



Remarks By

**Irene Brooks,
Chair, United States Section**

**International Joint Commission
of Canada and the United States**

On the Rainbow Bridge

Thank you Chair Gray for illuminating some of the reasons why we are celebrating a hundred years of the Boundary Waters Treaty. I would like to pick up on your last thought.

As long as we have shared waters – waters to share – we will need this treaty!

One might ask why we will need the treaty. Because as we move into the second century of the Boundary Waters Treaty, we are aware that most climate change models forecast less waters to share or, at the very least, dramatically different precipitation patterns – either of which could mean that tensions and possible disputes over those waters might be more likely.

For example, there are predictions that the glaciers in Glacier National Park, which feed 90 percent of the St. Mary River, may be dramatically diminished or even disappear. This is, of course one of the locations of disputes over water that was included in the Boundary Waters Treaty. I am proud to note that the current Commission has devoted much effort to refining the implementation of its 1921 Order and to encouraging cooperative efforts in the region.

As we stand above the raging Niagara River and contemplate the vast size of the Great Lakes, it may be hard to imagine a water shortage.

But the Great Lakes and this mighty Niagara River are not immune to the effects of climate change.

Lower supplies of water will mean increased stresses on ecosystems that depend on these waters, making the work of the IJC in its second century all the more important.

The need to find additional oil, gas and other critical natural resources may also be another source of stress on both water quality and water quantity.

The Commission anticipated and started planning for these future challenges in developing our International Watersheds Initiative, or IWI.

The concept for IWI began in 1997, when the two governments asked for the Commission's advice on how it might best help them meet the environmental challenges of the 21st Century within the framework of their treaty responsibilities.

The Commission produced a report called *The IJC and the 21st Century*, which included a proposal to transform our current boards into international watershed boards that would acquire expertise on the ecosystem of the watershed, involve the full range of concerned interests and have the flexibility to identify and deal with unforeseen developments.

The underlying premise of IWI is that local people, given appropriate assistance, are often best placed to resolve water resource and environmental issues within the watershed -- before such issues become international disputes.

The starting point for much of this joint work is the production of consistent and comparable geographic data along the Canada-U.S. boundary.

To put it more simply – it starts with a map of the boundary watershed in which rivers and other features line up, elevation contours connect, lines defining catchment areas match and terminology is consistent.

To do this, the IJC is bringing relevant agencies together to create a complete data inventory, reconciling discrepancies and structuring it into an agreed format to build one, unified map for use, not just by the board, but by other agencies and the public.

The role for the IJC as boundary map maker is not new. In fact, let me quote from one of the earliest IJC dockets – the 1917 report on the Lake of the Woods reference.

In connection with the watershed map, attention is particularly drawn to what seems to the commission a notable and significant fact. Perhaps for the first time in history two nations are being furnished by a commission, created to protect and conserve their mutual interests, with a very complete and accurate international map representing, without regard to political boundaries, the limits and details of a great and important watershed.

So let me go back to where Chair Gray began... why celebrate a 100 year old treaty? Because for one hundred years, the Treaty and the Commission it created have brought the U.S. and Canada together "to protect and conserve their mutual interests."

Today, this Treaty and our Commission remain a powerful and dynamic force for cooperative work to peacefully and amicably share "great and important watersheds" from coast to coast and far into the future.

So as we celebrate the 100th birthday of the Boundary Waters Treaty, we don't celebrate its age, but the fact that it is just as relevant today as it was 100 years ago.

The predecessors of the government officials here today created an institution that has stood the toughest test of all – the test of time.

So, I have no doubt that as new issues arise and old ones re-emerge, the U.S. and Canada will have no hesitation to put the Treaty and the Commission to work.

That's why I have no doubt our successors in another 50 or 100 years might even gather here on this bridge again to mark the anniversary of the Boundary Waters Treaty as the fundamental principles of equality and independence in the Treaty are timeless.