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Report to:



On the
**Historical Understanding of
Water Shortage & Flooding
In Southern Manitoba**

Report presented
By Richard Martel

Date: November, 2006

TO UNDERSTAND WATER IN THE RED RIVER VALLEY YOU NEED TO HAVE A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LOWER RED RIVER VALLEY WATER COMMISSION. ACUTE SHORTAGE OF WATER WEST OF THE RED RIVER TO THE PEMBINA HILLS ESCARPMENT AND DAMAGE FROM SPRING FLOODING LED TO MANY MEETINGS IN THE AREA IN THE 1940'S AND 1950'S. FOUR HUNDRED AND FORTY CONCERNED CITIZENS MET AT A MASS MEETING IN WINKLER, MANITOBA ON DECEMBER 5TH, 1955 TO FIND A SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM.

ON DECEMBER 13TH, 1956 THE RED RIVER VALLEY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION WAS FORMED IN MORRIS MANITOBA. IN JANUARY THE BOARD MET AND THE EXECUTIVE WAS INSTRUCTED TO DO THREE THINGS.

- a.) Meet with the Greater Winnipeg Water District Board, to discuss a pipeline from Winnipeg to the main communities in the valley
- b.) To ask the Government to do an engineering study of a pipeline from Winnipeg
- c.) To obtain Government support for a dam on the Pembina River for flood control and water irrigation. In August of 1957 a report from the Arthur D. Little on a Lower Red River Valley Water System was received and studied by the Board.

IN NOVEMBER 1957 THE BOARD MET WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MANITOBA GOVERNMENT AND PRESENTED THEM WITH A BRIEF THAT INCLUDED FOUR POINTS;

1. A water authority to be set up by the Government for the valley and an engineering study to begin immediately.
2. That we recommend the construction of the Stephenfield dam
3. That we recommend the construction on the Pembina dam
4. That we recommend the construction of a pipeline grid, connecting all the towns and villages in the valley

THE WATER SUPPLY DISTRICTS ACT WAS PASSED IN APRIL OF 1958 AND THE LOWER RED RIVER VALLEY WATER COMMISSION WAS FORMED WITH NINETEEN MUNICIPALITY MEMBERS. BY FEBRUARY 1959 THE GOVERNMENT AGREED TO ESTABLISH A PUBLIC UTILITY WHICH WOULD SELL WATER TO THE WATER DISTRICTS CONSTRUCTED. THE COMMISSION REQUESTED THE GOVERNMENT TO START NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE CITY OF NECHE, NORTH DAKOTA IN MID APRIL OF 1959 WHICH, LEAD TO AN AGREEMENT TO SUPPLY WATER TO GREY AND ALTONA BY PIPELINE AND IN AUGUST OF 1959 THE MANITOBA WATER SUPPLY BOARD ACT WAS PASSED. IN MARCH OF 1960, A MEETING IN WINKLER THE EXECUTIVE INSTRUCTED THE COMMISSION TO TAKE MORE POSITIVE ACTION TO BRING THE WATER SHORTAGE IN THE VALLEY TO THE ATTENTION OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDED THE FOLLOWING:

Southern Section:

1. Consideration for a dam on the Roseau River
2. Consideration for a dam on the Pembina River – in Canada

3. Design and estimate of a pipeline to serve the towns in the southern section

Northern Section:

1. Consideration for a dam on the Boyne River
2. Consideration for a dam on the Assiniboine River
3. Design and estimate of a pipeline to serve the towns in northern section

In December of 1960 the Executive dealt with a dam on the Boyne River, a water pipeline to Winkler and Plum Coulee and dams on the Pembina and Roseau Rivers. By April of 1961 the Town of Morden had requested another dam on the Dead Horse Creek, because they felt that any water taken out of the reservoir for use downstream would endanger their own supply. Later in May Test-wells were being drilled at Winkler and an engineering study of the Winkler distribution system was completed. In October of the same year Mr. Griffiths stated that the PFRA had now agreed that they could build a dam at Stephenfield. This project could be under by the summer on 1980, he also reported on requested dams on the Morris, Roseau and Tobacco Creek Rivers, as well on the status of the Morden, Winkler and Plum Coulee water supply.

By April of 1965 St. Jean and Letellier also accepted the proposal from the Water Supply Board and approved construction of distribution systems. Then Mayor of Gretna, P. Loewen also reported the construction of a pipeline to Gretna and Neche Customs and that the Canadian Government will sell the Neche water to the US Federal Government. Ring dykes around Emerson, Morris and St. Jean were approved by November of 1966, to an elevation of the 1950 flood lever and the Government agreed to contribute up to \$500 for protection of farm buildings in Morris, Montcalm, and MacDonald municipalities. Two hundred and sixty-five applications for such assistants were received. Mr. T. E. Weber also spoke at length on water problems throughout the area, replying to a number of questions from Commissioners. By December of 1967 the Tobacco Creek project was well underway, as were the drainage and dyking projects throughout the Valley. Discussions were held on the Aux Marais River and Gretna drain and the troubles this was causing on both sides of the border. Two years later a report of additional ground water supplies had been found in the Winkler area, and additional storage to be created at Neche by raising the dam, hoping that these supplies would be ample until the Pembina project was built. Petitions were received from farmers in the Aux Marais area in June of 1970 with regards to perennial flooding. R.S. McKenzie reported on the Carman Flood and asked the Commission to support a resolution to the Government for a diversion of the Boyne River around Carman. Two years later, T.E. Weber reported that a Committee had been set up to deal with the water problems on the U.S. Border near the Aux Marais other Valley water problems were discussed.

Representatives of the R.M. of Pembina, the Villages of Manitou and LaRiviere attended and showed much interest in the briefs the Commission had made to Governments and would support briefs urging the construction of the Pembina dams and expressed concerns regarding drought in the area. On March 19, 1973 a brief presentation to the Manitoba Water Commission was done in Morden, urging construction of a dam on the Pembina River near Kaleida.

In April of 1973 the area was experiencing drought conditions and a letter was forwarded to Premier Schreyer requesting discussion on the Pembina River Basin project and as a last alternative whether the Commission could construct a dam on the Pembina on their own. By January 1974 Mr. Weber also mentioned the problems of the Garrison dam diversion and presentation to the Honourable Sidney Green was prepared regarding the flooding along the U.S. – Canada border and requesting the Canadian participation for the construction of the Pembelien dam. In February 1975 more discussion was held on the Morden dam, Carman flood protection, Aux Marais, Buffalo Creek and the Roseau River projects. By the fall of that year the Commission went on record in expressing their concerns and opposition to the Garrison Diversion Project as presently envisaged. Other matters discussed included Pembelien dam, Dead Horse Creek, Carman flood protection and Roseau River Basin project. By the end of 1976 a resolution from Morris regarding a weir on the Morris River and further discussion and support on the Carman diversion from the Commission was expressed. An agreement regarding the "Flood Plain Mapping" was to be signed in Ottawa. Morden members brought up the desire for another dam on the Dead Horse Creek and a Miami member expressed concerns about the wells running dry. Discussion on the two-dam proposal on the Pembina River and at the Miami Nominating Convention held in April 1977 it was reported that Premier Lyon made the following remarks "when we form the next government, we will take steps to reactivate the Pembina Project". By April of 1979, Tom Weber brought the Commission up-to-date on various water projects in the Commission area:

- a) The Pembina River dams
- b) Additional water storage on the Dead Horse Creek (Morden Dam)
- c) Aux Marais and Roseau River Projects
- d) Carman Flood protection
- e) Gretna dyke

A lengthy discussion ensued on the Carman Diversion, the Bryson Project, Garrison Dam, the pollution from the U.S. on the Red River, a study on providing water for Rosenfeld and other matters. By June of that year thirty-four local briefs were presented at the meeting regards to the flooding of the Boyne River at Carman. There were also reports from six municipalities regarding the flooding west of Carman in the Rural Municipality of Dufferin, as well as flooding on both sides of the Red River along with a number of other Commissioners spoke about the flood damage in their areas.

At a meeting in July of 1979 the following concerns were discussed with the Provincial Cabinet at the Legislative Building in Winnipeg;

1. The request from the Town of Morden, Winkler and R.M. of Stanley for a second dam on Dead Horse Creek
2. A diversion channel on the Boyne River, north of Carman
3. The Pembina River Basin project
4. The flooding along the Red River

Briefs were presented to the Cabinet on these various concerns and lengthy discussions followed. In November of 1979 the Executive met with members of the Provincial Cabinet again to review the various concerns and projects in the Commission area:

Carman – This matter was being given the active consideration and a decision was to be made shortly. Mr. Ransom said that “our government has recognized that cost benefits may now have to have a ratio of 1/1, and that other non-monetary benefits also have to be taken into consideration”.

Red River – The flooding problem on the Red cannot be dealt with independently by only Manitoba, as the source of much of the waters originate in the U.S. Discussions have been held by the Premier and the Governors of Minnesota and North Dakota, and these discussions will be ongoing.

Roseau River – This project has been put on the “back burner” by the U.S. Government and no further activity can be reported.

Pembelieir Dam – The Pembelieir, the Aux Marais, and the South Buffalo have to be considered as one package and dealt with between governments accordingly.

The Government decided not to construct an upstream dam on the Dead Horse Creek, but to raise the existing dam on Lake Minnewasta and this was in April of 1980. In October the Army Corporation of Engineers looked at raising the height of the Pembelieir Dam which would back up water into Manitoba. Reported process was made on the Morden Dam. The Aux Marais and South branch of the Buffalo Lake Proposal was back on track. Discussion was held on the Carman Diversion, the Garrison, the Emerson dykes, the Altona-Gretna-Rhineland water supply as well. Location of the water treatment plants for the towns along the Red River was brought up for discussion.

In the 1980's planning proceeded on the Region Water Supply Project. This over time came to be the Pembina Valley Water Co-op made up of all the original members of the Lower Red River Valley Water Commission and we stand before you today requesting badly needed new resource water supply for South-central Manitoba.

