
2012 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray

Report No. 09

On Thursday, April 19, 2012, an observation flight of the Athabasca River basin was conducted by Alberta Environment and Water. The flight covered the Athabasca River from Brule Rapids, (approximately 90 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.

Changes in the ice cover were evident upstream of Fort McMurray. A small ice run was observed downstream of Brule Rapids leaving a short reach of the river open from bank to bank. Two small ice jams are in place between Brule Rapids and Little Cascade Rapids. Movement of the ice cover was observed in many locations along the Athabasca River. The ice cover is predominantly intact downstream of Crooked Rapids, but sections of open water have developed as the weakened ice cover has shifted and collapsed at several locations. Little snow cover remains on the ice cover or on the ground in the area adjacent to the river.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Brule Rapids to Crooked Rapids – A small ice run was observed ending in a small ice jam approximately 70 km upstream of Fort McMurray. Ice accumulations remain along an open lead that extends through Boiler, Middle and Long Rapids. 5 km of open water was observed extending through Crooked Rapids to Rock Rapids where an ice jam is in place. Water was seen spilling onto the intact ice cover downstream of the jam.
- Crooked Rapids to the Clearwater River Confluence – Small sections of open water have developed between Cascade Rapids and Mountain Rapids. Several ice accumulations were observed along this reach including one in place at Mountain Rapids. Open leads continue to develop in the intact section of ice upstream of the Grant McEwan Bridge. Directly downstream of the bridge the ice cover continues to darken and melt in place.
- Clearwater River Confluence to Stony Island – An open lead along right bank of the river, directly downstream of the Clearwater River confluence continues to lengthen. Movement in the ice cover at this location has created an approximately 1 km long section of open water along the right bank. An open lead along the left bank continues lengthen and has widened to nearly the width of the channel downstream of Poplar Island.

Clearwater River:

- No significant change was noted on the Clearwater River. The ice cover continues to darken as much of the ice cover melts in place. Shifting of the ice cover was still evident approximately 13 km upstream of the confluence. A small ice accumulation is in place downstream of the mouth of the Christina River.

The next observation flight is scheduled for the afternoon of Friday, April 20.

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>