

MD of Acadia & Special Areas Joint Irrigation Study Open House

Public Engagement – What We Heard

BACKGROUND

In 2021, the Government of Alberta (GOA), Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB), Municipal District of Acadia (MDA) and Special Areas Board (SAB) came together to assess irrigation development from the Red Deer River to ~108,000 acres of farmland in the MDA and Special Areas. Following completion of an initial feasibility report in 2022, project managers/water availability specialists WaterSMART and the AE-Clifton team of Associated Engineering, Clifton, Wilde Brothers, Boost Energy and Scott Land & Lease, were engaged for the second phase of work. The focus of the Phase 2 work is on investigating potential challenges and exploring ways to optimize a path forward.

WHAT WE DID

The Project Partners hosted an open house on May 2, 2024 in Acadia Valley. Representatives of SAB, MDA, CIB, GOA, WaterSMART, and AE-Clifton were available to facilitate project dialogue, obtain feedback, provide current information, and answer questions. Project team members walked attendees through information boards describing various aspects of the project, including crop mix recommendations, conceptual design work for the intake, reservoirs and canals, environmental considerations and water availability and analysis. Copies of the information boards are available on the SAB website at <https://specialareas.ab.ca/regionalirrigation/>.

Over 75 people attended the event. Feedback forms were received from 29 attendees. Over 40 additional individuals requested that their emails be added to the project update distribution list, bringing the total to almost 200. Local producers, existing irrigators, government officials, environmental stakeholders, contractors/equipment suppliers, Red Deer River watershed stakeholder groups, and the general public were among the attendees.



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WHAT WE HEARD

Based on discussions among the attendees and project team, as well as feedback forms received, several common themes emerged. This feedback is important and is being communicated to the larger team.

- Overall, feedback was positive, with support for the project and acknowledgement of long-term benefits to the region as a whole.
- There is a desire for more detailed information at the end of the current phase to better understand implications and alleviate potential concerns. These include:
 - Cost: Costs per acre, cost feasibility, high cost of energy, cost inequities by area, funding availability
 - Water Availability: Red Deer River viability, consideration for climate change impacts
 - Historical / Environmental: Presence of Indigenous artifacts, wildlife habitat / native grassland disturbance, impacts on Species at Risk
 - Reservoirs: Water quality concerns, opportunities for recreational use and firefighting
 - Timing: When will the project become a reality?
 - Questions/concerns about land acquisition
- Continued engagement with future users is critically important.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Engineering development and risk mitigation will continue to the completion of this phase including environmental and geotechnical field studies and progression of the design basis and cost estimates. Additional meetings with interested Nations will be coordinated. A public Open House in the project area is anticipated for early 2025 to present the results of the engineering analysis and cost estimates. Following completion of the Phase 2 report in March 2025, the Project Partners will evaluate the outcomes and decide on the next steps for project continuation.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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