



# *International River Improvements Act*

## *Annual Report for 2019*

The goal of the *International River Improvements Act* (the *Act*) is to ensure that Canada's water resources in international river basins are developed and used in the national interest. The *Act* has been in force since July 11, 1955, and the responsibility for administering the *Act* has been with the Minister of Environment since June 1971.

Section 51 of the *Act* requires that a report of the operations under the *Act* be tabled in each House of Parliament after the end of each calendar year. This annual report covers activities under the *Act* during the 2019 calendar year.

The *Act* states that no person shall construct, operate or maintain an “international river improvement” unless the person holds a valid licence under the *Act*. An “international river” is defined as “water flowing from any place in Canada to any place outside Canada.” The major international rivers and their corresponding watersheds are situated in the western provinces. There are also some small rivers and streams along the Canada–United States boundary in Quebec and New Brunswick that are categorized as international rivers. The *Act* provides for the licensing of an “international river improvement” which is defined as a dam, obstruction, canal, reservoir, pipeline or other work the purpose or effect of which is (a) to increase, decrease or alter the natural flow of an international river, and (b) to interfere with, alter or affect the actual or potential use of the international river outside Canada. The licences can be issued for a period not exceeding 50 years. The *Act* ensures that Canada can meet its obligations under the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909.

The *Act* does not apply to an international river improvement built under the authority of an act of the Parliament of Canada, situated within “boundary waters” as defined in the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, or constructed, operated or maintained solely for domestic, sanitary or irrigation purposes or other similar consumptive uses.

The *International River Improvements Regulations* were passed by an Order in Council in 1955, and amended in 1987 and 1993.



The *Regulations* allow for exceptions to the application of the Act under two conditions: if there are insignificant effects on river flows or levels at the Canada – United States boundary (i.e., effect of less than 3 cm on the level or less than 0.3 cubic metres per second on the flow of water at the Canadian boundary), or if the improvement is of a temporary nature, to be operated for a period not exceeding two years. For a project that is subject to those exceptions, the proponent is nonetheless required to notify the Minister in writing and include specific information as required under the Regulations.

## Activity in 2019

No licences were issued and no exception notifications were made under the *International River Improvements Regulations* in 2019.

This document may be cited as follows: Environment and Climate Change Canada. 2019. *International River Improvements Act* - Annual report for 2019. [online].

Cat. No.: En11-4E-PDF  
ISSN: 1927-9442

For information regarding reproduction rights, please contact Environment and Climate Change Canada's Public Inquiries Centre at 1-800-668-6767 (in Canada only) or 819-938-3860 or email to [ec.enviroinfo.ec@canada.ca](mailto:ec.enviroinfo.ec@canada.ca).

Photos: © Environment and Climate Change Canada

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, represented by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, 2020

Aussi disponible en français