

Westside Irrigation Rehabilitation Project Project Introduction Webinar Q&A Summary:

This summary consolidates questions received during the three Project Introduction Webinars held over the week of July 27-31, 2026, and provides current Water Security Agency responses based on available project information.

Project Purpose and Benefits

What are the benefits of the Water Security Agency's Westside Irrigation Rehabilitation Project?

The project is intended to achieve multi-purpose use of the infrastructure for irrigation, industrial and municipal objectives, supporting long-term food security, food stability, and climate adaptation in Saskatchewan. Recent Isitrix survey results indicate that Saskatchewan and Canadian residents are concerned about food affordability and availability, and irrigation projects can help address these concerns by supporting more reliable local food production.

By dedicating and managing water for agricultural use, the project can improve production efficiency and allow more food to be grown on less land. It can also support higher-value crop production, including vegetables. While some people may not associate Saskatchewan with vegetable production, areas such as Outlook show that these crops are already being grown in the province. Expanded irrigation may also create opportunities for related economic activity, including processing facilities and other secondary industries.

Additional project benefits are outlined in the [WSA - Economic Value of Irrigation - Final Report.pdf](#) available on the Lake Diefenbaker project website, including benefits related to food production, construction, and broader economic development.

What is the life expectancy of the Westside Irrigation Rehabilitation Project?

The project is being planned as long-term infrastructure with an expected design life of at least 50 years. Some existing infrastructure, including the pump station and concrete base, has already been in place for close to 60 years and has been assessed as being in good condition.

While the Terms of Reference refer to a 50-year life expectancy, the project is intended to function as a generational investment. With appropriate maintenance and ongoing rehabilitation, the infrastructure could potentially remain in service beyond 50 years, possibly in the range of 70 to 100 years.

It is also important to note that construction and full implementation will take time. Although the infrastructure is being designed for long-term use, it will take several years to construct, and the addition of irrigated acres will likely be phased in over time. Full development of the irrigated acres could take approximately 15 years.

Why was the Westside Irrigation Project not completed, and why was the project changed to the Westside Irrigation Rehabilitation Project?

In 2023 the original 2020 Lake Diefenbaker Irrigation Project was reevaluated through a Value Options Analysis, and a decision was made to redefine the project into the smaller but more viable project, called the Westside Irrigation Rehabilitation Project. The project scope was reduced and WIRP is now the full project, rather than a part of a larger project. We are moving forward with a more compact and practical project that leverages existing infrastructure that is already on the ground. The current WIRP scope is approximately 100,000 acres of irrigated development, representing only 20% of the original 500,000-acre Lake Diefenbaker irrigation vision.

Will the Westside Irrigation Rehabilitation Project be assessed by federal agencies, and could it be affected by federal commitments to speed up environmental assessments?

The WSA has self-declared the Project as a “development” under *The Environmental Assessment Act* and is currently proceeding through Saskatchewan's provincial Environmental Assessment (EA) process. On January 29, 2026, the Saskatchewan Environmental Assessment and Stewardship Branch (EASB) posted the Terms of Reference for the Project. The WSA is now working on the Environmental Impact Statement that is planned to be submitted to the EASB in the spring of 2027. Federal engagement is required for certain project components, including Transport Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

There are also ongoing discussions regarding the federal *Impact Assessment Act*. Future updates are expected to provide a clearer understanding of the level of federal involvement and any permitting requirements.

Will the Westside Irrigation Rehabilitation Project support crop diversification, and does Saskatchewan have suitable soils and growing conditions for higher-value crops?

Outlook has access to water and favourable growing degree days, which can support higher-value crop production. Saskatchewan already has the capacity to produce higher-value crops, and these crops are currently being grown in the province.

Dryland farming and irrigation farming are different, and transitioning to higher-value crops can require more advanced technology and management. However, this type of production is not new to Saskatchewan.

The land distribution suitable for higher-quality crops is similar to Alberta's, although Saskatchewan does not currently have the same volume of irrigation or processing infrastructure. Expanded irrigation may create opportunities to transition to higher-value crop production over time.

Water Supply, Allocation, and Climate Resilience

Is there any truth to the statement that the South Saskatchewan River life expectancy is only about 50 years and by that time Saskatoon will only have a trickle of water?

Lake Diefenbaker and the South Saskatchewan River are managed based on downstream flow needs, including a minimum flow requirement of 42.5 m³/s that was established to maintain fisheries, effluent dilution in Saskatoon, water intakes, ferry crossings, operation of the Queen Elizabeth power station and recreation. In addition, under 1969 Master Agreement on Apportionment Schedule B, Saskatchewan must pass on the following volumes of water to Manitoba during a calendar year:

- one-half the water flowing into the Province of Saskatchewan in that watercourse from the Province of Alberta; and
- one-half of the natural flow arising in the Province of Saskatchewan.

A RiverWare model has been developed for the Saskatchewan River system by the Water Security Agency to support ongoing management of the South Saskatchewan River, including assessing flow changes due to the Project. The model results indicate that the minimum flow requirement of 42.5 m³/s continue to be met with the Project, and the water volume requirements to Manitoba under the Master Agreement of Apportionment is also met.

How do we know Saskatchewan receives 50% of the water exiting Alberta, and what gives confidence that water will continue to be shared equitably if climate change or drought increases water demand upstream?

Water sharing between Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba is governed by the 1969 Master Agreement on Apportionment, administered through the Prairie Provinces Water Board. Under this agreement, Alberta is required to pass 50% of eligible annual flow volumes to Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan is required to pass 50% to Manitoba.

To date, Saskatchewan has typically received more than its 50% share, including during dry periods. Looking ahead, RiverWare modelling completed by the Water Security Agency assumes Saskatchewan receives only the required 50% from Alberta and considers what that would mean for the Saskatchewan River system. A report on this work is expected, and current modelling results indicate that sufficient water is expected to be available to support the project under the assumptions tested.

How does the project consider climate change and future water uncertainty, including the potential for more extreme weather events or lower river flows?

The project considers climate change adaptation by helping manage water in a closed irrigation system and applying it to crops when needed to support food production.

There are mechanisms in place to respond if water availability becomes limited. Saskatchewan has a [priority-of-use policy](#), available on the Water Security Agency website, which outlines how water use is prioritized during shortage conditions. If all allocated uses cannot be met, priority is given first to human consumption and municipal use, followed by industrial use, with irrigation lower in the priority order.

This means that, if there were not enough water to meet all allocated uses, irrigation would be one of the first areas where reductions could occur. Saskatchewan's system is different from Alberta's "first in time, first in right" system. In Saskatchewan, legislation provides authority to adjust water use, and water licences have term lengths that allow for review at renewal. These mechanisms provide backstops to help respond to changing water conditions and climate-related uncertainty.

Where can the policy that defines water-use priorities during low-flow conditions, including ecological flow considerations, be accessed?

The water-use prioritization policy is available on the Water Security Agency website under the [Adaptive Water Use Prioritization Policy](#). The policy has been shared and is expected to be referenced as part of the EIS. It outlines how the Water Security Agency prioritizes water use and notes that allocation decisions consider factors such as water supply and availability, stakeholder commitments, apportionment agreements, and environmental needs.

How will downstream water quality be protected as part of the project?

As part of the irrigation project, lands must be assessed for irrigation suitability before they can be used. This includes soil testing and considering whether the available water is suitable for the soil and proposed irrigation use.

The Water Security Agency has already completed a significant amount of soil suitability testing and expects to complete more as the project moves forward. Confirming that soils are suitable for irrigation helps reduce the potential for downstream impacts, including impacts related to surface flow and water quality.

Irrigation is also typically managed so that only the amount of water needed is applied, which helps minimize effects on surface water flows.

What baseline information is being used to assess downstream water quality?

The water quality baseline is based on long-term water quality data, including Water Security Agency inventory data and ongoing baseline datasets. This provides an extensive dataset for understanding existing water quality conditions.

Within the project footprint, water quality testing has also been completed throughout the project area over a three-year period. This provides a strong baseline for assessing and monitoring water quality as the project moves forward.

How many Burrowing Owls were identified during the environmental surveys?

The environmental surveys used accepted survey methods recognized by the Environmental Assessment Branch. No Burrowing Owls were recorded during the surveys.

However, the absence of a survey detection does not mean the species is not considered in the assessment. The project also considers habitat quality and the potential for species to be present in the future. Current survey results did not identify Burrowing Owls, but potential habitat considerations remain part of the assessment.

How does the Water Security Agency define sustainability?

The Water Security Agency's approach to sustainability is closely linked to long-term water security. The [Adaptive Water Use Prioritization Policy](#) supports sustainable water management by guiding how water allocation decisions are prioritized in Saskatchewan, particularly during shortage conditions.

The policy considers reliable and available water supplies, stakeholder commitments, apportionment agreements, environmental needs, infrastructure capabilities, timing of needs, and user compliance history. In practice, this means managing water so that basic human needs and municipal uses are prioritized first, while still considering economic, agricultural, and environmental needs within the limits of available supply.

Indigenous and Métis Engagement

What will engagement with Métis communities look like?

The Water Security Agency has sent out communications and is open to engaging with Métis communities in the way that works best for each community. This could include in-person meetings, virtual meetings, or other approaches depending on community preference. The engagement process is intended to maintain open communication, share project information, gather feedback, and identify community concerns or interests throughout the project.

Will environmental monitoring be addressed, and what opportunities may there be for Indigenous communities to participate in monitoring?

As part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) requirements outlined in the Terms of Reference, the Water Security Agency is required to consider monitoring and follow-up needs during construction, operations and management, and decommissioning and reclamation.

Monitoring is intended to track project activities on the landscape and assess whether valued components are being affected as anticipated. If effects are different from what was predicted, follow-up requirements and contingency measures would help determine whether adjustments are needed.

The Water Security Agency has been looking at opportunities for Indigenous participation in environmental monitoring based on experience from other projects, where Indigenous communities have conducted their own environmental monitoring. The Water Security Agency is looking for opportunities to partner, which could include learning opportunities or participation by communities with capacity to be involved in the project.

Some of these opportunities may be identified after the EIS, when the Water Security Agency begins looking more closely at potential monitoring partnerships and follow-up requirements.

How are Indigenous Treaty rights, including rights related to harvesting and traditional livelihoods, being considered in project planning and long-term monitoring?

Indigenous Treaty rights, including harvesting and traditional livelihood considerations, are being considered through engagement, consultation, and Traditional Land Use (TLU) studies. The Water Security Agency will continue meeting with communities and listening to concerns as the project moves forward.

Through the Environmental Impact Statement, potential long-term impacts to these uses will be considered, along with possible mitigation measures.

What measures are being considered to address potential impacts on hunting, fishing, trapping, other land-based activities, and downstream ecosystems?

Potential impacts to areas such as the delta, downstream wetlands, fish habitat, and ecosystem functions are being considered as part of the project assessment. RiverWare modelling is expected to provide information on what the proposed allocation could mean for the delta, including water flows through the river and dam operations.

As the water management agency, the Water Security Agency can also consider managing releases as a way to help address potential impacts.

Regarding water sustainability, approximately 3% of the water leaving Lake Diefenbaker is lost to evaporation. When other uses are considered, the water applied to the Project would represent less than 2% of the total, equivalent to less than one foot off the top of Lake Diefenbaker, which is approximately 190 feet deep.

Will heritage reports, including archaeological reports and EIS-related reporting, be available for review before the duty to consult process ends, and will there be further opportunities to provide feedback?

The Heritage Resources Branch manages access to heritage-related information, including archaeological information. There may be specific sensitivities associated with this information, and the branch manages what data can be made accessible.

The EIS will include a summary of the results and an assessment of what those results mean in relation to the project. The intent is to share information at a high level where possible, while leaving decisions about specific heritage information to the Heritage Resources Branch based on confidentiality and what can be released.

The Water Security Agency plans to share what it can as part of the consultation process, and communities will receive the information that can be shared before consultation concludes.

Unanswered Questions

Question: What happens if many groups and people disapprove of this project? Will it still go ahead?

Answer: Public, stakeholder, and Indigenous community feedback is an important part of the Project and helps inform project planning, environmental assessment, mitigation measures, and decision-making. The Water Security Agency is committed to listening to concerns, answering questions, and considering feedback throughout the Project. Engagement outcomes are documented and used to identify opportunities to refine the Project, avoid or reduce potential impacts, and improve Project outcomes.

Whether the Project ultimately proceeds will depend on the outcomes of the environmental assessment, regulatory review processes, consultation requirements, technical studies, and government decision-making. Feedback from First Nations and Métis communities, stakeholders, and the public is an important consideration within these processes, particularly where concerns identify potential impacts that need to be addressed.

The Project is therefore not decided by the number of people who support or oppose it. Rather, all feedback is considered by the regulator alongside environmental, social, and economic factors to determine whether the Project can proceed, and if so, under what conditions.