Oil sands development benefits First Nations and Aboriginal peoples through employment and billions of dollars in business contracts, creating economic opportunities in areas where few previously existed. At the same time, oil sands companies invest significantly in community education, culture and infrastructure, improving overall quality of life.

Canada's Aboriginal Peoples

Aboriginal peoples – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – live in every region of the country, on reserves and in towns and cities, and comprise about four per cent of Canada’s population, or roughly 1.2 million people.

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) is located in the northeast corner of Alberta and is home to many oil sands operations and several Aboriginal communities including Anzac, Conklin, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay and Janvier — all of which are home to multiple First Nation and Métis people.

- More than 12,000 Aboriginal people live in RMWB, with five First Nations and seven Métis Locals located in the region. Thousands more live off-reserve and off-settlement.

Dialogue and Consultation

Oil sands producers recognize their responsibilities for good social performance. It is important, however, that stakeholders and government remain clear about the role of private industry in society, versus the role of elected policy makers and governments which collect and allocate resource revenues and are responsible for delivery of social, education and health services to Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal consultation is the Crown’s legal duty and is a provincial and federal government constitutional requirement in Canada, where the proposed activity has the potential to affect aboriginal or treaty rights.

The goal of Crown consultation is to:

- Determine the potential for impacts on the rights and traditional uses of aboriginal or treaty rights;
- Seek ways to address the impacts on these rights and accommodate where appropriate prior to governmental decisions being issued.

All concerned must participate in the consultation process in a meaningful way, in a spirit of reconciliation.

The Supreme Court of Canada has noted that consultation dialogues require reasonable engagement from all parties, that the overall goal should be to work towards reconciliation amongst all parties, and that no party has the capacity to veto government decisions.

Industry Consultation

Industry works with potentially affected aboriginal groups to seek ways to mitigate the potential impacts of oil sands development.

Industry works with communities on training and education, supporting local businesses. Aboriginal groups, through consultation and engagement in regulatory processes and the courts, are afforded multiple levels of due process.

- More than 1,550 consultation meetings were held between First Nations and industry on oil deposits, pipelines, forestry and other resource development projects in 2011 and 2012.

Source: Government of Alberta
Benefits to Aboriginal communities

• There were more than 1,700 Aboriginal employees in permanent operations jobs in the oil sands industry in 2010.
  Source: OSDG 2011

• Over the past 14 years, Aboriginal companies have earned over $8 billion in revenue through working relationships with the oil sands industry.
  Source: OSDG 2013

• In 2011 and 2012, oil sands companies contributed more than $20 million to aboriginal communities in the Wood Buffalo and Lac La Biche regions for school and youth programs, celebrations, cultural events, literacy projects and other community programs.
  Source: OSDG 2013

• Wood Buffalo and Lac La Biche Aboriginal companies performed over $1.8 billion in contract work with OSDG member companies in 2012.
  Source: OSDG 2013

• 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.
  Source: Fort McKay Group of Companies

• Shell, as operator of the Athabasca Oil Sands Project (AOSP) has spent over $1.25 billion with Aboriginal contractors since 2006.
  Source: Shell Canada

• Syncrude is one of 13 companies in Canada, and the only oil sands operator, to be accredited at the Gold level in the Progressive Aboriginal Relations (PAR) Program of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB). PAR measures corporate performance in Aboriginal employment, business development, capacity development and community relations.
  Source: Syncrude Canada

• Numerous scholarships and bursaries are available for Aboriginal students through oil sands producers.

Environmental Facts

Water Use and Quality

• Oil sands projects recycle 80-95% of water used.
  Source: AESRD

• On average, in situ operations require 0.4 barrels of fresh water for every barrel of bitumen produced.
  Source: CAPP 2013

• Mining requires, on average, 3.1 barrels of fresh water for every barrel of bitumen produced.
  Source: CAPP 2013

• The Alberta Energy Regulator prohibits the release of any water that does not meet water quality requirements.

Land Impact

• Alberta law requires all lands disturbed by oil sands operations be reclaimed. All companies are required to develop a reclamation plan that spans the life of the project.

• An Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) report states the Lower Athabasca region’s living resources are 94% intact. This compares to 54% in Southern Alberta.
  Source: Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute 2013

• Only 0.02% of Canada’s boreal forest has been disturbed by oil sands mining operations over the past 40 years.
  Source: AER 2013

• Since operations began in the 1960s, approximately 10% of the active mining footprint has been or is being reclaimed by industry.
  Source: Oil Sands Portal 2013

GHG Emissions

• Between 1990 and 2011, GHG emissions associated with every barrel of oil sands crude produced have been reduced by 26%.
  Source: Environment Canada 2013

• Total oil sands GHG emissions in 2011 were 55 megatonnes
  Source: Environment Canada 2013

• Canada, with 0.5% of the world’s population, produces 2% of GHG emissions. Oil sands account for 7.8% of Canada’s GHG emissions and just over 0.14% of global GHG emissions.
  Source: Environment Canada 2012 and United Nations Statistical Division

Community Health

With respect to health, the recent Royal Society of Canada report concluded there is no evidence of linkage between health issues in local communities and oil sands development activity. However, public health in areas near oil sands development remains a concern to residents and others. The oil sands industry fully supports further health studies in the region, provided they are led by the responsible health authorities and grounded in good science.

• Current evidence on water quality impacts on the Athabasca River system suggest that oil sands development activities are not a current threat to aquatic ecosystem viability.

• There is currently no credible evidence of environmental contaminant exposures from oil sands reaching Fort Chipewyan at levels expected to cause elevated human cancer rates.

• The current ambient air quality monitoring data for the region show minimal impacts from oil sands development on regional air quality except for noxious odour emission problems over the past two years.