

2018 Athabasca River Report No. 5

Summary

On Wednesday, April 25, 2018, an observation flight of the Athabasca River basin was conducted by Alberta Environment and Parks. The flight covered an approximately 162 km reach of the Athabasca River from the House River confluence (by Grand Rapids) to Poplar Island (downstream of Fort McMurray), as well as 32 km of the Clearwater River.

The deteriorated ice cover on the Athabasca River remains mostly intact, but some localized shifting of the ice cover has begun to occur. This leaves short sections of open water, followed by small accumulations of ice (ice jams) at the downstream end. Upstream of Fort McMurray, the ice cover is more intact. Downstream of the Clearwater River, the ice cover has begun to open. The ice cover on the Clearwater River remains intact except for a 3 km stretch near the mouth of the Christina River, and 3 km near the confluence of the Athabasca River. In addition, ice movement has been reported at the Town of Athabasca, which is approximately 400 river km upstream of Fort McMurray.

Continued warm weather will continue to degrade the ice cover. As the ice cover breaks up, there is the potential for ice jams to develop and release at any point along the river. Water levels and ice condition have the potential to change quickly. Anyone taking part in activities near rivers should be aware of changing conditions. Melting ice covers are not very strong and travelling on them is not recommended.

The most current observation information, data and advisories will be posted to the Alberta Rivers website at: <https://rivers.alberta.ca/>. Ice observation report information can be found by selecting 'Ice Observation Reports' in the main menu, and by selecting the Athabasca River tab. Previous Ice Observation Reports and Maps can be found by selecting 'Archived Information' and then 'River Ice Observation Reports Archive'. Photos and ice cover information are displayed on the map, and can be viewed by turning on the 'Ice' layer. This information is also available through the Alberta Rivers app for iOS and Android.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Mouth of the House River to Crooked Rapids (110 km reach) – Mostly intact, but deteriorated ice cover with frequent open leads. Some sheets of ice have shifted downstream, leaving short sections of open water with small accumulations of ice (ice jams) at their downstream ends. Short open sections (1 to 3 km long) have developed at river km 432, 428, 472, 469, 359 and 347. Small ice jams (~2 km long) have formed at river km 425 (downstream of Grand Rapids) and 366.
- Crooked Rapids to Fort McMurray (40 km) – A more intact ice cover is in place from upstream of Crooked Rapids to Fort McMurray, with occasional open leads at Crooked, Rock, Little Cascade, Cascade, Mountain and Moberly Rapids.
- Fort McMurray to Poplar Island (18 km) – The ice cover downstream of the mouth of the Clearwater River has continued to open up, and in some areas, started to shift downstream.

Clearwater River:

- Clearwater River to the confluence of the Christina River (30 km) – The ice cover from the Snye to the mouth of the Clearwater River is open (3 km). Upstream of the Snye, it is mostly intact and is continues to melt back from shore. Downstream of the Christina River confluence the ice cover is intermittent or mostly open for approximately 3 km.

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