

2014 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray Report No. 13

On Wednesday, April 23, 2014, an observation flight of the Athabasca River was conducted by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. The flight covered an approximately 110 km reach of the Athabasca River from near Brule Rapids to near Stony Island, downstream of Fort McMurray.

The upper portion of the observed reach is ice free and an ice run was observed for a considerable distance coming into the existing ice jam near Mountain Rapids. This ice jam has moved downstream from its initial position to near the western boundary of Fort McMurray and it has also increased in length. An intact, but deteriorating ice cover exists between the jam and the bridges at Fort McMurray. Downstream of the bridges the ice cover has begun to move in areas, and a mix of open channel and intact ice cover exists downstream towards Inglis Island, near Suncor.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Brule Rapids (km 386) to Crooked Rapids (km 333) – From near Brule Rapids and downstream, this reach is free of ice cover. An ice run was observed beginning approximately 7 kilometres upstream of the Algar River (km 359) and continuing downstream to the existing jam near Mountain Rapids, an approximate distance of 51 kilometres.
- Crooked Rapids (km 333) to the Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) – This reach is free of ice cover except for the ice jam near Mountain Rapids and the intact section of ice cover upstream of the bridges. The ice jam has moved downstream approximately 2 kilometres since the first observation on April 22. The beginning of the jam is approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ kilometres upstream of the western boundary of Fort McMurray and the jam extends upstream for approximately 11 kilometres. The incoming ice run will add to this length, however until the next aerial observation the increase will be unknown. Downstream of the jam intact ice cover exists to the bridges. This cover continues to deteriorate as water spills onto the ice cover and open leads form near the centerline of the channel. Large blocks of ice, transported from upstream, have popped onto the intact cover.
- Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) to Stony Island (km 277) – The ice cover in the main channel has begun to move and shift, and is looking quite deteriorated. Intact cover exists along the east bank from the bridges to near the end of Grant Island (km 291). There is a section of open channel downstream of Grant Island to near Poplar Island (km 286). The mix of intact ice cover and open channel continues to at least Inglis Island (km 271).

Clearwater River:

- The ice cover remains intact and in place from the confluence and upstream to the Christina River confluence (km 31). The ice cover continues to show increased signs of deterioration: flow along the banks, open leads increasing in size and number and darkening of the cover. No movement or the ice cover or open sections have been observed yet.

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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