

2014 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray Report No. 10

On Sunday, April 20, 2014, an observation flight of the Athabasca River was conducted by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. The flight covered an approximately 82 km reach of the Athabasca River from the Algar River to near Stony Island, downstream of Fort McMurray.

The Athabasca River ice cover continues to deteriorate and reaches along the river show various stages of the breakup process. The river reach from just upstream of Boiler Rapids to Long Rapids is clearing and small ice jams are forming as a result. The rapid sections near Fort McMurray show open areas, as well as, intermediate ice covers that are in place. Downstream of Fort McMurray the ice cover continues to decay, and open areas in the side channels and around islands continue to increase.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Algar River (km 359) to Crooked Rapids (km 333) – An in place ice cover was visible in the channel upstream of the Algar River, however downstream the ice cover has been clearing out through the rapid sections. The ice jam at Boiler Rapids has cleared out and a short ice run approximately 4 km in length was observed approaching the existing ice jam at Long Rapids (km 345). Downstream of Long Rapids a section of intact ice cover remains to Crooked Rapids (km 333).
- Crooked Rapids (km 333) to the Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) – The ice cover in this reach is still in place, but continues to deteriorate. A small ice jam has formed at Rock Rapids (km 331) from ice that has cleared out from Crooked Rapids. From Little Cascade (km 327) to Mountain Rapids (km 307) open leads continue to develop in the ice cover and water is pooling in several locations. Upstream of the bridges at Fort McMurray, for approximately 6 km, the ice cover in this section is the most intact of all the observed ice covers and it shows no open leads and very little water along the shorelines. Downstream of the bridges, the ice cover is darkening and it is expected that an open lead will develop near mid-channel in the next few days.
- Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) to Stony Island (km 277) – The ice cover in the main channel remains in place and intact. Areas in the side channels, around islands and at sandbars continue to open up and open leads are increasing in size. The path of the open lead from the Clearwater River is visible for approximately 2.5 km downstream of the confluence.

Clearwater River:

- The ice cover is intact and in place from the confluence and upstream to the Christina River confluence (km 31). No significant change was observed since the last observation on April 19. The ice cover is darkening and water is pooling along the shorelines and around the islands near the Christina River. Open leads continue to grow around the islands and sandbars in the lower 6 km of the river. Near km 12, transverse cracks were noticed in the ice surface.

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>

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