



REGIONAL ADAPTATION ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM | PROJECT SUMMARY

A Shared Approach to Maintaining & Enhancing Dams in the Cariboo

IN THE CARIBOO REGION, AGRICULTURAL dams provide water storage infrastructure for irrigation and livestock. With the anticipated effects of climate change on hydrology, the role of these dams in ensuring a sustainable water supply for agriculture will become increasingly vital in the future.

“It seems like we can’t fight climate change, so we have to be able to adapt. One of the biggest things we can do is control and manage our water, and the easiest way to do that is water storage,” says Kevin Boon, general manager of the BC Cattlemen’s Association.

Although dams supply critical water, aging dam infrastructure has made dam safety a growing priority for the provincial government in recent years. Despite the shared ecological and recreational benefits of agricultural dams, in many cases it is ranchers (the dam owners) who are being required to cover the costs of necessary assessments, maintenance and upgrades. Meeting the dam safety regulatory requirements — and avoiding the loss of agricultural water storage — has become a pressing priority for Cariboo producers.

PROJECT	<i>Cooperative Maintenance & Enhancement of Agriculturally Significant Dams</i>
LOCATION	<i>Cariboo</i>
COMPLETION	<i>December 2015</i>
PROJECT LEAD	<i>Cariboo Cattlemen’s Association</i>
FUNDING PARTNERS	<i>Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, BC Ministry of Agriculture, Cariboo Cattlemen’s Association, Ducks Unlimited Canada</i>

In the winter of 2014, the Cariboo Cattlemen’s Association (CCA), Ducks Unlimited Canada and the BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative initiated a project to inventory the region’s agricultural dams and to assess the key issues. The project aimed to propose potential solutions to the identified challenges and to explore options for sharing the responsibilities and costs associated with maintaining and enhancing dams into the future.

One valuable outcome for dam owners has been identifying the important role that agricultural dams play in terms



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of wetland conservation and fish and wildlife habitat. Through the study’s high level inventory and GIS analysis, almost

60% of (the 403) Cariboo dams appear to have a wetland classification and up to half may be located within areas with species at risk or endangered species. Project partner Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) has identified options for funding based on these conservation values.

“When the costs of dam maintenance get too great, the main option is often to get rid of the dam and give up the water storage. If this happens it will lead to a loss of habitat, in addition to the serious impact on agriculture,” says Katharine VanSpall, Head of Conservation Programs for the BC Interior for DUC. “It is critical to keep this water on the landscape.”

The findings of the study were presented in a document and then shared through a workshop in November of 2015. The workshop brought together agricultural dam owners, agency representatives, potential partners and invited experts to foster constructive dialogue including the evaluation and prioritization of issues and potential solutions identified in the document. Discussion quickly focused down to a few key areas including: addressing the affordability challenges facing dam owners, improving the informational resources about the dam safety requirements and undertaking watershed planning to ensure maintenance of critical water supply and storage.

“There’s been a lot of value in being able to bring government and ranchers together in a spirit of cooperation,” says Clint

Thompson, president of the Cariboo Cattlemen’s Association, who also shares responsibility for an agricultural dam. “We were finally able to sit across the table and talk about what’s not working without feeling pressure or conflict.”

In the months ahead, partners are going to be focused on building on these results and implementing next steps identified through the report and the workshop. The *Maintaining & Enhancing Dams in the Cariboo* discussion document and workshop summary are available at: www.bcagclimateaction.ca/regional/cariboo/

Projects like this are part of the work being delivered by the BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative (CAI). CAI develops tools and resources to assist BC farmers and ranchers with adapting to impacts of climate change. CAI’s Regional Adaptation Enhancement Program provides up to \$300,000 to implement priority projects identified in each regional adaptation strategy.

www.BCAGClimateAction.ca

The BC Agriculture & Food Climate Action Initiative was launched in 2008 by the BC Agriculture Council to enable a proactive and pan-agriculture approach to climate change issues. The Climate Action Initiative is currently supported by the BC Agricultural Research & Development Corporation and the Investment Agriculture Foundation of BC with funding provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and the BC Ministry of Agriculture through Growing Forward 2, a federal-provincial-territorial initiative.

Photos in this handout are courtesy of Ducks Unlimited Canada and Allen Dobb.

