

2014 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray

Report No. 11

On Monday, April 21, 2014, an observation flight of the Athabasca River was conducted by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. The flight covered an approximately 165 km reach of the Athabasca River from the House River to near Stony Island, downstream of Fort McMurray.

The upper portions of the observed reaches are breaking up as the deteriorated ice cover is no longer strong enough to resist forces in the river. Reaches of the river have cleared out as the ice cover breaks up and moves downstream, accumulating as a series of small ice jams upstream of Long Rapids. Downstream of Long Rapids several reaches of intact ice cover are still in place, but deteriorating with the warmer temperatures and sunlight. It is expected that the river will continue to clear and small jams will continue to form upstream of Fort McMurray over the next few days. The strength of the remaining intact ice covers will determine how long the ice jams persist.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- House River (km 442) to Crooked Rapids (km 333) – Several small jams or ice accumulations have formed in this reach over the last few days: just downstream of the House River, near Pointe La Biche (km 412), approximately 5 km downstream of Brule Rapids (km 386), and at Long Rapids (km 345). The Long Rapids jam is the longest of the ice jams at approximately 5 km in length and it is being held back by an intact section of ice cover approximately 2 km long. The majority of this reach is now clear of ice and only a handful of intact ice cover sections remain.
- 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 is still in place at Rock Rapids (km 331). From Little Cascade (km 327) to Mountain Rapids (km 307) the open leads and open sections along the shorelines continue to grow. Near the golf course water is pooling extensively on the ice cover. Downstream of the bridges, the ice cover is darkening and showing more signs of deterioration.
- Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) to Stony Island (km 277) – The ice cover in the main channel remains in place and intact. Deterioration of the ice cover continues, especially in the side channels and near islands. No signs of movement were observed in the main channel ice cover. The path of the open lead from the Clearwater River is now visible for approximately 3 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). The extent of water pooling along the shorelines and around the islands is increasing, especially near the Christina River confluence. The open leads in the lower 6 km of the river continue to grow and the ice cover is becoming darker.

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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