

2014 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray Report No. 16

On Saturday, April 26, 2014, an observation flight of the Athabasca River was conducted by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. The flight covered an approximately 30 km reach of the Athabasca River from near Cascade Rapids to Grant Island.

The ice jam on the Athabasca River near the western boundary of Fort McMurray remains in place and static, with no incoming ice being observed. The ice cover below the jam remains in place and shows signs of gradual deterioration. Below the bridges at Fort McMurray, an intact ice cover remains in the main channel up to the Clearwater River confluence.

Water levels in the Athabasca River at Fort McMurray have started to rise in response to increased flows from upstream. As of the afternoon of April 26 the levels had not yet reached the levels observed during breakup and the formation of the ice jam.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Cascade Rapids (km 324) to the Grant MacEwen Bridge (km 295) – The ice jam remains in place at approximately km 301 to km 315. The ice jam has reduced in length by approximately 1 kilometre, most likely due to compaction and some loss from the ice mass. No incoming ice was observed. The water level remains elevated behind the jam and the ice/water level is near the treeline of the mature trees. An in place ice cover remains between the jam and the bridges. Water is spilling onto the ice cover and open leads are growing in this cover.
- Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) to Grant Island (km 291) – Sections of the ice cover between the confluence and Grant Island (km 291) have shifted and some have moved downstream. Downstream of Grant Island the channel appears nearly free of ice cover. An in place ice cover remains between the bridges and the Clearwater River confluence.

Clearwater River:

- The ice cover from the lower 2 kilometres has cleared out, but has left some remnant pieces in the channel beside Roche and MacDonald Islands. Near the Hangingstone River confluence the ice cover has shifted and a small section of the channel is open. Upstream of the Hangingstone River and towards the Christina River confluence (km 31) the ice cover remains generally intact and is still in place. The ice cover in this reach continues to deteriorate and new open leads continue to develop.

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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