
2012 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray Report No. 07

On Tuesday, April 17, 2012, an observation flight of the Athabasca River basin was conducted by Alberta Environment and Water. The flight covered the Athabasca River from Boiler Rapids (approximately 60 km upstream of Fort McMurray) to Inglis Island (approximately 25 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.

Complete snow cover was observed on the ice cover on the Athabasca and Clearwater Rivers due to snowfall in the Fort McMurray area overnight. An open lead extends through Boiler, Middle and Long Rapids ranging from 30% to 80% of the channel width. Small ice accumulations were in place at several locations between the rapid sections. A small section of the ice cover has released from an intact section of ice and drifted downstream into a growing accumulation at Rock Rapids. Movement of the ice cover was noted several locations throughout the observed reach. Thermal deterioration of the ice cover continues along the Athabasca River in the Fort McMurray area.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Boiler Rapids to the Clearwater River Confluence – The long open lead observed in past observation flights has widened at several locations. Ice accumulations separate what would be an open channel of water through Boiler, Middle and Long Rapids. Cracks in the ice cover were observed upstream of Crooked Rapids and movement of the ice cover was noted at Rock Rapids. Water spilling onto the ice cover was observed at several locations downstream of Little Cascade Rapids and open leads continue to develop downstream of Cascade Rapids. Open leads downstream of Mountain Rapids are continuing to develop, although an approximately 5km section of intact ice cover is still in place from Moberly Rapids to the confluence of the Clearwater River.
- Clearwater River Confluence to Inglis Island – Localized cracking and shifting of the ice cover was observed in a developing lead along the right bank and downstream of the Clearwater River confluence. An open lead extends from Grant Island to near Willow Island along the left bank of the river. At Inglis Island, cracking and shifting of the ice cover was observed and breakup is more advanced at this location.

Clearwater River:

- Flow was observed along the banks of MacDonald Island near the mouth of the Clearwater River. Open leads continue to develop along the entire observed reach of the river. The most deteriorated portion of the ice cover is in the first few kilometres just downstream of the Christina River confluence.

The next observation flight is scheduled for the afternoon of Wednesday, April 18.

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>