

## Results of Stakeholder Consultations - NSWRC

The first round of stakeholder consultations was conducted February 20, 21 and 27<sup>th</sup> in Turtleford, Lloydminster and North Battleford. In each case the consultations were well attended by individuals from the communities and surrounding area interested in learning more about the project and voicing their thoughts with regards to future developments.

The consultation process began by outlining the objective of the study, the roles that different organizations were playing in the completion of the study, the history of the project and the process that the study would follow. The alternatives being analyzed in the study were presented and described followed by an explanation of the facilitation process that would be used.

Participants were told that as much as possible feedback would be broadly grouped into four categories: agriculture, ecology / environment, economic development and recreation. The process began with participants being asked to join one of two groups based on their areas of concern or interest. The first two groups (eg. agriculture and economic development) would work simultaneously in different parts of the room to outline the benefits and challenges associated with each alternative in regards to their category. Individuals were given cardstock on which to document their feedback and then would discuss them with the group to narrow responses down to a more condensed list of common themes. Once the first two groups were concluded, participants selected one of the remaining two categories to discuss and the process was repeated until there was a condensed list of common themes for those categories as well. Finally, the group came back together and the list of condensed themes for each category was presented to the group to allow participants to add to the categories they had not participated if they felt their thoughts were not already reflected in the feedback.

To facilitate feedback the following questions were suggested under each category:

- Recreation
  - Current
    - What are the benefits and drawbacks of the river currently?
  - Future
    - What are the benefits and drawbacks that you can see of the various options?
  - Assessment
    - What further questions would you like answered?
- Agriculture
  - Current
    - How is the river currently used? Can it be used more effectively?
  - Future
    - What are the benefits and drawbacks of the various options? What opportunities are created?
  - Assessment
    - Additional Questions?
- Economic Development
  - Current

- What are current community needs?
- Future
  - What new opportunities/challenges are created by increased access to consistent water supply?
- Assessment
  - What points require further study?
- Ecology
  - Current
    - What are the benefits and drawbacks of the North Saskatchewan River today?
  - Future
    - What are the benefits and drawbacks of the various options?
  - Assessment
    - What points require further study?

Before summarizing the results of the stakeholder consultations it is important to note that there were a very small number of responses that spoke directly to the alternatives. Very often perceived benefits and concerns were voiced in general terms and if any of the alternatives was specifically referenced it was most often regarding the construction of a dam.

The feedback from stakeholder consultations can be summarized as follows. Please note that because of the nature of public consultation there will be conflicting sentiments expressed.

#### Recreation

- Current
  - Wide range of opinion from very little to great recreation resource
  - Canoeing, heritage sties, bird watching, "eco-tourism", hiking, fishing, are all current uses
  - Limited access for water transportation because of changing flows
  - One of the longest un-dammed waterways in North America
  - Current depths is good for keeping motor boats and other sources of pollution off the river
- Future
  - Loss of historical sites due to flooding is a concern
  - See missed opportunities in doing nothing
  - Opportunity to develop historical and ecological tourism if it is left as is
  - A river with a dam is not a replacement for a lake and will not produce the same attraction. Develop the lakes that we have in the province
  - Development should not impact the ecosystem up or downstream
  - Off site storage may be a way to improve recreation, increase habitat and provide a fresh water reservoir for wildlife.
  - Opportunity to reduce fluctuations in water levels
  - Potential for resort development, enhanced facilities.
  - Significant potential to attract Alberta investment in recreation in the area

- Recreation would not be assured if water quality was negatively impacted
- Over population can have a negative impact if recreation is developed
- Questions / additional comments
  - Primary motivation should not be recreation but conservation. Recreation might actually limit access to the water through private development.

#### Agriculture

- Current
  - The river provides water for livestock and small market gardens
  - Feedlots, irrigation, potato farms and many other types of agriculture are already operating in the area without a dam
- Future
  - Opportunities for irrigation. Intensive livestock
  - Industrial use is a concern and that withdrawal could grow in the future
  - Price increases due to development of recreation land could make those areas uneconomical for agriculture
  - Some off-site locations could incur additional costs for managing salinity
  - With water holding options fish farming could be an option along with a wider range of crops
  - Irrigation not seen as economical is not justified as a motivation as current irrigation resources are underutilized.
  - Would not want this kind of development to cause restrictions for farmers or ranchers that currently use the water
  - Difficult to irrigate in many nearby areas because they are hilly.
  - Water is the oil of the future. There will be a big demand for fresh water in the future.
- Questions / additional comments
  - *How much land would be lost due to an increase in the water level?*
  - Lake Diefenbaker has never reached its irrigation potential
  - *Will a rise in the water level cause more salinity in the area?*
  - *What will the impact be on land taxes?*
  - *Concern that conflicts would arise if land was flooded. What happens to those with land that is flooded?*
  - *Does irrigation need a dam? Wouldn't a series of weirs work?*
  - Do not approve of a dam or off-site storage, there is no need.
  - Should not invest unless there is an indication there will be actual value or financial returns

## Economic Development

- Current
  - The river is available for economic development now, it can be drawn from as needed.
- Future
  - Opportunities for development of a larger livestock sector and attracting more industry
  - Concern that water is being used for economic opportunities. It should be accessible to everyone
  - It is important that development is forward looking but is also based on current world knowledge about dams and experiences from other countries.
  - Concern about potential for pollution and water contamination if attract industry development to this water source
  - Opportunity to conserve water for agriculture, cities and recreation
  - Do not want to see increased amounts of water made available to the oil and gas sector
  - Economic development and a greater use of the water can increase water pollution from infrastructure and more people around the water
  - *More people in the area will require more infrastructure – roads, water, sewage systems – who will pay?*
- Questions / additional comments
  - *What is the cost be of replacing the bridges that a dam would put under water?*
  - Have not seen Lake Diefenbaker provide economic development in that area.
  - *What is the economic impact of loss of land?*
  - *Is there a need for a dam? What is the purpose? Would like to know who will benefit?*
  - Would like to know more about the long term costs of the proposed alternatives.
  - The money for development would be better spent ensuring there is safe drinking water in communities along the river
  - Economic benefits should not occur at the expense of the environment
  - What will Alberta and Manitoba do if we do nothing
  - *What about houses that would be flooded with a dam?*
  - This seems speculative as any benefit would likely not be realized for 50-100 years. Future generations will have to pay the cost which might outweigh the benefits.
  - *Are any of the towns / villages along this stretch of water having problems with water shortage or quality?*
  - Seems like a large investment for a perceived need.

## Ecology

- Current
  - Healthy ecosystem
  - River is self-cleaning. Nature takes care of itself
  - Integral part of surface water and ground water systems
  - Highs and lows of flow are an important natural function of the river, necessary to support forests and marshes
  
- Future
  - See opportunities to avoid droughts and provide flood control
  - Opportunity to promote a biofuel industry that would reduce emissions
  - Do not want to see a development that floods Big Gully, this area is recognized under the International Biosphere program and people will lobby for its protection
  - Concern about water pollution
  - Concern about habitat loss
  - Impact of oil and gas wells that would be below water level
  - Potential for significant impact on the fish population. Many observed that the North Saskatchewan river is a profitable system for fish, and it is important to know what the impact will be on these populations.
  - The integrity of the environment and the water has to be maintained
  - Small weirs would be acceptable if they were very carefully planned
  - Concern about the loss of the river valley and associated trees and wildlife
  - The water needs to remain clean and uncontaminated
  - Concern about water loss due to increased evaporation
  - Need to accept the limits of current precipitation and conserve
  - Sediment / silting, mercury and rotting vegetation will all decrease water quality
  - Could destroy corridors for large mammals
  - Reservoir could improve conditions for some fish species, but also reduce viability of Sturgeon population
  - Only see a negative impact on native species
  
- Questions / additional comments
  - Would like more information about the ecological footprint of the alternatives
  - *Are the downstream impacts being considered?*
  - *What will the impacts be on Cut Knife Creek and Battle River and other lakes, rivers and creeks? How will this impact Jackfish Lake? Lake Winnipeg?*
  - *How big would the flooded area be?*
  - Would like to see information on water conservation provided
  - *Does this contribute to global warming? How does global warming impact this project?*
  - *How stable are the banks? What happens if they level out?*

In addition there was an obvious interest from stakeholders in more information about the options, the impacts of the options, the costs and benefits of each option and the valuation methods used. There was a hesitancy to evaluate or discuss the different alternatives and when the alternatives were mentioned it was usually in reference to a dam. Finally, there were several requests that First Nations communities be fully informed and consulted throughout the process.

As is apparent in these consultations, the priorities of stakeholders vary, not only by location but also from one individual to the next. However, the interest in this project is apparent along with a desire for more information. It is likely that the Phase 1 report will answer a great number of these questions.