

Conservation Corner by Sheldon Kowalchuk

Surface Water Management

When you take a look at the interaction between water and humans it is quite interesting. The availability of water influenced the establishment of cities and towns across this country as most major cities in Canada are located along rivers or the ocean. The availability of water can be a driver of economic activity and too much can result in economic losses.

During the public consultation phase of developing the East Souris River Watershed Management Plan various issues were identified, and none more often than issues related to surface water management. Drainage, the enforcement of illegal drainage activities and concerns with the licensing process for drainage activities were mentioned repeatedly.

Drainage has been an integral component in Agro-Manitoba but it seems that the public wants a balance. What is that balance? In recent years we seem to be more susceptible to drought and flooding. Well that is the challenge that needs to be determined by all with a stake in surface water management and there are many.

Currently there are many with an interest in surface water management in Manitoba. The Province of Manitoba is responsible for issuing Water Rights Licenses for water withdrawals and for drainage purposes. Manitoba Transportation of Government Services, railway companies, and municipalities all are responsible for the infrastructure within their right-of-ways. Private landowners can drain or store water on their property. Organizations like the Turtle Mountain Conservation District and other organizations have also been involved in various water projects in the past. The bottom line is you have many players in the surface water management area and all too often there is not enough coordination in the management of surface water.

One of the pillars of the East Souris River Watershed Management Plan is to develop a coordinated strategy to direct surface water management activities within the area. There is an old saying, “whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting”. By bringing together all with an interest in the management of surface water, hopefully we can prove that water is worth cooperating for.