

Aboriginal involvement in the oil sands

ALBERTA is blessed with a beautiful natural environment and abundant globally valuable natural resources. We will protect our air, land and water while responsibly developing these natural resources.

- The Aboriginal ancestry population in Alberta is close to 250,000, an increase of 23% in five years (2001- 2006) and almost 8% of the province's total population.
- An estimated 23,000 Aboriginal people live on the 18 First Nations Reserves and six Metis Settlements located in Alberta's oil sands area. Thousands more Aboriginal people live off-reserve and off-Settlement in the three oil sands regions. They represent about 10% of the regions' population.
- Alberta is the only jurisdiction in Canada to have a constitutionally protected land base for Métis people covering 512,121 hectares in eight Métis Settlements in northern Alberta.
- Aboriginal people continue traditional activities in the region, are involved in multi-stakeholder groups, express interest in responsible development and have involvement in the economic benefits of industry, including direct employment, service contracts and land agreements.

Aboriginal and industry activities in the region

- In 2010, more than 1,700 Aboriginal people were directly employed in oil sands operations, an increase of more than 60% since 1998. This figure does not include construction-related or long-term contract employment.
- Many major oil sands companies have Aboriginal employment policies that recruit local residents into suitable positions. About 10% of the oil sands workforce is Aboriginal.
- In 2009, there were more than 2,190 Aboriginal apprentices registered in Alberta, an increase of more than 114% since 2004.
- From 1998-2010, Aboriginal-owned companies secured over \$5 billion worth of contracts from oil sands companies in the Wood Buffalo Region. This includes \$1.3 billion worth in 2010 alone.

Aboriginal engagement

- The Government of Alberta respects the rights of Aboriginal people in the province, including in oil sands development decisions.
- The Supreme Court of Canada has determined Alberta has a duty to consult with First Nations where its land management and resource development decisions may adversely impact First Nations Treaty rights.
- In 2005, Alberta was the first province in Canada to develop a consultation policy. The Government of Alberta's *First Nations Consultation Policy on Land Management and Resource Development* was introduced in 2005. Consultation guidelines, first developed in 2006 and updated in 2007, are in place to support the policy's implementation and help satisfy Alberta's duty to consult. The policy and guidelines are under scheduled review.

- Traditional Use Studies help support First Nations consultation, by identifying where First Nations people hunt, fish and trap on public land. This information helps identify where potential impacts to Treaty Rights may exist and assists with land management and resource development decisions.
- Aboriginal people have been engaged in the development of regional plans under Alberta's Land-use Framework.

Community impacts

- The Government of Alberta is developing a resource and environmental management plan for the entire northeast region of Alberta, which looks beyond oil sands development on a project-by-project basis by addressing the cumulative effects of development.
- Government continues to collect feedback from Aboriginal and environmental groups to ensure there is a balance between environmental protection and economic development.
- The Land-use Framework sets out an approach to manage public and private lands and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic, environmental and social goals. It provides a blueprint for land management and decision-making that addresses Alberta's growth pressures, including the oil sands region. Alberta has been working with Aboriginal groups in the development of a land-use plan for the Lower Athabasca region.
- Concerns over oil sands impacts on water and traditional food sources of First Nations downstream of the developments are of utmost importance to government and all Albertans.
- The Alberta Cancer Board conducted a comprehensive review of claims that there are higher-than-normal rates of rare cancers among residents of Fort Chipewyan. The peer-reviewed study found that while there was a slightly higher than expected number of cancers (51 cases in 47 individuals over 12 years) no link was found to the oil sands and Alberta Health Services said the rate should not be cause for alarm.
 - This review has not been supported by the community and government is re-engaging residents to establish a collaborative process intended to resolve unanswered questions.
- Further measures will be discussed with the community, and may include, but are not limited to:
 - hands-on roles in environmental monitoring of air, water, and fish and wildlife;
 - additional health investigations and epidemiological studies; and
 - two-way education and outreach, offering awareness of traditional knowledge and practice to non-Aboriginal participants, and diet-and-lifestyle health best practices to the local communities.