



*Working with agriculture and the rural community to ensure our environment is protected.*

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**Spirit Creek Watershed  
Monitoring Committee**

Spirit Creek Watershed Monitoring Committee Newsletter

# The Monitor

December 2000

## Change... for the better

About one year ago we learned about a change in the Spirit Creek watershed, which we felt could have serious repercussions on water quality in Good Spirit. At the time, Big Sky Farms proposal for an intensive hog operation in the upper reaches of the Spirit Lake watershed had created serious local concern about potential water quality impacts. I, along with other users of Good Spirit Lake, shared those concerns and set out to learn more.

The first thing I learned is that there are many individuals out there who are concerned about the long term health of Good Spirit Lake and of their drinking water, which is a scarce commodity in the upper Assiniboine River Basin. In fact, water quality concerns are on the increase across Canada. If this large hog project were to proceed, how could I be assured that water quality in the lake would be preserved? Little did I know that these concerns would lead to the formation of the Spirit Creek Watershed Monitoring Committee.

In response to the public concern about the Big Sky Farms/Rama Hog Venture proposal, the Hon. Clay Serby, Minister of Agriculture and Food, formed the Spirit Creek Watershed Monitoring Committee. Our mandate is to monitor possible water quality impacts of hog operations in the Spirit Creek watershed and to report our findings to local residents in newsletters such as this. Our goal is not to lay blame but to better understand water quality issues in the watershed and to implement practical, locally-acceptable solutions. By working together, we can promote and develop rural Saskatchewan and protect the environment for future generations.

I trust this newsletter will bring you up-to-date on the Committee's activities. We invite your input.



**Don Walters**  
Chairperson

## Big Sky Farms Update

By Florian Possberg  
Big Sky Farms'

proposal for Rama is a 5,000 sow farrow-to-finish hog project which will produce 116,000 market hogs per year.

Production will take place on six different locations of which three are located in the Spirit Creek Water Shed.

The sow barn, where the sows are bred and farrowed, is located south east of Rama. Piglets will be weaned from the sow at 17 days of age and taken to the nursery site located southwest of Rama where they remain for another seven and half weeks before being shipped to one of four feeder barns. The feeder pigs remain in the feeder barns for 17 weeks at which time they will be ready for market.

One of the four feeder barns is located northeast of Rama. Sites for the additional three feeder barns have not been finalized.

Construction of the earthen manure storage has been completed at each of the three sites and construction of the buildings is progressing at the sow barn and nursery sites. Big Sky

*Continued on the next page...*

# Monitoring is a BIG job!



By Ray Riesz

Monitoring of the Spirit Creek watershed is being done in cooperation with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, Sask Water and Saskatchewan

Health. The first priority was to establish a broad baseline of water quality near the three proposed barn sites. The only way to measure change is if we know what we started with.

In late October, Committee members conducted a very successful phone blitz of residents located within three miles of the three barn sites to identify both surface water and groundwater supplies that could be sampled. Thank you to the Committee members who worked the phones and to the 47 residents to date who have provided access to their water supplies for sampling. Without you, our program would be a wash.

Thirty-eight surface water and ten groundwater samples were collected. The sampling program includes duplicate sampling at some locations. The two samples are submitted to separate labs and the results compared to ensure accuracy. The samples were collected during November and early December. Although the weather cooperated into November, 15 surface water samples remain to be collected and will be included the spring collection of samples.

A broad-based sampling will be conducted at least once more to allow for seasonal variations in water quality. Long-term sampling will concentrate on selected stations, which provide insight on the upstream and downstream water quality.

The committee will also conduct a soil-monitoring program of lands receiving manure from the intensive hog operations.

The design of that portion of the program will take place January and February.

The first full-scale spreading of manure from the project will occur in the fall of 2002.

Results of the water sampling will be provided to each individual who cooperated in the program and overall results will be published in our next newsletter. Stay tuned!



*A monitoring well*

## BIG SKY CONTINUED

plans to stock the sow barn in February. The first feeder barn will not receive any pigs until August 2001.

Big Sky Farms has also decided to build a central feed processing unit for the project. The unit will be located north of Rama and will process feed required for the six barn sites. Up to 800,000 bushels of feed grain per year will be processed for this project alone. In total, the project including the feed mill will employ about 40 people.

Big Sky has also announced that Daryl Possberg will move to the community to manage the breeding site.

## Bus tour a good learning experience

By Jack Prychak

Representatives from Sask Water, Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, and the municipalities of Buchanan, Invermay and Preeceville joined Agriculture and Food Minsiter Clay Serby on a bus tour hosted by the Committee on November 13.

The tour was a good opportunity for the committee members and their guests to see first-hand the construction sites for the farrowing barn and nursery barns. Florian Possberg of Big Sky Farms spoke about the operation of the barns,

animal husbandry and of the feed processing center which will form part of the overall project.

Also along was Brian Eckel, a professional engineer with Machibroda Engineering Limited, the firm responsible for the geotechnical site investigation for each earthen manure storage.

Brian provided valuable information and explanation of the soil and groundwater conditions present at the site as well as the

monitoring system, which is installed and operational.

The Committee appreciates the time and effort of the resource agencies and of the local representatives to attend and to learn more about the Spirit Creek Watershed Monitoring Committee and our activities.

## Next Steps

JANUARY	Water sampling report
FEBRUARY	Design soil monitoring program
MARCH	Spring newsletter
APRIL	Spring runoff monitoring