



# Oil Sands

A strategic resource for Canada, North America and the global market

## Aboriginal Peoples

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“Aboriginal Peoples” is the shared name for the original inhabitants of North America and their descendants. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people: First Nations, Métis and Inuit. These are three distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. Of Canada’s 616 First Nations, 45 are located within the province of Alberta.

In Canada, a great majority of oil and gas exploration and development activity occurs in three oil sands deposits in northeast Alberta – Athabasca, Cold Lake and Peace River – which comprise 142 200 square kilometres. To date, approximately 663 square kilometres of this land have been used for oil sands mining activity. An estimated 23 000 Aboriginal people live in Alberta oil sands areas, with 18 First Nations and six Métis settlements located in the region. Thousands more live off reserve land and outside of settlement areas.

Oil sands extraction methods have varying levels of impact on First Nation and Métis communities in and around Alberta’s oil sands regions. The Government of Canada is working directly with First Nation and Métis communities to address and manage those impacts.

### Economic Benefits for Aboriginal Peoples

The Government of Canada supports Aboriginal peoples in their efforts to improve social well-being and economic prosperity; develop healthier, more sustainable communities; and participate more fully in Canada’s

political, social and economic development. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) is one of 34 federal government departments responsible for meeting the Government of Canada’s obligations and commitments to First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

In recent years, the Government of Canada has made Aboriginal economic development a priority and has implemented a new strategic framework for increasing Aboriginal participation in the Canadian economy. In line with this framework, Canada is currently working in partnership with First Nations, provincial and municipal governments and industrial developers to help First Nation communities secure ongoing social and economic benefits from the Athabasca oil sands development.

Today, many Aboriginal groups are active participants in the development of the oil sands region. For example:

- In 2009, Aboriginal companies performed C\$810 million in contract work with oil sands companies (this figure does not include construction-related jobs).
- Over the past 11 years, Aboriginal-owned companies have secured over C\$3.7 billion worth of contracts from oil sands companies in the region.
- In 2009, over 1,600 Aboriginal people were directly employed in oil sands operations.
- A joint venture between Bigstone Cree and Bronco Energy has resulted in the biggest oil sands project ever undertaken on First Nation reserve lands in Canada.

- The Fort McKay Group of six companies, completely owned by the Fort McKay First Nation, works extensively with oil sands companies, resulting in more than C\$100 million in annual revenue.
- AANDC has been working with all 45 Alberta First Nations on the feasibility of a C\$6.5-billion oil refinery-upgrader, which processes the heavy oil produced in the oil sands.

## Aboriginal Consultation and Accommodation

Canada's Constitution recognizes the existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada. In fact, Canada has a legal duty to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate Aboriginal groups if it has been determined that treaty and Aboriginal rights could be adversely impacted. This legal duty also applies to provinces and territories.

Canada endeavors to meet its legal duty to consult through meaningful and direct consultation with Aboriginal communities to ensure that Aboriginal views are taken into consideration when making decisions on projects – oil sands or otherwise – that could adversely affect their rights.

The federal government has issued a set of guidelines to assist federal officials in meeting consultation obligations. These guidelines are available on AANDC's website at [www.aandc.gc.ca](http://www.aandc.gc.ca).

## Oil Sands Impact on Aboriginal Communities

Some Aboriginal peoples in the oil sands regions have expressed concern over the cumulative effects of oil sands activities in and around their communities. Cumulative effects are changes to the biophysical, social, economic and cultural environments caused by the combination of past and present natural events and human actions.

The Government of Canada, along with other governments, Aboriginal people, scientists and industry, are cooperating to monitor the cumulative effects of oil sands development on the environment. While scientists and Aboriginal people are carrying out field studies to assess current trends in the environment, Aboriginal elders are using their traditional knowledge to provide valuable information about weather patterns, the land, plants and animals, and how these things have changed over time.

Understanding and minimizing cumulative effects are an essential part of the overall environmental management and stewardship of Canada's lands and resources. Good environmental management requires putting together all the pieces of an environmental stewardship framework. The Government of Canada continues to work in concert with Aboriginal peoples in both the development and ongoing implementation of strategies to ensure informed decisions are made that will meet the needs of today and those of future generations.

