



Aboriginal Peoples and Oil Sands Development in the Wood Buffalo Region Fact Sheet

October 2009

Aboriginal Peoples and oil sands have a long history together, with recorded accounts dating back as far as the 1700s. As the first inhabitants of the land, the impacts of development have been many. Aboriginal communities and groups work with resource developers to build relationships and understanding, overcome obstacles, make decisions that are fair and beneficial and forge business and employment ties.

Location and population

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada define “Aboriginal Peoples” as a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples - First Nations (status, non-status and Treaty First Nations), Métis and Inuit. These are three distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. More than one million people in Canada identify themselves as an Aboriginal person, according to the 2006 census. Canada has 615 First Nations – representing more than 50 nations or cultural groups and 50 Aboriginal languages.

There are five First Nations within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, with a registered population of about 6,400 members.

- The Mikisew Cree First Nation is the largest with about 2,550 registered members. MCFN has nine reserve areas located in and around Fort Chipewyan with a total land area of approximately 6,440 ha.
- The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) has a registered population of 888. ACFN has eight reserve areas in the Athabasca Delta and on the south shore of Lake Athabasca in and around Fort Chipewyan with a total land area of approximately 21,205 ha.
- The Fort McKay First Nation has five reserve areas with about 648 registered members. The Fort McKay reserve areas are in and around the hamlet of Fort McKay and total approximately 14,886 ha.

- Fort McMurray No. 468 First Nation has four reserve areas with approximately 3,231 ha and 608 registered members. Three reserve areas are located near Anzac on Gregoire Lake while the fourth is located about 20 kilometres east of Fort McMurray.
- Chipewyan Prairie Dene First Nation has about 704 registered members and three reserve areas with approximately 2,669.7 ha located in and around the community of Janvier/Chard.

There are seven Métis locals of Region 1 of the Métis Nation of Alberta that lie within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo: Fort Chipewyan Métis Local # 125, Fort McKay Métis Local #63, Fort McMurray Métis Local #1935, Fort McMurray Métis Local #2020, Willow Lake Métis Local (Anzac) #780, Chard Métis Local #214 and Conklin Métis Local # 193. Estimates of the regional Métis population vary with estimates in the range of 5-6,000.

The region is also home to a number of non-status Aboriginal peoples, but population numbers are unknown.

According to the 2006 Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo census, in rural communities, about half the people report they are of Aboriginal heritage. About 10 per cent of Fort McMurray residents indicate they are of Aboriginal heritage.

Consultation and issues management

Companies engaged in the development and operation of the region's natural resources industry have strong corporate social responsibility and Aboriginal affairs policies with commitments to engaging Aboriginal peoples. This engagement includes consultation and issues management, community involvement and business development.

- Each First Nations community in the region operates an Industry Relations Corporation (IRC) which receives funding from industry and governments. The IRCs employ staff and technical consultants to help each community increase its capacity to evaluate and respond to issues related to the impacts of industrial development and facilitate consultation with companies and governments.
- The five First Nation IRCs received about \$7 million in funding in 2008 – including funding paid by project proponents for project-specific reviews.
- This funding also provides the IRCs with capacity to participate on numerous regional multi-stakeholder issues management organizations - bringing the

Aboriginal perspective and concerns to the table. Some of these organizations include:

- The Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA): develops management systems to monitor and reduce the long-term environmental impacts of industrial development.
- The Wood Buffalo Environmental Association (WBEA): monitors air quality issues by operating a 24-hour air quality monitoring system across the region. WBEA also operates a Terrestrial Environmental Effects Monitoring Program (TEEM).
- The Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program (RAMP): a science-based monitoring program designed to further understanding of aquatic ecosystems in the oil sands region and to monitor the aquatic environment for potential effects related to industrial development.

Government's role in consultation

- Provincial and federal governments have a duty to consult with First Nations and other Aboriginal groups before making a decision that may affect Aboriginal Peoples' ability to exercise their Aboriginal and Treaty rights. Governments endeavour to accommodate the impacts of development on Aboriginal and Treaty rights.
- Alberta was the first provincial government to adopt a First Nations consultation policy on land management and resource development.
- Studies that document the First Nations traditional use of the land are required by the Government of Alberta as part of the application process to develop a commercial oil sands project. These are called Traditional Land Use Studies. Industry has provided funding for in-depth traditional land use studies for the region's five First Nations and two of the Métis Locals.

Community involvement

- OSDG member companies work with Aboriginal communities on a wide range of community initiatives and issues, including: school and youth programs, cultural retention, addictions, health and wellness, childcare, employment and training, literacy training, elders programs, parenting programs, residential school healing, conferences, community recreation programs and community infrastructure. In

2008, \$2.5 million was provided by OSDG member companies to support community programs.

- OSDG members have created and funded many programs to train and employ Aboriginal peoples in their workforce. Other initiatives include Aboriginal recruitment campaigns and initiatives that allow Aboriginal employees to work for industry while continuing to live in their home communities.
- OSDG members have pioneered and supported many programs that provide Aboriginal community members with access to industry-related training and education - including scholarship programs, recruitment programs, apprenticeship programs and life skills and employability skills training – all designed to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal Peoples.

Business development

- Wood Buffalo Aboriginal companies performed over \$575 million in contract work with oil sands companies in 2008.
- Between 1998 and 2008, Aboriginal companies earned more than \$3 billion in their work with OSDG members.
- In 2008, Suncor Energy Inc. surpassed \$1 billion in goods and services spending with Aboriginal companies since 1992.
- Over the past 15 years, Syncrude has completed over \$1.2 billion in total business contracts with Aboriginal companies.
- In 2008, Shell spent more than \$210 million on supplies and services purchased from Aboriginal groups.
- The Fort McKay Group of Companies (FMGC), which works extensively with oil sands companies through its six limited companies, brings in more than \$100 million in revenue annually and is completely owned and controlled by the Fort McKay First Nation.
- There were about 1,500 Aboriginal employees in permanent jobs in the oil sands industry in 2008.
- OSDG members work with the North-eastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association (NAABA) to develop and increase opportunities for Aboriginal businesses in the region.

Sources for all facts available upon request