

February 26, 2025

Friends of the Blindman River  
[friendsoftheblindman@gmail.com](mailto:friendsoftheblindman@gmail.com)

Dear Friends of the Blindman River:

Thank you for your email about the Blindman and Medicine Rivers water management. I understand you helped to organize a well-attended public meeting in Bluffton on August 8, 2024. I hope attendees gained a better understanding of low flows, the licence application process, minimum flows, and regulator actions to manage and limit temporary licences to protect water resources and the environment.

I understand there may still be questions from your July 8, 2024 letter that need further clarification. I will address the specific points you raised:

#### Instream and Water Conservation Objectives and Environmental Protection

Alberta's Surface Water Allocation Directive (SWAD) sets science-based guidelines for protecting instream flows. Directors use SWAD to guide water allocation decisions when specific instream requirements do not exist, or in areas outside an approved water management plan.

The Blindman and Medicine rivers fall under the South Saskatchewan River Basin Water Management Plan. Directors can consider the SWAD when making decisions, but the existing management plan offers better protection against low flows.

Water Conservation Objectives (WCOs) specify flow needs like the SWAD, but involve public consultation and consider environmental, economic, and social factors. At this time no WCO reviews have been initiated for the Blindman or Medicine River sub-basins.

#### Decision-making Processes and Policy

While the AER operates independently, it is obligated to follow provincial laws and policies. The Water Act outlines public notice requirements, and regulators adjust practices as needed. I forwarded your suggestions about enhancing public notice processes to the AER for their consideration.

The water-short areas assessment map, first developed in 2006, was reviewed under the 2020 Water Conservation Policy for Upstream Oil and Gas Operations (WCP). This map compares long-term water availability with current allocations across Alberta. It shows no significant changes since 2006. Low-flow periods, like those recently observed in the Blindman River, are managed by restricting term licences and cancelling temporary diversion licences.

While there is always more work to do, regulators continue to review and improve policies to reduce barriers to alternative water-sourcing options. Water licence applications must demonstrate they have considered using alternative water sources, such as produced water, over freshwater. As part of the WCP implementation, the AER made updates to make alternative water use more efficient and affordable.

### Monitoring and Assurance

We review each water licence application to determine the appropriate monitoring location. Location, withdrawal rate, expected timing, and the reliability of the monitoring station will inform whether a near-real-time station can be used or if a point of withdrawal measurement is necessary.

The province also has two active groundwater monitoring wells in the watershed as part of the provincial Groundwater Observation Well Network; however, these are ambient monitoring locations and are not situated close to many diversions. Ongoing studies of where groundwater contribution is important for rivers will increase our ability to manage surface and groundwater.

I hope you have found this information helpful. Thank you again for writing and for your advocacy to ensure the use of Alberta's vital water resources remains sustainable and responsible.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Schulz  
Minister of Environment and Protected Areas

cc: Honourable Jason Nixon  
MLA Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre

Mrs. Jennifer Johnson  
MLA Lacombe Ponoka