

## **SASKATCHEWAN IS GOING DOWN THE DRAIN.....**

The recent snowfall around much of Saskatchewan has raised the Water Security Agency's (WSA) projections to a near normal to above normal snowmelt runoff across most of the province. If WSA had been enforcing its legislation and controlling illegal drainage, the risk of flooding downstream and the amount of runoff would be a lot less.

WSA has estimated that there are over 150,000 quarters of land with illegal drainage and that number continues to grow. Last fall, farmers were once again out on the landscape digging illegal drainage ditches. Track hoes, scrapers, and bulldozers draining and cultivating wetlands were a common site all despite the Province of Saskatchewan enacting Bill 44, new legislation that requires landowners to license all their drainage works by obtaining the necessary downstream land control and acquiring an Aquatic Habitat Protection Permit.

For those of us living downstream and affected by the Quill Lakes Flood and the increasing potential for a natural or man-made release of water from the largest saline lake in Canada, the concern over WSA's inaction is real. Since 2016 WSA has said that they will be stopping illegal drainage into the Quill Lakes, stating that "unapproved drainage is contributing to the rise in water levels and has for years" and "the Quill Lakes is one of the highest risk areas in the province because of the flooding impacts to farmland and infrastructure". Despite this, drains remain open, and new drainage ditches continue to be dug, all sending more water to the Quill Lakes causing more flooding and increasing the risk of an outflow of saline water downstream to Last Mountain Lake and the Qu'Appelle - Assiniboine River.

Water from the Quill Lake Basin is high in saline and measures as much as 9000 to 11,000 mg/L TDS. As the saline water flows through ditched agricultural land, phosphorous and nitrates will be picked up and absorbed along the way. The accumulation of saline, phosphorous and other contaminants into our lakes and rivers will be irreversible. Our water quality will be severely degraded and the habitat for our fish and wildlife will be at huge risk.

We need only look to our provincial neighbours to ask the question: Why is this Saskatchewan moving backwards? Why are we destroying the very resource that may help get us through tough times in the future? Why are we polluting and flooding our waterways when we should be protecting them?

The Government of Alberta have developed a *Water for Life* 10 year action plan with goals to maintain healthy aquatic ecosystem; reliable quality water supplies and safe, secure drinking water. The Manitoba government has introduced a strategy to protect wetlands and increased fines for illegal drainage. The Government of Canada has committed \$25.7 million dollar investment to improve the ecological health of Lake Winnipeg and its basin. Should we really be sending saline water through the Qu'Appelle river system into Manitoba's waterways?

Why is the Saskatchewan Government not taking the same steps as our neighbouring provinces, steps to protect our resources, with a vision to look ahead with positive changes rather than stepping backwards and gambling with the future of our province and the legacy we should leave to our children?

Agricultural drainage in the province of Saskatchewan is threatening our ecosystem and changing the natural landscape. Wetlands are disappearing and being replaced by straight-line farming practices. Our province is being stripped of a precious resource that is essential in combating extreme weather conditions such as excessive rainfall or drought. We often hear the refrain that farm production in this province must increase so that we can feed the world. Well, it makes no sense to feed the world while we destroy ours.

For further information log on to our website at: <http://lmlsg.ca/saws/>

Sherry Forsyth  
Saskatchewan Alliance for Water Sustainability