
2012 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray Report No. 04

On Saturday, April 14, 2012, an observation flight of the Athabasca River basin was conducted by Alberta Environment and Water. The flight covered the Athabasca River from just upstream of Crooked Rapids (approximately 40 km upstream of Fort McMurray) to Stony Island (approximately 17 km downstream of Fort McMurray). The observation flight also covered an approximately 30 km reach of the Clearwater River, from its confluence with the Athabasca River to the Christina River.

The Athabasca River upstream of Fort McMurray continues to deteriorate thermally. Today's precipitation has blanketed the area and ice cover with snow, however fresh signs of deterioration are visible along the river. Leads at the rapids sections continue to enlarge and portions of the ice cover between rapid sections are showing new open leads.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Crooked Rapids to the Clearwater River Confluence – Crooked and Rock Rapids continue to open up and accumulations of broken or brash ice are present. Little Cascade Rapids are open across approximately 2/3 of the channel width and water is spilling onto the downstream ice cover. Cascade Rapids are open across the entire channel width and open leads are present downstream of this rapid section. The ice cover downstream of Cascade Rapids is a mixture of reaches with intact ice cover and reaches that have open leads present. An intact ice cover extends from Moberly Rapids, past the Grant McEwan Bridge and through to the confluence of the Clearwater River. The ice cover along this reach is beginning to show signs of thermal deterioration along the shore lines and at the islands.
- Clearwater River Confluence to Stony Island – The open lead along the right back of the river, downstream of the Clearwater River Confluence, has widened near its downstream end and is starting to branch across the river. The open lead along left bank, beginning near Grant Island and extending past Poplar Island, has also widened near its downstream end. Signs of melt are evident around the bars and islands in other portions of this reach.

Clearwater River:

- The Clearwater River continues to melt in place. Open water is present around most islands and bars, and along the shorelines of the river. Open leads are present in several locations along the river, especially in the first few kilometres downstream of the confluence with the Christina River. No signs of movement of the ice cover were observed.

The next observation flight is scheduled for Sunday, April 15.

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