

2011 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray Report No. 08

On Saturday, April 23, 2011, an observation flight of the Athabasca River basin was conducted by Alberta Environment. The flight covered the Athabasca River from the House River confluence, (approximately 150 km upstream of Fort McMurray) to Stony Island (approximately 17 km downstream of Fort McMurray). The observation flight also covered an approximate 30 km reach of the Clearwater River from its confluence with the Athabasca River to the Christina River.

With the exception of two small ice jams upstream of Fort McMurray, the Athabasca River is open upstream of Grand Rapids through Fort McMurray to downstream of Suncor. The ice jam in place directly upstream of the Grant McEwan Bridge released at approximately 12:40 pm this afternoon. Increased water levels were observed, but no flooding occurred. The release of the ice jam created an open channel from Moberly Rapids past the Clearwater River confluence. The Clearwater River is open from its mouth to upstream of the Christina River confluence. Breakup on Athabasca River at Fort McMurray was declared by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo at 12:40 pm.

Ice runs may be observed passing through Fort McMurray on the Athabasca and Clearwater Rivers over the next several days. Although a deteriorated ice cover remains in the upper Athabasca River basin (more than 165 km upstream of Fort McMurray).

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Grand Rapids to Crooked Rapids – The river was open bank to bank throughout this reach with the exception of two small ice jams located approximately 100 km and 50 km upstream of Fort McMurray. Both ice jams have decreased in length as a result of melting since the last observation flight. The short sections of intact ice at the toe of the jams continue to thermally deteriorate.
- Crooked Rapids to the Clearwater River Confluence – An open channel extends from Crooked Rapids through to the Clearwater River confluence. Much of the reach is open bank to bank.
- Clearwater River Confluence to Stony Island – The Athabasca River is open from the Clearwater River confluence to beyond Willow and Stony Island. Ice was observed stranded on sand bars and shallow sections throughout the reach. A small ice run was observed passing Stony Island.

Clearwater River:

- The Clearwater River is open bank to bank throughout the observed reach.

The most current information with interactive maps and photos is posted on the Alberta Environment web site at <http://www.environment.alberta.ca/forecasting/RiverIce/index.html>