

Growth Through Agriculture Program Success Story

The work to replace Drops 2 and 5 was in response to a canal failure which occurred on May 17, 2020 resulting in wide ranging impacts to the region, both in the United States and Canada.

Milk River St. Mary Drop 2 & 5 Replacement Project



Drop 5 - October 10th, 2020

Without the Growth Through Ag program funding, the Joint Board would not have been able to immediately mobilize resources to site such as engineering and geotechnical investigations so quickly. The GTA program helped to bring water back to the Milk River Hi-Line when the prospects were very bleak for 18,000 citizens and 140,000 irrigated acres. The GTA funds were vital to our project's success

Wade Jones, President
Milk River Joint Board of Control



Drop 5 - October 15th, 2020

Growth Through Agriculture Program Success Story

At approximately 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 17, a concrete drop structure failed on the Bureau of Reclamation's Milk River Project St. Mary Canal, northwest of the town of Cut Bank in northern Montana, located completely within the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

This failure jeopardized the water supply for the entire Milk River Project, the majority of which originates in the St. Mary River watershed in Glacier National Park. Runoff is stored in Lake Sherburne for release into the St. Mary River. The St. Mary Canal begins at the St. Mary Diversion Dam on the west-side of the St. Mary River. The water continues down the 29-mile canal to a series of five large concrete drops and discharges into the north fork of the Milk River. The water then continues down the Milk River into Canada and travels more than 216 miles through Alberta before re-entering the United States. After re-entering the United States, the water flows into Fresno Reservoir (Havre) where it is stored until needed for irrigation or municipalities. The Milk River Project Facilities provide water to over 140,000 irrigated acres, private contracts, stock water, the cities of Havre, Chinook and Harlem as well as providing water to the Fort Belknap and Blackfeet Indian communities, Town of Milk River and Coultts, Alberta, Sweet Grass in Toole County and the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge. The project also creates habitat for wildlife and recreational benefits on and off the reservation.

The majority of construction of the Milk River Project was completed between 1906 and 1940. The canal provides over 60-percent of the water supply to the Project in an average year and more than 80-percent in a dry year.

The Milk River Joint Board of Control managed the construction effort to replace Drops 2 and 5. Funding for the repairs were provided by the Bureau of Reclamation, local irrigators and pumpers, grants from DNRC and Department of Agriculture, St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group with the remainder covered by State of Montana issued bonds. The current replacement costs of the two drop structures is \$7.7 million. The work was covered under Emergency-EXM through Bureau of Reclamation which changed the allocation from normal allocation of 73.96% local and 26.04% federal to 48.07% local and 51.93% federal.

The construction project took 22-weeks from failure to restarting the canal. Without programs like the Growth Through Agriculture grants and loans, the Milk River Joint Board of Control would not have initiated designs prior to the failure, allowing us to complete this project in one season. The success of the St. Mary Drop 2 & 5 Replacement would not have been possible without funding sources like the GTA program.



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