

# Oldman River Basin Water Allocation Order

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Information briefing

Alberta Environment and Parks  
November 20, 2020



# Agenda

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What is the Oldman order, and the opportunity



Water amounts and uses



Issues to address, and the proposed changes

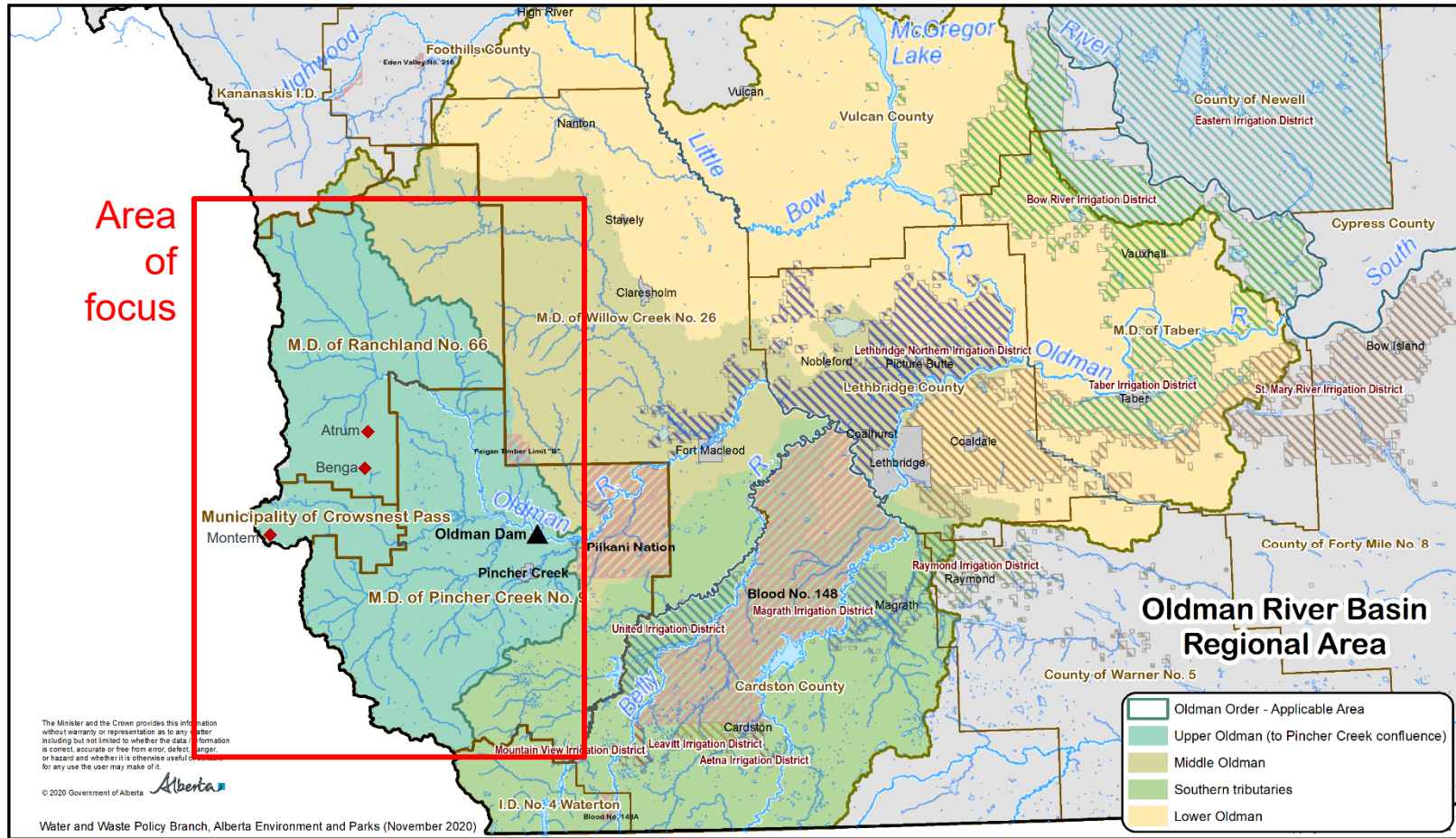


Feedback and discussion

# What is the Oldman order

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- **11,000 acre-feet\*** of water originally set aside for irrigation purposes in three municipalities impacted by the creation of the Oldman dam and reservoir
- Water can be allocated in the upper watershed to the Pincher Creek confluence, within the boundaries of
  - the Municipal District of Pincher Creek
  - the Municipality of Crowsnest Pass
  - the Municipal District of Ranchlands



# Status of the Oldman order

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- Oldman order established under *Water Act* in 2003
- In 2006 the SSRB Plan closed three sub-basins
  - The *Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Allocation Order*
    - Water under the Oldman order can still be allocated
- Government amended the Oldman order in 2010 to allow some water for purposes other than irrigation
  - 9,350 acre-feet is now reserved for irrigation
  - Other limits apply for industrial (150 acre-feet) and other specified purposes (1,500 acre-feet)

# Opportunity

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- Alberta's government is focused on
  - Economic recovery and stimulus
  - Removing burdensome regulations while maintaining high environmental standards
- Alberta Environment and Parks proposes updating the order to
  - Better reflect current needs and improve economic opportunity in the area
  - Remove artificial barriers to water sourcing options

# Water amounts and uses – current

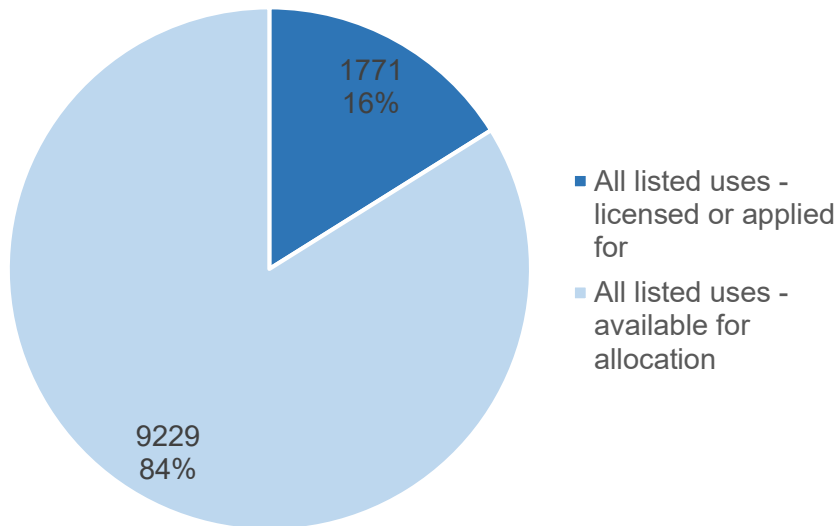
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	Reserved total	Licensed or applied for	Remaining to allocate
Irrigation	9,350	1,295	8,055
Other listed uses*	1,500	326	1,174
Industrial	150	150	0
<b>Total, all listed uses</b>	<b>11,000</b>	<b>1,771 (16%)</b>	<b>9,229 (84%)</b>

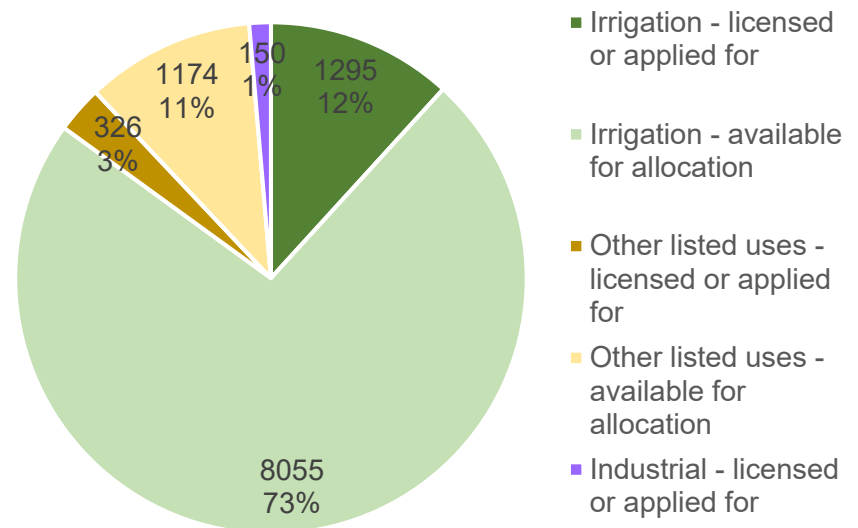
\*The **other listed uses** permitted under the order are municipal, commercial, recreation, rural community water supply and agricultural (non-irrigation) purposes

# Water amounts and uses – current

General breakdown, today



Detail breakdown, today



The **other listed uses** permitted under the order are municipal, commercial, recreation, rural community water supply and agricultural (non-irrigation) purposes



# 1: Addressing economy and regulation

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- Despite available water set aside for use, sourcing water for new projects and activities remains a barrier
  - Over nearly three decades, only 14% of the water reserved has been licensed or applied for and there is limited potential use for the water as currently specified
  - Other new projects not falling under the order limits for the listed purposes must seek and acquire licence transfer(s)

## 2: Addressing fish and environment

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- There was no approved water management plan for the basin and no water conservation objectives existed when water was originally reserved in 1991
- Fisheries needs and instream requirements have emerged, with two particular species of concern in the upper Oldman
  - Westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout, with active or pending recovery plans under *Species at Risk Act*

# Proposed amendments

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- Replace specific water volume limits for irrigation, industrial, and other purposes with **one overall limit for all listed uses**
- Recognize need for sustainable water use by setting aside **20% of the original order volume for aquatic environment needs**

# Rationale

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- Allow market forces to drive water use, activity and innovation in the area
  - Frees up previously reserved water by removing sector-specific limits, allowing expanded economic opportunities
- Reducing the overall amount reserved for general use offsets adverse impacts of increased water use on critical habitat for listed species at risk

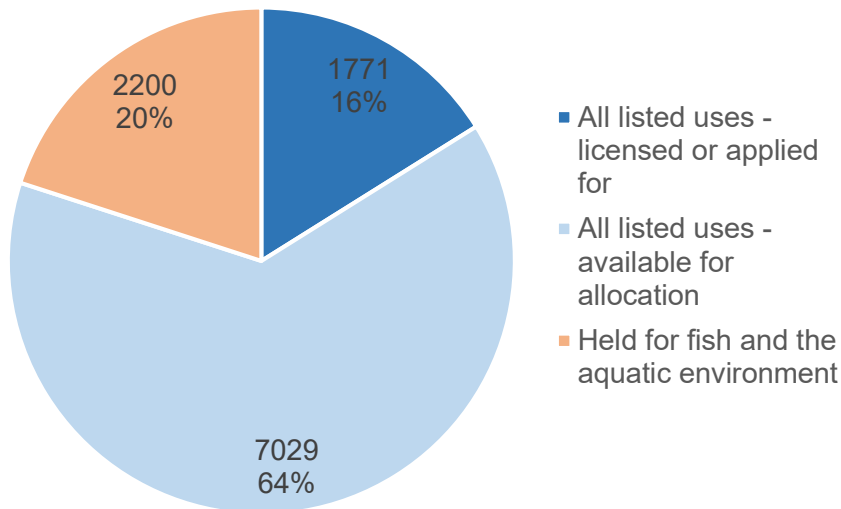
# Water amounts and uses – proposed / future

	Reserved total	Licensed or applied for	Remaining to allocate
Listed uses*	8,800	1,771	7,029
Held for fish and the aquatic environment	2,200	2,200	-
<b>Total, all listed uses</b>	<b>11,000</b>	<b>3,971 (36%)</b>	<b>7,029 (64%)</b>
Estimated water needs, new projects		[303 <sup>(B)</sup> +1,216 <sup>(A)</sup> ]	<b>~5,510 (50%)</b> (if approved)

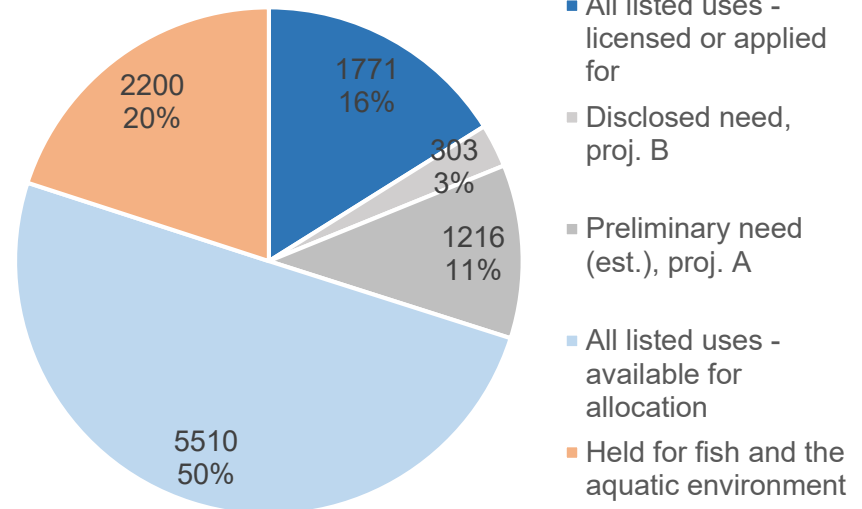
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# Water amounts and uses – proposed / future

**If changes are approved**



**If changes are approved + projected needs**



The **listed uses** permitted under the order are municipal, commercial, recreation, rural community water supply, agricultural (non-irrigation), irrigation and industrial purposes

# Outcome

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- Easier to apply for water licences in the municipalities in the upper Oldman, Castle and Crowsnest region
  - Reducing one of the most significant challenges to economic development – securing water
- Reduces unnecessary red tape
  - Water will be available for all purposes including irrigation, agriculture and municipal and community water supply – and its use no longer constrained by artificial limits

# Outcome

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- Ample room for economic growth even with water now set aside for environmental needs
  - Water still available (7,029 acre-feet, or **64% of the order**) greatly exceeds what has been allocated (1,771 acre-feet) in the last 28 years
  - Approx. 5,500 acre-feet (or **about 50% of the order**) remains available after two proposed coal projects, if approved
    - Projects require an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to be completed before a licence could be issued
    - An EIA can set conditions and requirements also, for a project to be approved



# Outcome

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- Directing some water to support the aquatic environment is not only good for the environment but contributes to Albertan's quality of life
  - Helps maintain fisheries and recreational opportunities and sustain Alberta's tourism and recreation sectors
- The SSRB Water Conservation Objective (WCO) is also applicable to licences issued under the order
  - Provides another mitigation for fisheries and critical habitat, in addition to the volume reduction in the order

# Discussion

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