

2014 Athabasca River at Fort McMurray Report No. 06

On Tuesday, April 15, 2014, an observation flight of the Athabasca River was conducted by Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. The flight covered an approximately 160 km reach of the Athabasca River from near Grand Rapids to near Stony Island, downstream of Fort McMurray.

The Athabasca River ice cover remains largely intact and in place. No signs of large scale movement in the ice cover were observed during the observation flight. A light snowfall last night has covered the Athabasca River ice cover, however increased signs of the river breakup process were visible from Grand to Long Rapids. The development of open leads, water spilling on the ice cover and flow along the shorelines were commonplace in this reach. Downstream of Long Rapids the signs of the breakup process are not as apparent, however this is not out of the ordinary.

Observation Details

Athabasca River:

- Grand Rapids (km 422) to Crooked Rapids (km 333) – The ice cover in this reach is intact except for at the rapids sections. Open leads, water spilling and flow along the shorelines is becoming common in this reach. The rapids sections continue to open up and the open leads at the rapids are joining together. The main channel at Grand Rapids is almost entirely open and the open leads continue to extend upstream and downstream of the rapids. The area of open water continues to increase at: Brule (km 386), Boiler (km 353), Middle (km 349) and Long Rapids (km 345). Small intact sections of ice cover exist between Boiler and Long Rapids, however open water in this section is close to being continuous. An accumulation of ice approximately 2 river widths long was observed at Middle Rapids.
- Crooked Rapids (km 333) to the Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) – The ice cover in this reach is intact and in place. The rapids sections in this reach continue to be at various stages of opening up and they are not as open as those upstream. Water pooling around the islands and sandbars downstream of Mountain Rapids (km 307) is becoming more common. Open leads have not yet formed in the ice cover.
- Clearwater River Confluence (km 293) to Stony Island (km 277) – The ice cover is intact and in place. Water pooling on the ice cover is increasing, especially around the islands and sandbars. The open lead which originates near the waste water treatment facility still remains close to Poplar Island (km 285) and has not yet entered the main channel. The open lead which forms downstream of the Clearwater River confluence has just begun to poke through the ice cover.

Clearwater River:

- The ice cover is intact from the confluence and upstream to the Christina River confluence (km 31). The snowfall has obscured some of the signs of thermal breakup, however water pooling around the islands and along the shorelines was visible in the snow. Open leads have not yet developed.

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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