the benefit of the integrated management of the waters across the South Saskatchewan River basin with regard to water apportionment to Saskatchewan, whereby when necessary low Red Deer River flows into Saskatchewan can be augmented by flows from the Bow and/or Oldman Rivers, and vice versa;
- (2) advocates that SSRB Water Management Plan clearly indicate that in each year Alberta Environment will strive to manage the waters of the Red Deer, Bow and Oldman Rivers with regard to apportionment on a 50/50/50 basis;
- (3) notwithstanding (1) and (2) above, strongly advocates that during water shortage periods within the South Saskatchewan River basin, water management policy for the SSRB state that water licences in the Red Deer River basin have first priority use of Red Deer River water;
- (4) opposes a 'cap' (fixed or otherwise) on allocations on the Red Deer River whereby more than 50% of the median annual flow of the Red Deer River will be required to flow to Saskatchewan; the City may review this position if Alberta Environment can clearly demonstrate to the satisfaction of the City that a 'cap' is required to assure the water quality of the Red Deer River.

Water to sustain communities and basin growth

The City:

- (1) advocates water management for the Red Deer River basin must recognize the need for assured water supplies to meet present and future needs throughout the basin, including but not limited to growth pressures along the Highway 2 corridor and those portions of the basin where potable water may be in short supply;
- (2) encourages, where practical and cost effective, multi-municipal/regional solutions for the delivery of potable water to communities throughout the basin [see also Interbasin diversion of water (1)];

- (3) will continue to advise the Province and Red Deer County that land uses around Gleniffer Lake Reservoir must not be able to change or modify the operation priority of Dickson Dam as a flow regulation structure to supply assured minimum year-round flows of the Red Deer River downstream from the dam.

Water conservation

The City:

- (1) recognizes the stewardship of water resources will be enhanced through water conservation programs;
- (2) commits to undertake a City of Red Deer water conservation action plan;
- (3) encourages the Red Deer River Watershed Alliance and Red Deer River Municipal Users Group to work together to prepare a basin wide Municipal Water Conservation Guide; as a member of these groups the City will assist in the preparation of this guide.

Water for irrigation

The City:

- (1) opposes the approval of any existing or future application for the allocation of water, including by transfer of a water licence or portion thereof, from the Red Deer River system for any large scale agriculture irrigation project, including any as part of a multiple use project (note: this does not apply to small, individual irrigation operations, whether public or private);
- (2) advocates that no new licence, including by amendment of an existing licence or by transfer in whole or in part of an existing licence, be approved for irrigation in the Bow and Oldman River basins.

Interbasin diversion of water

The City:

- (1) generally is supportive of the interbasin diversion of treated water from the Red Deer River if the treatment and delivery of Red Deer river water through regional systems to communities outside the basin is the most prudent and effective way to provide potable water to these communities;
- (2) in the absence of adopted river basin water management plans and a province-wide Provincial Government policy report on the interbasin transfer of water, opposes the interbasin diversion of raw (i.e. non-potable) water out of the Red Deer River basin; upon the availability of these plans and policy report, the City may review its opposition;
- (3) will advise the Provincial Government to not consider or approve any interbasin diversion of raw (i.e. non-potable) water until an integrated watershed management plan for each affected basin and for each affected major sub-basin therein is approved and the Province has adopted a Provincial Policy on interbasin diversions of raw water that addresses needs, opportunities, benefits, impacts and other related considerations for both the donor and receiving basins;
- (4) will request the Provincial Government to review and amend the Water Act with regard to the interbasin diversion of raw (i.e. non-potable) water so the Act clearly

provides for multiple opportunities for public review and input as part of the application process, including a public hearing process and/or opportunity for appeal.

Groundwater

The City:

- (1) will encourage the Province to undertake for the Red Deer River basin a thorough groundwater supply study and prepare a groundwater management strategy;
- (2) may approve the use of groundwater as a means to provide potable water to a development or use of land within the City but only in a manner whereby the provisions of the Water Act are met and only where City water supply services are not available;
- (3) may approve the use of groundwater as a means to provide non-potable water for use by a business or industry within the City for non-drinking use (e.g. washing, cleaning, landscape maintenance) purposes but only in a manner whereby the provisions of the Water Act are met.

Wetlands

The City:

- (1) will continue as a part of its Ecological Management System to identify wetlands deemed as significant assets worthy of conservation and to integrate the conserved wetlands into the urban fabric;
- (2) will seek the cooperation Red Deer County in a sensitive lands conservation strategy for lands in and around the County and City's rural/urban fringe.

REVIEW, AMENDMENT and DEPARTURE

The City:

- (1) may review and amend from time to time the City's positions on water use and management, including watershed management;
- (2) may depart from a position contained herein if information becomes available that persuades the City that a departure from the position is appropriate.