

Taber Irrigation District

Strategic Plan

2014-2035

February, 2014

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TABER IRRIGATION DISTRICT
Responsible Water Management

TID Vision

Our vision is a progressive and cohesive team, supporting the diverse needs of our water users through a heritage of efficient operations, a drive for continuous improvement, and a spirit of collaboration toward responsible water management within Specialty Crop Country

TID Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide sufficient, quality water to our rate payers through collaborative planning, regular upgrading, proactive maintenance and cost-effective operation, enabled by an informed board and dedicated staff using sustainable management practices

Contents

Executive Summary.....	1
TID SWOT Analysis	2
TID Values	5
Taber Irrigation District Vision	7
TID Goals and Objectives	8
Goal #1: Provide the Best Possible Water Quality	8
Goal #2: Improve Water Security	8
Goal #3: Achieve the most effective and efficient water supply and distribution system possible	9
Goal #4: Foster a Positive Health and Safety Culture	9
Goal #5: Prevent and Introduction of Aquatic Invasive Species.....	9
Goal #6: Be Prepared for an Introduction of Aquatic Invasive Species.....	10
Goal #7: Optimize TID Human Resources for Efficiency, Resiliency and Productivity.....	10
Goal #8: Build a Robust, Compatible, Flexible and Responsive Information Technology (IT) System Appropriate to the Current and Forecasted Needs of TID.....	11
Goal #9: Optimize TID Buildings and Yard.....	11
Goal #10: Improve the Image of TID.....	11
Goal #11: Set up a Financial Structure that Meets TID’s Forecasted Needs	11

Executive Summary

The Taber Irrigation District (TID) is approaching the end of the General Rehabilitation Plan (GRP). As we started to consider what work needed to be done we understood that the technology now available has changed significantly from when the GRP was last reviewed. Available pipe sizes have increased, along with the variety of materials and fabrication options. Canal lining, automation and communication systems have advanced significantly. Also, the terrain modeling, GPS survey and CAD technologies available to assist in design have expanded the scale and detail of planning. As we considered this, we began to realize that our irrigation works were a reflection of where we were as an organization. We were in good shape overall, but needed to take a fresh look at what we had and where we wanted to go.

As we entered discussions on long term strategic planning, we found we needed to better understand who we were and what was important to us – our values. To gain this perspective, we undertook a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) that asked both our neighbours and our staff to review who we were and where we should direct our efforts. In December 2013 the board and senior staff spent a day unplugged from our daily distractions to review the SWOT Analysis, identify our values and carve out some goals that we could work towards. The Visioning Retreat was followed up in January, 2014 with a Special Board Meeting to set timelines for meeting the individual objectives that will be used in tracking our progress in achieving our goals. Through all of this process, the board carried certain key values forward that were incorporated into TID's Vision Statement – defining how we want others to see us, as well as our Mission Statement – capturing our core responsibilities.

TID's Strategic Plan collects the results of the brainstorming, the honest discussions, collaborations and learnings into a single document, recognizing that it is more a direction than a destination. We will make mistakes along the way, and we will have setbacks. What we learned from this process however, is that we all have the best interests of our water users in mind.

I would like to thank all those who participated in the process, including the individuals and agencies that offered their advice, the ditchriders who graciously hosted me on our ride-alongs, the office staff who bantered ideas around with me, and our board who held nothing back. I look forward to the work ahead.

TID SWOT Analysis

The acronym SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. A snapshot of the SWOT analysis will provide some context to the identification of our values and subsequent development of our Vision and Mission Statements, as well as to the establishment of our goals and objectives. Most observations relate directly to TID, but some apply to all irrigation districts or in conjunction with our partners.

The comments were categorized into one or more of 12 different headings. At our Visioning Retreat, the board and senior staff reviewed the comprehensive list of unedited, randomized comments with only the source name/agency or related identifiers removed. The key observations are as follows:

1. Location/Geography/Water Supply/Drainage
 - a. Strengths: compact, efficient, transportation corridor, growing conditions, soils, markets, water security
 - b. Weaknesses: low expansion potential, flat (reduced pipeline potential), small/shallow internal reservoirs
 - c. Opportunities: other water use, promote processing, integrate drainage solutions/services, collaborate on increased water storage / multi-use
 - d. Threats: external pressure on water availability, inability to store provincial entitlement climate extremes, storm water, drainage.
2. Infrastructure & Equipment
 - a. Strengths: efficient, compact, sized for expansion, signs of improvement
 - b. Weaknesses: old/manual technologies district-wide, limited management options, low spill capacity
 - c. Opportunities: planning ahead, add latest technology, take advantage of others' lessons, multi-benefit improvements, compatibility
 - d. Threats: unwillingness to change, fear of change, lack of planning, aquatic invasive species
3. Management – Vision & Planning
 - a. Strengths: water users first, support of water users, independent spirit, manageable size
 - b. Weaknesses: status quo, short term savings over long term value, no long term plan
 - c. Opportunities: momentum for change, well-positioned to be great, collaborative planning, develop a strategic plan
 - d. Threats: traditional thinking, limiting ourselves, inaccurate external perception, replacement of action with planning
4. Management – Operation
 - a. Strengths: small district with quick response to issues, flexibility, water users first
 - b. Weaknesses: safety culture, collaboration between office and shop, water tracking
 - c. Opportunities: improve communication/collaboration, integrate with office technology upgrades, improve payment options
 - d. Threats: expanded household/rural developments, data loss, water tracking during rationing
5. Management – Finances
 - a. Strengths: capital reserve, Irrican, surplus, low rates, look for value

- b. Weaknesses: infrastructure improvements lagging behind, cost of water delivery not reflected in rates, lack of planning
 - c. Opportunities: plan for value-added improvements, financial resources available to implement plans
 - d. Threats: losing track of water user needs, accumulated infrastructure deficit, water rates falling too far behind cost to operate, spending without adequate planning
6. Staff
- a. Strengths: stability, loyalty, dedication to water users
 - b. Weaknesses: conservative thinking, training/development is lagging behind, responsibility creep, demographics skewed toward retirement
 - c. Opportunities: training, goal-setting, advancement, cross-training, succession planning, building staff unity, improve communication, collaboration on common goals
 - d. Threats: stifled ideas, lack of training/knowledge, job market, influence of individuals with poor work ethic
7. Board
- a. Strengths: balance of experience/youth and family farm/agriculture business, direct, candid, engagement in wider perspective/committees
 - b. Weaknesses: need more engagement in ensuring district goals are put into action
 - c. Opportunities: use this momentum for change
 - d. Threats: reluctance to act
8. Water Users
- a. Strengths: progressive, knowledgeable, progressive, profitable, helped define TID, good to work with, supportive
 - b. Weaknesses: none identified
 - c. Opportunities: collaboration on understanding issues, promote value-added processing, extend to other water use
 - d. Threats: none identified
9. External – Collaboration
- a. Strengths: Irrican, main canal, AIPA, OWC, government departments, politicians
 - b. Weaknesses: communication/relationships weak in some areas and at some times, limited collaboration
 - c. Opportunities: develop partnerships to achieve common goals, mitigate conflict, add value to our water
 - d. Threats: lack of time/will, narrow thinking, government red tape, external issues, minority interests
10. External – Public Relations
- a. Strengths: location in hub of Specialty Crop Country, good sponsorship, strong heritage
 - b. Weaknesses: unprofessional image, no website, lack of PR plan, interaction/communication with water users at organizational level
 - c. Opportunities: website, key in on opportunities for public announcement/education, representation/promotion of TID in local sponsorship, multi-use benefits
 - d. Threats: lack of public understanding/awareness affects our social license to operate, oil and gas taking attention from water

11. Environmental

- a. Strengths: support of riparian management, OWC involvement, contribution to AIS prevention
- b. Weaknesses: water quality effects through TID, weed and algae issues, shallow reservoirs with low residence time,
- c. Opportunities: improve water quality through collaboration on studies and improving/adding infrastructure
- d. Threats: aquatic invasive species, chemical effects/availability, storm water and drainage

These observations were understood to be perceptions and not necessarily reality. In some cases we realized the issue was communication and in others it was a matter of documenting ideas or processes that were already in place. For the most part though, we see these as a candid view of TID and that we could use these as context for establishing our values, outlined in the next section.

TID Values

The values of the Taber Irrigation District were generated after reviewing the external and internal SWOT analyses. These are the guiding beliefs that demonstrate what we, our water users and other stakeholders value most about how we achieve our mission, i.e. Who are we? How do we want to be seen? What is important to us?

Here is our condensed list of TID values:

Our Focus on Water Users

We value the good relationships we have with our water users, knowing and understanding the diversity of problems and opportunities they face and being accountable to the direction they provide through their representatives on the Board of Directors.

Our Quality Product

We value delivering a reliable supply of clean water in a timely manner.

Our Dedicated People

We value having an engaged and progressive board and management, a strong work ethic in our staff and a spirit independence and self-determination.

Our Heritage

We value the contributions of the irrigation pioneers from whose legacy we operate, and the sound decisions of previous board and staff that have built a strong foundation.

Our Efficient Operation

We value fiscal responsibility, sustainability and maximizing efficiency and productivity in our operations with a hands-on, straightforward, no-nonsense management approach.

Our Partnerships

We value our partnership with St. Mary River Irrigation District and Raymond Irrigation District in the SMRID main canal and Irrican, our role in regional economic development and drainage, our role in protecting and enhancing Alberta's water supply, and our relationships and shared goals with government.

Our Potential

We value the economic, recreational, environmental and aesthetic properties that come with irrigation water, the advantages of size, location, high quality land and progressive water users we have in this region, and the potential of excellence at TID in becoming the best district we can be.

These values were considered as we crafted the following Vision Statement – defining how we want others to see us, as well as our Mission Statement – capturing our core responsibilities.

Taber Irrigation District Vision

TID Vision

Our vision is a progressive and cohesive team, supporting the diverse needs of our water users through a heritage of efficient operations, a drive for continuous improvement, and a spirit of collaboration toward responsible water management within Specialty Crop Country

TID Mission Statement

Our mission is to provide sufficient, quality water to our rate payers through collaborative planning, regular upgrading, proactive maintenance and cost-effective operation, enabled by an informed board and dedicated staff using sustainable management practices

TID Goals and Objectives

The Vision and Mission statements give TID the overarching guidance for preparing the more specific goals and objectives. The goals present the broad, long-term activities that we will be working on and the objectives give short-term, specific targets to aim for in achieving these goals. Here are the eleven goals for TID, the subsequent objectives and the timelines we are starting out with:

Goal #1: Provide the Best Possible Water Quality

	Objective	Timeline
1.1	Understand our water quality by designing and implementing a water quality monitoring program to identify sources of pollution	2014 - ongoing
1.2	Improve water quality throughout the district through a surface water pollution mitigation program that will prioritize problems, collaborate to improve land management and stormwater control, develop administrative tools such as proactive runoff conveyance agreements, and install engineered solutions such as holding ponds, controlled drain inlets, and integrated water treatment structures/processes into drains and reservoirs	2015 - ongoing
1.3	Improve water quality at the point of delivery through an aquatic weed and algae control program that installs treatment structures at pipeline inlets through IRP funding and at individual farm turnouts through cost recovery	2015 - ongoing

Goal #2: Improve Water Security

	Objective	Timeline
2.1	Lobby government, collaborate with partners, and participate actively in consultations and hydrologic modelling studies toward increasing storage and improving water management in the region (eg. increasing capacity of Waterton-St.Mary headworks canals, Chin Reservoir expansion)	ongoing
2.2	Investigate the opportunities to improve storage and water management of district-owned infrastructure in collaboration with SMRID, RID, M.D. of Taber, Town of Taber, and Alberta Government	ongoing
2.3	Continue working with municipalities and other agencies to facilitate the funding and installation of on-farm and municipal storage to improve sustainability and efficiency, while integrating potential low impact drainage practices	ongoing

Goal #3: Achieve the most effective and efficient water supply and distribution system possible

	Objective	Timeline
3.2	Convert all technically and economically feasible conveyance systems to buried pipeline	2014 - 2035
3.3	Rehabilitate and/or retrofit all permanent canal systems as appropriate with membrane liners, gates, controls, communication and automation systems to optimal benefit and low risk of failure	2014 - 2025

Goal #4: Foster a Positive Health and Safety Culture

	Objective	Timeline
4.1	Review, revise, implement, and maintain an effective Health & Safety Program for employees, including industry requirements for training, seasonal safety meetings, weekly tailgate meetings (construction), provision of industry standard PPE/Guards/Tools, completion of hazard assessments and design of safe work practices and policies	ongoing
4.2	Promote Health and Safety in the actions and decisions of the Board and senior management, posting current safety targets, and making health and safety priorities visible to the public and government. Set up Health and Safety Committee.	2016 - ongoing
4.3	Review and implement improvements to our irrigation infrastructure affecting employee and/or public safety	ongoing
4.4	Develop and implement an Operation, Maintenance, and Surveillance (OM&S) manual, and Emergency Response and Preparedness Plans (ERP/EPP) applicable to all district infrastructure, property and all types of foreseeable emergency.	2018

Goal #5: Prevent an Introduction of Aquatic Invasive Species

	Objective	Timeline
5.1	Participate in the current programs to inform and educate the public about how AIS could affect irrigated agriculture, and extend to our local region	ongoing
5.2	Participate in the monitoring program spearheaded by Alberta Agriculture and Forestry at the district level through training of staff, installation of mussel substrates, inspection and reporting of results, and collaboration with our upstream water neighbours	2014 - ongoing
5.3	Advocate for and support provincial and federal initiatives for AIS prevention, including emergency preparedness, through ongoing participation in stakeholder consultations and committees, lobbying government for related legislation and jurisdictional control measures, and public awareness	2014 - ongoing

Goal #6: Be Prepared for an Introduction of Aquatic Invasive Species

	Objective	Timeline
6.1	Maintain a communication link with the provincial AIS program to ensure we are informed of the first indication of AIS introduction in southern Alberta	2014 - ongoing
6.2	In collaboration with other agencies, investigate, build and maintain a list of the current options to treat AIS, in particular Zebra & Quagga mussels, within our conveyance systems	2014 - ongoing
6.3	In collaboration with other agencies, develop a mussel containment and treatment plan that includes lining up off-the-shelf practical solutions, license requirements for chemicals/agents, resource requirements and lead time	2014 - ongoing

Goal #7: Optimize TID Human Resources for Efficiency, Resiliency and Productivity

	Objective	Timeline
7.3	Review and update the work/task analysis annually to maintain efficiency and avoid responsibility drift	ongoing
7.4	Develop and maintain a succession plan for all permanent staff as a means to prepare for retirement or loss of personnel	2016 - ongoing
7.5	Prepare career development plans for all permanent staff. Continue cross-training for similar or complementary positions to allow for flexibility in time off and potential succession. Provide access to career development opportunities based on aptitude and interest.	ongoing
7.6	Host regular staff information-sharing meetings, get-togethers, recognition events (eg. celebrate training milestones), intra-departmental awareness activities, etc. to gain a better understanding of how our own work relates to rest of the district operations, and help foster a sense of pride in working in the TID.	ongoing
7.7	Maintain and implement a graduated system of documentation and follow-up to ensure accountability of staff time and/or performance measures as appropriate to each position	ongoing
7.8	Provide incentives for bringing special/value-added skills to the TID such as a remuneration adjustment, special recognition, special projects, etc.	2014

Goal #8: Build a Robust, Compatible, Flexible and Responsive Information Technology (IT) System Appropriate to the Current and Forecasted Needs of TID

	Objective	Timeline
8.5	Procure any additional equipment and software as selected from the Long Term Infrastructure Plan, including potential items such as water delivery tracking tools, reservoir level tracking, return flow tracking, and/or remote flow/gate communication and controls	2014 - 2021
8.6	Provide training for staff to operate the above equipment and software	2014 - 2021
8.8	Assess the resiliency, redundancy, shutdown protocols, compatibility, data backup, and security of TID's information technology system (software & hardware) and develop an appropriate replacement policy	2020

Goal #9: Optimize TID Buildings and Yard

	Objective	Timeline
9.5	Finalize south yard plan and complete recommended improvements	2020
9.6	Assess TID's risk of loss of documents and historic records and recommend appropriate mitigation and backup	2020

Goal #10: Improve the Image of TID

	Objective	Timeline
10.4	Promote TID's values as we engage in or otherwise support community projects	ongoing
10.5	Pro-actively participate in government and other agency lobbying, consultations and committees with promotion of TID's Vision	ongoing
10.6	Make effective use of Media to assist in promotion of TID's Vision by submitting at least 2 story ideas per year to newspapers and television	2014 – ongoing
10.7	Collaborate with M.D. of Taber, Town of Taber, provincial government, grower associations, individual farmers and processors to promote the region for increasing value-added specialty crop development	2014 – ongoing

Goal #12: Have Sustainable and Justifiable Rate, Fee and Investment Structure

	Objective	Timeline
12.1	Create a direction on Capital Assets Charges appropriate to the value and intended use	2018
12.2	Update the forecasted plan for rates and fees to accurately reflect the cost of operating the district	2018
12.3	Establish a plan for funding the three portfolios (Operating, Capital, Reserve)	2018

Goal #13: Update District Policies and Procedures

	Objective	Timeline
13.1	Construct an efficient framework to build a new TID Policy and Procedures Manual.	2018
13.2	Establish policy review committees for related groups of policies, create a set of policies, and develop the intent of each policy.	2018
13.3	Write the details of each policy, approve at the committee level, and put in force at the board level.	2018-2019
13.4	Establish an employee manual review committee, recommend updates at the committee level, and put in force at the board level.	2018-2019