Questions and Answers on the Approved Water Management Plan for the South Saskatchewan River Basin

1. What does the plan mean for southern Alberta?

We are entering a new age of increased awareness and appreciation of the importance and value of water. In the future, water management planning is expected to lead to even greater improvements for human needs and the needs of aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

2. With Alberta Environment no longer accepting applications for new water allocations in the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins, how will municipalities, industries and others get the water they need?

There are opportunities to make the best use of the large amount of water that has already been allocated in these sub-basins:

- Improvements and innovations by Alberta Environment in water administration and legislation to match allocations with needs.
- Market mechanisms such as water allocation transfers to encourage re-distribution of the water already allocated through voluntary actions by licence holders.
- Innovation and creativity of water users to improve water use efficiency.

3. What are some of the expected benefits of a decision to no longer accept applications for water allocations in the sub-basins of the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan River sub-basins?

- Water allocation transfers will be more routinely used to obtain reliable water supplies.
- The potential value of a water allocation transfer will provide incentive to improve water use efficiency.
- Innovations in water use efficiency will be encouraged.
- With a limit on the amount of water allocated, water sharing in times of shortage will remain a viable option.
- Future demand on the Red Deer River to contribute water to the apportionment agreement with Saskatchewan will not increase as much as it would without this management plan in place.

4. What is a Crown Reservation?

A Crown Reservation is a tool under the *Water Act* that allows the Minister of Environment to specify the purposes for which any unallocated water can be used. The priority of any future allocation of the reserved water can be prescribed, although it cannot have a date earlier than the date of the reservation. For example, the existing Oldman River Basin Water Allocation Order reserves 11,000 acre-feet of water for irrigation purposes to the Oldman Reservoir Area Projects. The priority date for any licences that may be issued for this water is the date the Order was filed under the Regulations Act (in 2003).

5. What relationship does the SSRB plan have with other water management plans in the basin?

The SSRB Water Management Plan is the most senior water management plan for the SSRB. Other water management plans in the basin must meet or exceed the standards set in the SSRB plan. The SSRB plan could be revised by Cabinet to benefit from experience gained in other water management planning projects.

6. How was the figure of a 45 per cent of the natural rate of flow determined for the water conservation objectives?

In the case of the Red Deer River, this figure forms part of the water conservation objective (WCO). The figure was based on the Red Deer River Basin Advisory Committee's recommendation that this rate would permit sufficient water to be diverted for economic development and municipalities in the basin, without resulting in an unacceptable degree of impact on the aquatic environment of the river. The WCO could be re-evaluated with better knowledge of the aquatic environment.

In the case of the other rivers of the SSRB, 45 per cent of the natural rate of flow represents an intention to take opportunities to restore flows when they arise. The figure may be refined with improved understanding of the aquatic environment to result in a publicly-acceptable long-term flow restoration target.

7. How were the figures of 10 and 16 cubic meters per second (cms) determined as the minimum rates of flow components of the Red Deer River WCO?

The figure of 16 cms is a rate of flow necessary to ensure good water quality in the river during the winter months. This minimum flow during the winter may mean new licences for year round diversion will require storage. Winter flows are usually less than16 cms so water will likely not be available for diversion.

The figure of 10 cms is a rate of flow determined by computer simulations to permit the same amount of water to be available for economic development as recommended by the Red Deer River Basin Advisory Committee.

8. Why doesn't the plan address water quality?

Water quantity and allocations issues needed to be addressed immediately. Also, it is necessary to know how much water will be in the rivers to address the water quality factors that are strongly affected by flow: dissolved oxygen and temperature. These factors were considered in determining the instream flow needs for the aquatic environment and also in the development of the recommendations for water conservation objectives. Water quality can be expected to be a priority in the watershed management planning to be carried out by Watershed Planning and Advisory Councils.

9. Why doesn't the plan stipulate the Director always withhold 10 per cent for holdbacks?

The 10 per cent holdback is a discretionary decision made by the Director. This allows each transfer application to be assessed individually and permits the Director to determine what, if any, amount of holdback is needed. Recent experience with transfers has shown there are times when a holdback is not justified. For example, if an allocation is being transferred a significant distance down stream, the allocation remains in the river longer to the benefit of the environment.

10. Who decided who should be on the basin advisory committees?

Alberta Environment extended invitations to all municipalities and First Nations, and to all industries and organizations believed or known to have an interest in water management. As a result, representatives came forward from municipalities, industries, irrigation agriculture, non-irrigation agriculture, and environmental and recreation groups.

11. Why wasn't the Red Deer River Basin closed to new applications for water allocations?

The Red Deer River is substantially less allocated than the Bow, Oldman and South Saskatchewan Rivers. The plan indicates, however, that the Red Deer River also has limits. The plan indicates that when allocations reach 550,000 cubic decameters, there will be a review for the purposes of establishing a Crown Reservation to set the limit.