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Eastern Irrigation District

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2024 Irrigation Season

Heading into the start of the 2024 irrigation season the District took a cautious approach as a result of the 2023 dry conditions, even while reservoirs were full and late snowpack conditions looked promising.

With this cautious approach the Board set allocations at 15", knowing that 15" could be delivered to the farm gate with little to no shortages as was done in the extremely dry conditions of 2023.

Spring precipitation, particularly in May, along with good late snowpack provided the confidence in June to increase allocations to 18" and 24" in July.

All reservoirs are at full winter levels and soil moisture is much improved, leading to an optimistic start to the 2025 irrigation season.

IRRIGATION UPDATE

Provincial Water Availability Engagement

The Provincial government has recently launched an engagement on provincial water availability. The government is requesting all Albertans share their thoughts on ways to increase water availability and improve the water management system in Alberta. Outcomes of this consultation may include amendments to the Water Act as well as changes to the current water licensing system.

The **provincial water availability engagement web page** has specific information on the engagement including 'issue sheets' on a number of topics. Several of the issue sheets and the considerations within them, would have a material impact on irrigation districts and their irrigators.

The Alberta Irrigation Districts Association (AIDA) and its member districts have been engaging with government officials since we were first informed of the extent of the engagement. We have communicated concerns and the risk of potential amendment considerations on districts and their irrigators. We have also provided a list of sector-endorsed suggestions to improve water management in Alberta. The sector's areas of concern, along with suggestions to improve access to water, are detailed in an AIDA white paper titled "Provincial Water Availability Engagement: Identified concerns of possible amendments and suggestions to improve water access in Alberta", and is available for download from the AIDA website or from your irrigation district. We strongly encourage all irrigators to review this document.

AIDA and districts will have additional meetings over the coming months with the government. However, we need your help to reinforce our concerns and suggestions and to share any thoughts and opinions you have. Not only is the engagement period very short, ending on January 10, 2025, but it also falls over the Christmas holiday season.

A virtual public open house has already occurred. However, there are still several ways to assist, including:

- Attending one of the in-person engagement open houses taking place over the next week:
 - **In-person open house in Red Deer** at the Alberta Sports Hall of Fame – Tuesday, December 3, 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
 - **In-person open house in Fort Macleod** at the Fort MacLeod & District Community Hall - Monday, December 9, 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
 - Providing written feedback to epa.water@gov.ab.ca
 - Providing feedback to your local MLA via email or in-person:
 - Brooks.MedicineHat@assembly.ab.ca
- Phone: 587-270-5110 or 403-527-5622 Fax: 587-270-5113

The following are some key messaging points that provide some important economic information on the irrigation sector and summarize the most significant concerns and the top suggestions to improve the water management system in Alberta.

Provincial Water Availability Engagement

Irrigation Sector Key Messaging

Key Takeaways:

Irrigation Provides Significant Economic and Social Benefits - Irrigation in Alberta is highly efficient and provides sustainable production of food to supply the nation and the globe. Additionally, the irrigation distribution system supports water access for municipalities, industry and to support wildlife, wetlands, and recreational opportunities.

The System is not Broken – The South Saskatchewan River Basin just faced two difficult years (more so in 2023 than in 2024), yet water users, specifically large senior license holders, worked together to mitigate drought with the result being two successful water management years.

Mitigation Steps for Droughts and Floods - Proactively planning for droughts and floods is essential in Alberta and can be achieved through increased water storage and retention. Investments in reservoirs would eclipse any new water efficiency efforts in stabilizing water supplies for Alberta.

Sharing Water Allocation - Stripping large license holders of allocation would restrict Alberta's economy. What might be seen as unused allocation is actually an essential buffer for large license holders to deal with inclement weather. Stripping the licenses would effectively shrink Alberta's agriculture sector, which has proven to be the bedrock of Alberta's economy. To make water go further, added storage is the key rather than stripping allocation from efficient, productive, large license holders.

Irrigation Sector Key Messaging

1. Irrigation district water license allocation significantly supports the Alberta economy.

Irrigation practiced in Alberta's 11 irrigation districts represents only 4.4% of Alberta's cultivated land base but has significant contributions to the regional and provincial economy. The "Economic Value of Alberta's Irrigation Districts" shows that irrigation related activities in Alberta irrigation districts contribute:

- \$5.4 billion annually to provincial GDP. 80% accrues to the region and province and 20% to irrigation producers.
- \$3.2 billion annually in labour income and supporting almost 50,000 full-time equivalent positions.
- 27% of the province's total primary agricultural sales.
- 38% of Alberta's total livestock sales.

Irrigated crop production generates about 4.5 times more revenue per hectare than dryland crop production. 48% of the total feeder cattle in the province are associated with irrigation districts.

IRRIGATION UPDATE

Provincial Water Availability Engagement

Irrigation Sector Key Messaging

- 2. Reducing water license allocations to irrigation districts and shifting allocation to other users does not make more water available and will increase water availability shortages to irrigators and other district users in average water supply years.**
 - Current irrigation district allocations were set several years ago through a process that was based on the infrastructure and operational needs of districts. Those allocation limits considered future efficiency gains and irrigation expansion within districts.
 - The large allocation volumes of irrigation district licenses guarantees water availability to irrigation districts in low precipitation, high temperature years when projected water supply is sufficient. This is essential not just to grow food, but also to justify the tremendous investment we have seen in the value-added food processing industry in our province.
 - When water supply is projected to be lower than average or when in-stream river flow thresholds may not be met, irrigation districts and other large license holders voluntarily reduce their diversion to ensure all users (including the river environment) have water, irrespective of whether such users have large or small water license allocations, or senior or junior priority. This is authentic water sharing.
- 3. Unnecessary restrictions on irrigation district licenses to provide water for other purposes should be removed.**
 - Within irrigation district service areas, irrigation infrastructure is often the only practical way for many potential non-irrigation water users to access water.
 - Many districts have received amendments to their water licenses to allow them to provide water within their areas for other uses such as municipal, commercial, industrial, and agricultural use. However, the conditions for amending licenses to provide water for these purposes force restrictive or precise quantities of water to be stated. These conditions are unnecessarily restrictive and can limit opportunities for economic development within the areas served by irrigation districts if the amended quantities fall short of the water needed in the future.
- 4. Mandatory volumetric pricing schemes are simply a tax on water similar to the federal carbon tax.**
 - Such schemes would remove funds that irrigation districts use for water infrastructure rehabilitation/modernization investment required to increase sector water efficiencies. Increased costs from volumetric pricing would be passed onto irrigators and other district water users, decreasing affordability.
 - As irrigators are already incentivized to maximize irrigation efficiencies due to the variable power cost of running irrigation, any additional tax would actually result in less funds being available for on-farm investment in sustainable irrigation practices, including precision irrigation opportunities. The result is a negative impact on future water efficiency gains.

Provincial Water Availability Engagement

Irrigation Sector Key Messaging

5. Mandatory setting of sector water conservation, efficiency and productivity targets by the provincial government is comparable to targets set by the federal government to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Such schemes will force a pace of rehabilitation on districts which may be financially unattainable.

- Irrigation districts and irrigators have been voluntarily increasing water efficiencies for over 50 years by investing in infrastructure rehabilitation and on-farm system changes.
 - The sector has achieved efficiency and productivity gains of over 40% since 2005. These gains are larger than those achieved by any other water using sector in the province.
 - For the period 2011 to 2019, \$474 million dollars was invested in irrigation infrastructure rehabilitation. Collectively irrigation districts funded 63% of the total and the government of Alberta 37%.
 - The current round of investment of \$933 million is an investment in water efficiency and security. 70% of this investment has been funded by irrigation districts. Irrigation farmers have and continue to heavily invest in water efficiency, water security and water sustainability.
- Recent and ongoing increases in the cost of supplies and labour have already affected the quantity of annual rehabilitation activities districts can complete. Setting unrealistic rehabilitation targets will result in the associated costs being passed onto irrigators and other district water users, decreasing revenue and affordability.
- The potential setting of mandatory goals by government to use specific on-farm technology (ie. sub-surface drip irrigation) would impact the current irrigated crop mix (which would impact the agri-food processing sector) and shift the decision of how to best irrigate a crop from the farmer to the government.

6. The existing market-based transfer provisions within the Water Act are the most effective way to reallocate water in basins closed to new licenses (such as the South Saskatchewan Basin (SSRB)).

- Under this system the transferee receiving the new allocation will typically provide financial compensation to the transferor. Several districts have participated in this market system. Where districts are the transferor, the funds received through such a transfer are directed to infrastructure rehabilitation activities which result in the actual conservation of water.
- This system should continue to be recognized as the best alternative to reallocate water in a closed basin such as the SSRB.
- Eliminating the existing conservation hold-backs on water license transfers would reduce the cost to the transferee or allow them to receive more water for the same cost.
- The Irrigation Districts Act requires irrigation districts to hold plebiscites for all transfers. An amendment to the IDA to allow a maximum threshold value, for example a maximum percentage of a district's licensed allocation for which plebiscites would not be required, could help alleviate the administrative burden on districts to facilitate license transfers to others without having a material effect on actual water availability within a district.

IRRIGATION UPDATE

Irrigation Applications for 2025

Irrigation Development Applications for 2025 were reviewed at the October 22, 2024, Board of Directors Meeting. Those meeting the District's rating criteria pursuant to Irrigation Acres Bylaw #974 (2024) have been given conditional approval, and letters outlining conditions that must be met to receive final approval have been forwarded to the applicants. Additional information has been posted in the minutes, summarized as follows:

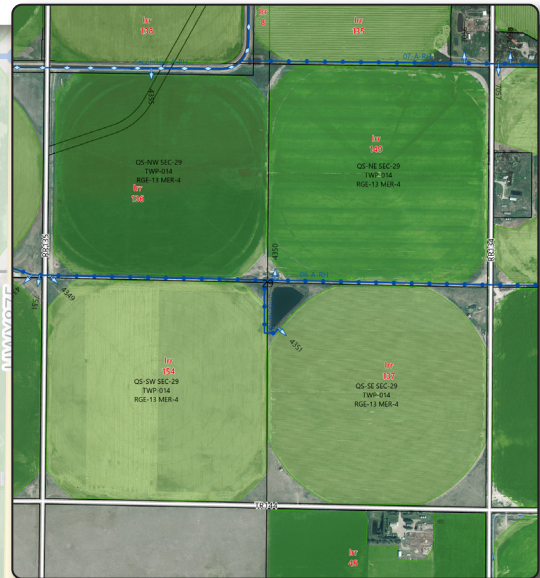
Irrigation Applications for 2025					
	Total Applications	Approved Applications	Denied Applications	Approved Acres	Carry Forward Acres
River	22	5	17	1,789	0
<i>[1,200 acres max which are not located downstream of either Lake Newell Reservoir or Crawling Valley Reservoir]</i>					<i>[589 carry forward acres from last year were used]</i>
Reservoir	4	2	2	272	2,146
<i>[1,800 acres max which are located downstream of either Lake Newell Reservoir or Crawling Valley Reservoir]</i>					<i>[last year – 618] [this year – 1,528]</i>

Moving forward, EID Admin will apply any **River** carry forward acres from projects that are not completed in 2025 to the 2026 irrigation applications maximum allotment. Any **Reservoir** carry forward acres from projects that are not completed in 2025 will be prioritized for irrigation development on District owned lands.

Irrigating Within Assessment

Irrigators are reminded to keep irrigation water from all private infrastructure equipment and head ditches within the assessed irrigation area. Irrigating outside assessment is in contravention of the *Irrigation Districts Act* and EID bylaws and policies. If you are unsure of a parcel's assessment area or are aware of needing additional irrigation acres to rectify what is currently being irrigated, please contact Staci Connauton.

The District is required by the Act to keep an accurate assessment roll and for this reason, general assessment reviews are conducted every few years using aerial photos to confirm irrigated areas, confirm irrigation methods, and identify physical encroachments onto District owned lands. Please note that instances of irrigating in excess of assessment, when identified by the District, may result in a capital assets charge of 150% times the new parcel rate.



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IRRIGATION UPDATE

2025 Corporate Planning Sessions

Corporate Planning Sessions have become an annual practice for the EID Board of Directors, administration, and staff. Scheduled to be held this year in mid-January, the 2-day in camera meetings are used to focus on significant or confidential issues, those that require in-depth review, and/or those that lead to policy development. Often, Directors are encouraged to obtain feedback from irrigators on certain topics or questions. The sessions may also be used to review board governance matters and to meet confidentially as a Board and/or with the General Manager. In addition to other agenda items, it is anticipated that this winter's Corporate Planning sessions will include discussions on:

- 2024 Irrigation Season and Maximum Water Delivery Bylaw
 - Drought Plan Guidelines
 - 24"/acre maximum limit
- Irrigation Acres Bylaw
 - criteria & weighting of applications
 - large scale developments
- Irrigation Development
 - next locations
- Rate Bylaw
 - preliminary review of the water rate
 - rent & water rate for annual agreements to farm road allowances or other parcels
- Fees Bylaw
 - preliminary review of fees
- Economic Development
 - the EID role in local economic development
- Long Term Irrigated Lease Expiries
 - direction on renewal or converting to a new lease
- Sale of District Owned Lands Policy
 - parameters to consider if selling small portions of District land to complete private infrastructure
- Acreage Water Agreements
 - defining acceptable yard area and parameters for watering additional areas

Division 4 (Cassils/Brooks) Director Seat

Brian Schmidt, Division 4 Director has submitted a letter to the Board confirming that effective December 1, 2024, he will no longer be an irrigator and will not satisfy the board member eligibility requirements as outlined in the Irrigation Districts Act.

At the November 26, 2024 Board of Directors Meeting, a motion was carried to leave the Division 4 seat vacant effective December 1, 2024 until the upcoming election. An election will be held, if necessary, on April 8, 2025, for Division 2 (Rosemary/Duchess), Division 4 (Cassils/Brooks), and Division 7 (Rolling Hills).

To continue to have full representation at the board table, a second motion was carried to appoint Brian Schmidt as an additional Board Member, pursuant to section 30(1) of the *Irrigation Districts Act*, to continue his representation on his current committees and associations. A member appointed under subsection (1) has voting rights on the board.

IRRIGATION UPDATE

New Irrigated Leases

In continuance of the District's mandate to maintain and promote irrigated agriculture, 4 parcels of District owned lands were approved for development as Irrigated Leases for 2026:

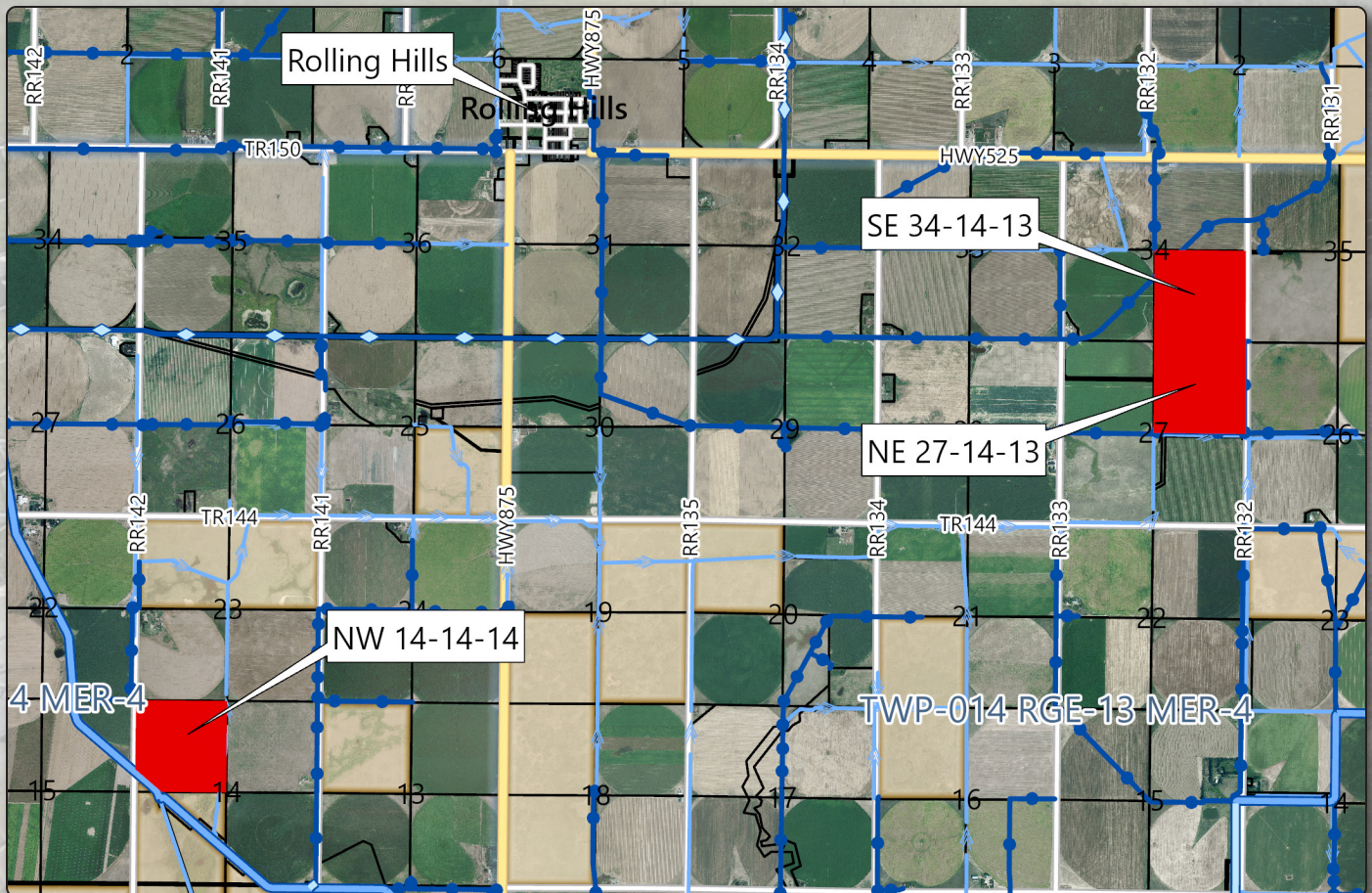
- NE 27-14-13 W4M – 155 irrigation acres (farmable acres) with corner arm pivot;
- SE 34-14-13 W4M – 125 irrigation acres (farmable acres) with standard pivot;
- NW 14-14-14 W4M – 149 irrigation acres (farmable acres) with corner arm pivot; and
- NW 06-24-15 W4M – 154 irrigation acres (farmable acres) with corner arm pivot.

Equipment and infrastructure components have been ordered; necessary construction work on the parcels will be completed during the summer of 2025; and it is anticipated that lessees will have access to the parcels in the fall of 2025 to break the land. Lease particulars will be reviewed and confirmed at the upcoming Corporate Planning sessions, and further information regarding the leases and auction will be provided in the Spring Newsletter.

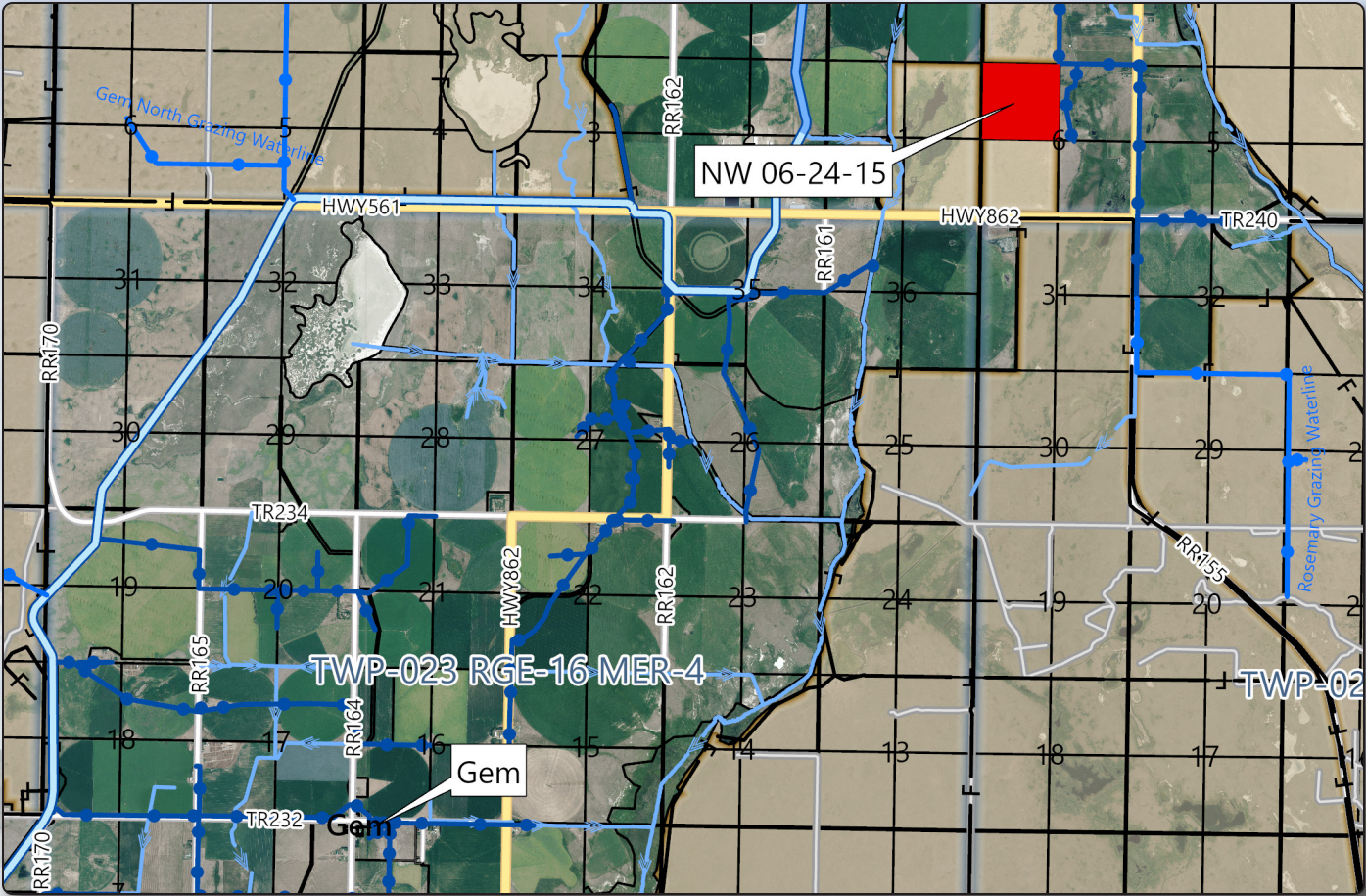
Nathan Fontaine,
Land Supervisor

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IRRIGATION UPDATE



IRRIGATION UPDATE

Updates on Policies and Bylaws

Bylaws and policies relevant to irrigators may be viewed on the District's website.

[see website for bylaws and policies]
[\[https://www.eid.ca/bylaw_policy.html\]](https://www.eid.ca/bylaw_policy.html)

Election Date Bylaw #975 (2024)

(see page 7)

Irrigation Acres Bylaw #976 (2024)

The Irrigation Acres Bylaw was initially reviewed by the Board in October. This bylaw establishes the rules and procedures governing an application for an increase in irrigation acres and for an application to transfer irrigation acres. The new bylaw was passed at the November meeting and includes a stipulation that:

- no delivery of water shall occur until the applicant's approved project has been completely finalized to the satisfaction of the Manager.

Capital Assets Charges Bylaw #977 (2024)

The Capital Assets Charges Bylaw was also initially reviewed by the Board in October. This bylaw levies a charge on each irrigation acre added to a titled unit and shown on the assessment roll and sets the purchase price the District will pay for irrigation acres sold to the District by a landowner. It also assigns a general assessment audit penalty for prohibited irrigating of acres, outlines responsibilities for irrigation works, and contains a 2% annual payment escalator. Purchase prices and charges may be adjusted more than the automatic 2% annual escalator by Board decision. The bylaw is reviewed annually with annual adjustments to capital asset charges occurring December 1 of each year so that applicants for irrigation acres in the following year are aware of any adjusted charges. A 2% increase was approved at the November meeting and the current charges in effect until December 1, 2025 are as follows:

- \$765/acre for converting terminable acres to irrigation acres;
- \$1,530/acre for infill and efficiency acres up to 50 irrigation acres per parcel;
- \$3,672/acre for infill and efficiency acres over 50 irrigation acres per parcel; and
- \$3,672/acre for acres assessed to dry parcels (new acres).

Notice of Irrigation Billing and Penalty

Pursuant to Rate Bylaw #971 (2024), invoices for irrigation rates, charges, and surcharges have been mailed to irrigators on October 28, 2024.

Payment is due December 31, 2024

Payment may be made by cheque, cash, credit card, or online through your financial institution. A payment drop box is also located at the front of the District building. The office of the Eastern Irrigation District will be closed at 5:00 p.m. on December 20, 2024, through and including January 1, 2025. All payments mailed to the District that are postmarked by the 31st day of December 2024 will be deemed to have been received by the District as of that date. A penalty of 8% will be added on the 1st day of January 2025 to all amounts remaining unpaid on the collector's roll as of the 31st day of December 2024. [s. 132, Irrigation Districts Act] [Rate Bylaw #971 (2024)]

EIDNet

EIDNet has a network of 18 towers, serving more than 1,800 local farms, ranches, business, and individuals in community hubs and outlying rural areas. Internet usage has become an integral part of business and everyday life for our customers, with usage possibilities and demands continually increasing. In predicting the increased demand in bandwidth required by our customers, an 8 phase fibre optic build was initiated. Once into the project, both Federal and Provincial funding was received, and the initial 8 phase project was fast-tracked to 4 phases:

- Phase 1 (One Tree, Duchess & Rosemary) – complete.
- Phase 2 (Bantry, Tilley, Cassils & Snake Lake) – complete.
- Phase 3 (Rainier, Bow City & Scandia) – complete.

Phase 4 (Patricia, Rolling Hills & Gem) – scheduled for completion in 2025.

The installation of fibre connecting EIDNet towers and available new technology have enabled speeds for subscription categories to be increased. The Premium and Ultra accounts were combined, and all accounts received increased download and upload capabilities.

New EIDNet Accounts - Effective December 1, 2024		
Account	Download / Upload	Irrigator Cost per Month
Irrigator Entry Level	5 Mbps / 5 Mbps	\$25.00
Ultra	25 Mbps / 5 Mbps	\$55.00 [\$70.00 non-irrigator]
Super UT	50-500 Mbps / 30-100 Mbps	\$95.00 [\$110.00 non-irrigator]
Super Office	150-500 Mbps / 90-100 Mbps	\$285.00 [\$285 non-irrigator]

If you have any questions regarding the fibre project, your account, or the services provided, please call the EIDNet department at (403) 362-1401. EIDNet also offers custom accounts, access points, and point-to-point kits.

Ronan Moen,
Internet Services Supervisor

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Email: ronan.moen@eid.ca



IRRIGATION UPDATE

Ice Fishing

All EID access rules remain in force during the winter [\[click HERE to view the Access Policy for District Owned Lands\]](#). When accessing EID reservoirs:

- Keep highway vehicles on established roads and trails.
- No fires or camping on shore.
- Pets must always remain under control.
- If off-highway vehicles are to be used to access the ice, offload from the closest established trail, and then take the most direct route on and off the ice.

Ice conditions on EID reservoirs change frequently throughout the winter. Always use extreme caution when accessing reservoirs in the winter and do not assume what was safe ice yesterday is safe ice today. All individuals accessing EID lands and reservoirs do so at their own risk.

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Please Note:

All Annual Reports and Newsletters
can be read on-line at:
www.eid.ca



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