Oldman River Basin
Water Allocation Order

Information briefing

Alberta Environment and Parks
November 20, 2020
Agenda

- 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

• **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

*11,000 acre-feet = 13,568,000 cubic metres*
Area of focus
Status of the Oldman order

- 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

• 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

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

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

- 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

• 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

• 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

• 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**

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<tr>
<td>Listed uses*</td>
<td>8,800</td>
<td>1,771</td>
<td>7,029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Held for fish and the aquatic environment</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total, all listed uses</strong></td>
<td><strong>11,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,971 (36%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>7,029 (64%)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Estimated water needs, new projects</td>
<td>[303(B) + 1,216(A)]</td>
<td>~5,510 (50%) (if approved)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Water amounts and uses – proposed / future

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

• 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

- 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

• 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