

History

The early achievements of the CPR in constructing the irrigation infrastructure were then, and remain today, impressive. In the midst of the bald prairie, Alberta's largest man-made lake was constructed just south of Brooks. Lake Newell is more than 16 km (10mi) long and 6.5 km (4 mi) wide, an inland sea in a region naturally devoid of water. A number of wooden flumes were constructed across narrow valleys to provide water to areas that otherwise would have had very limited agricultural capability. Across a valley north and east of Lake Newell, the CPR constructed the Brooks Aqueduct, an engineering and construction marvel that has since been recognized as one of Canada's most impressive construction projects.



Eastern Irrigation District

The Eastern Irrigation District (EID) maintains its administration offices in the City of Brooks, Alberta. The administrative jurisdiction of the EID encompasses an area of 600,000 ha (1,500,000 Ac), and is bounded by the Red Deer River to the northeast, and the Bow River to the southwest.



The District delivers water to over 113,000 ha (275,000 Ac) of cultivated crop land, and retains ownership of close to 240,000 ha (600,000 Ac) of native prairie rangeland, making the EID the largest private landowner in Alberta.

Epilogue

The introduction of irrigation water to this semi-arid landscape has created a virtual oasis in the desert. This is an area, "Where Water Works Wonders."

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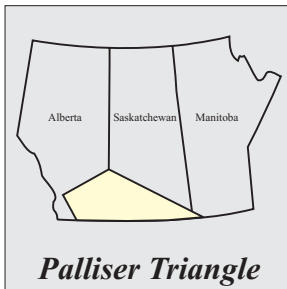


Where Water Works Wonders

Eastern Irrigation District

Palliser Triangle

In 1903 the Dominion Government of Canada approved a 1,200,000 ha (3,000,000 Ac) land grant to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company Ltd. (CPR) as the final compensation package for the construction of the Trans-Continental Railway. The CPR welcomed the land transfer, as it was convinced that these lands in the Palliser Triangle could successfully be converted to cultivated farmland. The Palliser Triangle consists of a large tract of land in southwest Saskatchewan and southeast Alberta. The Palliser Triangle received its name because of observations and remarks recorded during early explorations by Captain John Palliser.



“The South Saskatchewan, which in its upper part is called the Bow River, ... flows in a deep and narrow valley, through a region of arid plains, devoid of timber or pasturage of good quality ... The sage and cactus abound and the whole of the scanty vegetation bespeaks an arid climate.”

-Captain John Palliser

The Role of the CPR

How could the transformation of a western region, thought to be part of the “Great American Desert”, be altered by the intervention of the CPR? The CPR began construction of Canada’s most ambitious agricultural project.



The government had long since decided that it would play only a limited supporting role in the development of irrigation systems in western Canada. Large tracts of land would need to be brought under irrigation for the CPR to recoup its investment and to earn a profit.

The CPR began construction of the Bassano Dam on May 10, 1910. This dam would serve as the diversion works required to bring water from the Bow River onto the plains region to allow for irrigated farming. In addition to building the Bassano Dam, the CPR constructed an elaborate network of canals, flumes, syphons, drains, reservoirs and spillways. Much of the original construction was completed in just four years.



The Formation of the EID

Twenty years of irrigation had convinced the area’s farmers and ranchers of the long term value of irrigation water to the region. They formed a water users group and commenced discussions with the CPR on taking over the project. In April of 1935, these negotiations culminated in the administrative transfer of the Eastern Division of the CPR Irrigation Project to the Board of Trustees of the Eastern Irrigation District (EID).



To assist with the transfer and provide legal basis for the activities of the water users, the government of Alberta approved the Eastern Irrigation Act. This Act set out the rules of operation and government for the irrigation project.

It also provided a method for the election of trustees from amongst the water users and gave guidance for the administration of the land and water resources.

The newly formed Eastern Irrigation District received ownership of the irrigation system, 400,000 ha (1,000,000 Ac) of land within the region, and a cash reserve fund of \$300,000 to assist with start-up operations of the District.