

Land-use Framework

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan

Implementation
Progress Report for
2020 and 2021

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Land-use Framework Lower Athabasca Regional Plan: Implementation Progress Report for 2020 and 2021
Land Use Secretariat, Government of Alberta

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Contents

- Introduction.....4
- Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Progress5
 - Provincial Outcome: Healthy Economy Supported by Our Land and Natural Resources5
 - Provincial Outcome: Healthy Ecosystems and Environment 14
 - Provincial Outcome: People-friendly Communities with Ample Recreational and Cultural Opportunities 19
- Cross Reference Table.....24

Introduction

The Land-use Framework, introduced in 2008, provides a blueprint for land-use management and decision-making to address mounting pressures on Alberta's land and resources. It also establishes a vision of Albertans working together to respect and care for the land as a foundation for our environmental, economic and social well-being.

Since that time, many advances have been made including the establishment of the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and the adoption of an integrated approach to resource management. This approach encourages cumulative effects management of natural assets, taking into account the impacts of development on the land over several years. It relies on legislation, regulations and on Land-use Framework regional plans developed for each of seven regions within the province to provide direction. To date, two regional plans – the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan for northeastern Alberta and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan for southern Alberta – have become regulations.

Regional plans are developed with input and feedback from stakeholders, Indigenous communities and organizations, and the public. They establish a long-term vision for the region, set the desired economic, environmental and social outcomes and objectives for the region using a cumulative effects management approach, and align provincial policy at the regional level to set integrated outcomes. Regional plans specifically describe the strategies, actions, approaches and tools required to achieve these desired ends and they contain regulatory provisions to enable achievement of these strategies and actions for the region over the next few years. They are enforceable by law and binding on everyone as identified in the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. This provides guidance and clarity for land users and land-use decision-makers.

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Implementation Progress Report for 2020 and 2021 meets the legislative requirements described in the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and the regulatory requirements embedded in the plan. It also fulfills a public commitment to regularly monitor and answer the question “was progress made toward achieving desired regional objectives expressed within the approved regional plans?” This report is dedicated to offering information regarding the work accomplished or the barriers encountered in 2020 and 2021 for the plan's implementation.

Copies of this and earlier reports are available on-line at <https://landuse.alberta.ca> or by contacting the Land Use Secretariat at LUF@gov.ab.ca or 780.644.7972.

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Progress

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan came into effect in September 2012, and was the first regional plan established. It presents the desired economic, social and environmental outcomes for northeastern Alberta and a detailed plan to achieve these results. For example, in order to achieve a healthier environment and ecosystems, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan sets environmental management triggers and limits for air and surface water quality, and provides for six new conservation areas with the aim of conserving two million hectares or 22 per cent of the region in northeastern Alberta.

The plan encourages economic diversification, addresses infrastructure challenges around Fort McMurray, commits to continued consultation with Indigenous peoples, offers more certainty to industry, and provides for nine new provincial recreation areas to address growing demand for recreational and tourism opportunities. It commits to the development of a biodiversity management framework, a tailings management framework and a surface water quantity management framework to guide land and natural resource management decisions for many years to come.

This report highlights the status of all the strategic commitments made in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan. Although timelines for some strategies in the regional plans were delayed, they continue to be commitments of the Government of Alberta.

This report presents a detailed look at the strategies for the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan. Reporting for Regional Plan supporting indicators has moved online and can be found at landuse.alberta.ca

Implementation Status	Description
Complete	No further work required
Complete and in implementation	Strategy is in place and being implemented. Work is ongoing to implement the strategy, including changes to ongoing programs, continuous improvement, or through succeeding government action
In progress	Development of the initiative is underway
Delayed	Progress has not met original timelines due to unforeseen or changing circumstances, or because it is dependent on other work that remains incomplete
Deferred	Work is on hold pending further government direction

Provincial Outcome: Healthy Economy Supported by Our Land and Natural Resources

LARP Outcome 1: The economic potential of the oil sands resource is optimized

1. Continue implementation of the Alberta Provincial Energy Strategy

Alberta Energy – complete and in implementation

Description:

Alberta's Provincial Energy Strategy charted the course of Alberta's energy future more than a decade ago. It is no longer in effect. Responsible development of Alberta's energy resources, the strategy's principal objective, remains a priority for the government, and has been incorporated into Alberta Energy's programming and policy work.

Progress:

Government's priorities for advancing responsible development of the province's energy resources in 2020 and 2021 focused on advocating for pipelines, and protecting and increasing market access, defending Alberta's reputation as a responsible energy producer, and improving the province's regulatory environment. Specifically, taking action on greenhouse gas

emissions, improving the liability management system, introducing the Site Rehabilitation Program to speed up well, pipeline and site closures efforts, and completing the review of the Alberta Energy Regulator.

The Government of Alberta completed its review of the Alberta Energy Regulator in June 2020. Outcomes included development of an updated mandate and roles document, and appointment of a new CEO and board of directors. In October 2020, the Government of Alberta launched the Natural Gas Vision and Strategy, which outlined opportunities for diversification in the natural gas sector. This strategy included the launch of the Alberta Petrochemicals Incentive Program to encourage innovation, attract billions of dollars in investment and create thousands of jobs in Alberta's petrochemical sector. The Government of Alberta also released the Alberta Hydrogen Roadmap in November 2021. The Roadmap builds on Alberta's experience in carbon capture, utilization and storage and our large natural gas reserves to chart out how the Government of Alberta can best support the emerging hydrogen economy.

Progress was also made on emissions management. In November 2020, Alberta reached an equivalency agreement with the federal methane regulation ensuring that the province remains in charge of regulating its natural resources while providing the flexibility and innovation for industry to reduce their emissions in a cost-effective manner, targeting actions where they are needed. Since the start of 2020, more than \$265 million have been made available for methane reduction projects in Alberta.

Additional details about the actions highlighted in this strategy are described in other sections of this report.

2. Continue implementation of Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands Alberta Energy – complete and in implementation

Description:

Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands was a proactive 20-year strategic plan for innovative, responsible and collaborative development of Alberta's oil sands. Responsible Actions no longer actively guides provincial policy and program delivery for the oil sands, though its strategic objectives – optimal oil sands development and improved environment performance – continue to be relevant and have been incorporated into Government of Alberta's programming and policy work.

Progress:

A priority area of the original strategy that remains so today is emissions management. The Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction Regulation (TIER) was finalized in 2019, and came into effect on January 1, 2020. It has been subsequently granted equivalence to the federal *Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act* by the Government of Canada.

The Government of Alberta is investing up to \$750 million from the TIER fund and other public funding on a series of programs that will get Albertans back to work and reduce emissions. The TIER fund supports the advancement of technology and innovation while providing incentives to increase compliance and decrease overall emissions, and invest in clean technology.

With a strong commitment to energy advocacy, the establishment of the Environmental, Social and Governance Secretariat will help Alberta inform Canadians and people across the globe about how Albertans produce energy with the world's highest environmental, social, and governance standards.

3. Continue implementation of improved regulatory processes to enhance competitiveness of oil sands and other key industries Alberta Energy and Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation

Description:

Building a robust and efficient regulatory system is critical to supporting continued growth and environmental management in the region and province. Effective regulation of energy and mineral development requires a balanced and integrated approach that takes into consideration the range of constantly evolving social, economic and environmental factors. This is incorporated in Alberta Energy and Alberta Environment and Parks' programming and policy work that requires ongoing effort and collaboration among Government, regulators, industry and other stakeholders.

Progress:

The establishment of the *Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act* (2019) has provided over-arching policy direction to the Government of Alberta to reduce costs and the regulatory burden for businesses.

To support the act, the Alberta Energy Regulator launched a Regulatory Change Program in 2020 to reduce red tape while maintaining environmental protection and public safety, ensuring modern and effective regulations and continuing to transform how the regulator operates. Between 2020 and 2021, twenty-one projects were completed under this program. Highlights of the 2020 and 2021 work include:

- Updates to Alberta Energy Regulator Directive 20. These changes build on a pilot as part of the Alberta Energy Regulator's Area-Based Closure program and streamline routine well abandonment and closure activities for specific, pre-approved oil and gas pools in the province. Changes, such as eliminating the need for operators to request multiple approvals, created time-savings for the Alberta Energy Regulator and significant savings for industry.
- Updates to Alberta Energy Regulator Directive 040. These changes reduced the frequency of mandatory pressure tests that operators need to conduct on wells. This resulted in cost savings for industry without comprising public safety or environmental protection. These changes also allow the Alberta Energy Regulator to obtain and maintain sufficient data from operators for pressure tests conducted on wells and align with current well testing practices.
- Modernization of Alberta Energy Regulator Directive 056 and Manual 12. These changes streamlined the Alberta Energy Regulator's well licensing application requirements and procedures in Directive 056 and Manual 12 to better align with the Alberta Energy Regulator's OneStop technology platform. These changes created efficiencies in the regulator's application process for wells, without putting the public or environment at risk.

Implementation of the Integrated Decision Approach (IDA) also continued in 2020 and 2021. This approach is based on the concept of risk-informed, life-cycle regulatory oversight supported by the Alberta Energy Regulator's technology platform OneStop. IDA and OneStop support efforts to enhance oversight of energy resource development and increases the effectiveness of decisions by focusing on what matters the most to Albertans. Highlights include:

- Moving pipeline, public lands, *Water Act* approval and well licensing applications into the OneStop platform, and implementing the Area Based Closure program initiative under the Liability Management Framework in OneStop.
- Implementing public lands data sharing between the Alberta Energy Regulator and Government of Alberta.
- Implementing data sharing between the Aboriginal Consultation Office and the Alberta Energy Regulator.
- Implementing a risk informed decision-making process for most applications, received by the regulator as well as inspections and audits to ensure Alberta Energy Regulator staff are focusing on the applications and activities that have the highest risk to people and the environment.

The Alberta Energy Regulator also continued to make progress assessing risk exposure and providing more transparency to the public about development activities. The Alberta Energy Regulator recently established a Data Hub as a central access point for information about Alberta's oil and gas energy industry. The Data Hub works to increase and simplify access to data about the oil and gas industry and supports the Alberta Energy Regulator's commitment to transparency with Albertans.

A new Liability Management Framework to manage oil and gas liabilities was announced on July 30, 2020. The framework includes a series of mechanisms and requirements to improve and expedite reclamation efforts. Setting clear expectations throughout the lifecycle of oil and gas projects, the framework ensures that industry is better able to manage clean-up of oil and gas wells, pipelines and facilities at every step of the development life cycle – from exploration and licensing, through operations, mergers and acquisitions, abandonment, reclamation, and post-closure.

The actions being taken under this new framework provide industry with the certainty needed to make long-term investment decisions, create jobs by accelerating clean-up of inactive and orphaned wells across the province, and protect landowners and communities by ensuring more timely restoration of land. This approach is helping support long-term sustainable oil and gas development, while protecting future generations of Albertans from experiencing a backlog of sites needing cleanup and from paying these costs.

The Alberta Energy Regulator introduced the Inventory Reduction Program. The purpose of the program is to increase the amount of closure work occurring in Alberta, reduce liability, and increase the amount of land being returned to original or alternative uses. To do this, we are setting an industry minimum standard for annual closure work and encouraging companies to collaborate to increase efficiency of projects and complete more closure work. The AER has set a 2023 industry-wide mandatory closure spend target of \$700 million.

Alberta Environment and Parks continues to work on a Regulatory Assurance Framework, a foundational approach to enabling economic development while ensuring environmental outcomes. As part of the transformation, a Digital Regulatory Assurance System is shifting the department from using multiple independent and outdated systems to a single consolidated system for applications, approvals and monitoring, with the first module released in June 2021.

4. Sub-regional plan using a strategic environmental assessment approach for the South Athabasca oil sands area

Alberta Environment and Parks - due 2013, in progress

Description:

Development of a sub-regional plan using a strategic environmental assessment approach for the South Athabasca Oil Sands area will contribute to the management of cumulative effects and support efficiencies in the regulatory review process for in situ oil sands operations. The South Athabasca Oil Sands Regional Strategic Assessment examines the potential cumulative effects of three energy development scenarios in an area between Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche that will likely see significant development of bitumen resources over several decades.

Progress:

A draft of the South Athabasca Oil Sands Regional Strategic Assessment was completed in 2015, with subsequent technical refinements. The regional strategic assessment is a rigorous and science-based approach that integrates social, economic and environmental considerations and provides information necessary for planning processes. The approaches used in this assessment will inform relevant sub-regional planning.

Sub-regional planning initiatives taking place in the region include caribou sub-regional task forces. A task force for the Cold Lake planning area was announced in August 2019 with a mandate to provide recommendations on land use planning, including caribou recovery actions. In 2021, the Government of Alberta gathered feedback on the draft Cold Lake Sub-regional Plan to support caribou recovery with an approach that considers a broad range of land-use activities. The plan was informed by recommendations provided by the Cold Lake Caribou Sub-regional Task Force.

The Cold Lake Sub-regional Plan is one of several sub-regional plans that are in development. The task force for the Wandering River sub-region, adjacent to the Cold Lake Sub-region, commenced in October 2021. These sub-regional plans support a working landscape, which considers the economy, while also supporting caribou and other species, Indigenous traditional land use, and recreational activities.

5. Implement key recommendations in Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta

Alberta Indigenous Relations – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta (2010) report was submitted by a Member of Legislative Assembly Committee highlighting 30 recommendations to increase participation of Indigenous peoples in Alberta's workforce and economy. Due to new government mandates and priorities, the recommendations are no longer being worked on, however the principles described in the report remain important to the Government of Alberta and Indigenous peoples.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta continues to promote social and economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples in Alberta through a variety of programs and services available to Indigenous communities and organizations that support Indigenous peoples, such as the:

- Aboriginal Business Investment Fund continues to partially or completely fund capital costs for Indigenous community-owned economic development projects. Projects like these improve social and economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples and their communities;
- Employment Partnerships Program: supports initiatives that help Indigenous communities and Indigenous-serving organizations connect their members to employment;

- The Site Rehabilitation Program (SRP): targeted \$133 million to clean up inactive oil and gas sites within Indigenous communities and organizations, helping ensure those communities and organizations play a meaningful role in Alberta's post-pandemic energy strategy. Several measures strengthened Indigenous participation in the SRP, including establishing an Industry Advisory Committee, regular Indigenous Roundtable meetings, and appointing a dedicated Indigenous liaison to answer questions and support completion of eligible applications. Incentives were also put in place to encourage Indigenous participation in the SRP, which created new opportunities and new partnerships that are expected to last beyond the program; and
- Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation (AIOC): designed to bridge the gap between Indigenous groups seeking commercial partnerships in natural resource sectors and their financial capacity. In the first full year (2019-20) of operation over 80 project proponents approached the AIOC. The AIOC continues to meet with Alberta's Indigenous groups and industry players, while acting as a catalyst to spur the economic ecosystem and support Alberta's economy during the recent economic downturn.

LARP Outcome 2: The region's economy is diversified

6. Continue to prevent future shortfalls in timber supply

Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Alberta forest sector faces a number of growing challenges caused by natural factors such as insects, disease, wildfire, and climate change; and non-natural factors such as international trade agreements and diminishing productive forested public lands as a result of competing development projects and use.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta is implementing a Forest Jobs Action Plan to help maintain timber supplies. The plan includes five focus areas:

- Ensuring a more expedient return of wildfire burned areas to productive forests.
- Awarding currently unallocated allowable cut through an open competition.
- Exploring the enhanced utilization of harvest waste and residual fibre.
- Using superior seed for regeneration (i.e. tree improvement programs).
- Ensuring best utilization of allocated timber in forest management plans.

The Government of Alberta also continues to maintain a robust forest tenure system providing long term secure access to fibre for companies. This long term secure access to fibre is the anchor for capital investment and job creation for the world class industry we have in Alberta.

7. Continue work on wildfire management planning initiatives

Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development – complete and in implementation

Description:

The amount of wildfire risk in Alberta is increasing due to population growth pressures, rapid development in the wildland/urban interface, and industrial activity on the landscape. In 2013, the Government of Alberta developed a Wildfire Management Planning Standard as a guideline for wildfire risk management in Alberta. These standards and plans are intended to guide wildfire prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery within a forest area for a five-year period. Wildfire management strategies are aligned with regional outcomes.

Progress:

The Fort McMurray Wildfire Management Plan was approved in 2017, and work continues on the strategies and actions.

The strategies in the Lac La Biche Wildfire Management Plan were re-evaluated in 2017, and additional strategies were developed to address wildfire risk. Work continues on these strategies and actions.

These strategies and actions were put in place to reduce wildfire risk to identified values in each Forest Area, which support regional outcomes within the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

8. Continue work on the Alberta Forest Products Roadmap to 2020

Alberta Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development – complete and in implementation

Description:

Collaboration between the Government of Alberta and the forest industry sector focuses on an approach to make Alberta's forest sector the most successful in North America based on economic competitiveness and environmental performance. Strategies are aimed at achieving growth, progress and long-term viability in Alberta's forest products industry, enhancing contributions to rural communities and the province at large, and moving toward green solutions to address environmental and economic challenges.

Progress:

The Forest Products Roadmap provided guidance on how to advance the competitiveness and strategic direction for the Forest sector. The Government of Alberta is currently implementing some of the key concepts and ideas from the Roadmap, and will look to new strategies and ideas to advance the sector moving forward. Collaborations between the Government of Alberta and the forest industry sector focused on:

- An approach to make Alberta's forest sector the most successful in North America based on economic competitiveness and environmental performance.
- Policies aimed at reducing the CO2 profile of buildings by enabling 12-storey wood construction and partnerships with organizations to increase wood use in design and construction.
- Exploring opportunities to diversify the sector through new markets and products, including the establishment of the Alberta Value Added Wood Product Program to support the growth of Alberta's value-added wood product industry
- Advocacy and litigation efforts aimed at supporting the negotiation of a long-term, managed trade agreement with the United States to provide secure and predictable market access for Alberta lumber producers.

The Government of Alberta also made changes to modernize the *Forest Act* and Regulations in 2020. These changes facilitate red tape reduction and support continued competitiveness of the forest industry.

9. Lakeland Country Destination Development Strategy and Tourism Opportunity Plan

Jobs, Economy and Innovation – due 2015; delayed

Description:

Lakeland Country will be developed as an iconic provincial tourism destination in order to diversify the regional and local economy, increase tourism and recreational opportunities, provide an attractive destination for domestic and international visitors, support hunting, fish and trapping, protect and maintain private property rights, honor existing statutory consents and tenure on public lands, and provide for continued issuance of new ones.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta has supported the growth of the tourism industry in Lakeland Country over the past decade through funding for various destination strategies, plans, and forums championed by municipalities and local associations. These initiatives include, cultural tourism planning by the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta (2016-18); visitor readiness and action planning by Lac La Biche County (2017-18); and tourism entrepreneurship sessions hosted in Cold Lake (2018).

In 2021, the government expanded Travel Alberta's mandate to a destination management organization. Travel Alberta will work directly with communities, businesses and entrepreneurs to develop new tourism destinations, products, and experiences. Travel Alberta has proposed advancing tourism through tourism development zones, one of which encompasses the Lakeland region. This work will consider how the development of destination management planning, informed by local tourism strategies and forecasted visitor economic impacts, aligns with Government priorities. Planning will also provide local tourism organizations and communities the tools and data to consider expanding their tourism business lines and

seasons of operation, expanding their visitor markets, and/or implementing technologies and digital solutions to address key business challenges.

Also in 2021, the Government of Alberta gathered feedback on the draft Cold Lake Sub-regional Plan to support caribou recovery with an approach that considers a broad range of interests and land use activities. A number of tourism and outdoor recreation outcomes identified in the draft plan, informed by recommendations provided by the Cold Lake Caribou Sub-regional Task Force, provide strategic direction that may support efforts related to the Lakeland Country Destination Development Strategy and Tourism Opportunity Plan.

10. Continue to enhance and expand the supply of tourism products and infrastructure
Jobs, Economy and Innovation – in progress

Description:

The tourism industry has great potential to diversify Alberta's economy. It is a multi-billion dollar industry that supports over 19,000 tourism businesses and employs more than 127,000 people, either directly or indirectly. Tourism revenue is an important economic driver for the province and contributes to the well-being of all Albertans.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta supported Fort McMurray Tourism (now Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development & Tourism) to develop a Tourism Asset Inventory and Northern Lights Viewing Attraction Investment Opportunity, alongside a Tourism Product Development Plan (2016-18). These tourism plans set the short and long-term vision for tourism product development and lay out specific action items to develop products into market ready experiences.

Under its expanded mandate for destination management, Travel Alberta provided financial support for tourism businesses and organizations in the region to enhance their infrastructure and assets. Supported projects have included tipi and Metis comfort camping experiences in the Lac La Biche area and the construction of geodesic domes for comforting camping and dark sky/aurora viewing at Andrew Lake (2021).

Further planning to examine the potential to expand the supply of tourism products and infrastructure is anticipated through Travel Alberta's initiative to create tourism development zones in the Wood Buffalo and Lakeland regions.

11. Tourism Development Nodes
Jobs, Economy and Innovation – due 2015, delayed

Description:

Tourism development nodes identify areas on public, municipal or private land that comprise a cluster of natural features, built features, scenery and settings that can provide unique opportunities for recreation and tourism development. An established node is a commitment by provincial and municipal agencies to ensure that tourism development is the predominant use and focus for the area.

Progress:

In 2021, the government expanded Travel Alberta's mandate to include tourism development and destination management. As part of that mandate shift, there is an updated approach to advance tourism development in the province. Advancement of high value tourism areas, including assessment of existing tourism nodes, is planned through implementation of tourism development zones, currently at early stages of development with anticipated completion for 2023.

12. Tourism opportunity assessments for Quarry of the Ancestors, Bitumont and Fort Chipewyan
Jobs, Economy and Innovation – complete

Description:

Tourism opportunity assessments identify potential Indigenous tourism development and investment opportunities including guided tours, educational programs, attractions, exhibits or interpretive sites. This creates a distinctive travel experience and showcases the region's unique scenic resources.

Progress:

Tourism opportunity assessments for Quarry of the Ancestors and Bitumount were completed in 2015, while the Fort Chipewyan tourism opportunity assessment was completed in 2016. Assessments considered background reviews, destination analysis, market research, lifecycle evaluations, community engagement input, and situational reports.

Based on these assessments, there are no further plans to develop the Quarry of the Ancestors or Bitumount sites for tourism purposes. The results of the Fort Chipewyan tourism opportunity assessment were submitted to the Fort Chipewyan Tourism Committee for action.

13. Scenic Byways Network

Jobs, Economy and Innovation – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Government of Alberta is working with municipal governments and other partners to identify, establish and promote scenic byways which include routes, trails and waterways in and around areas with high quality attractions for recreation and tourism. Creation of distinctive travel experiences will showcase the region's unique scenic resources and cultural landscapes.

Progress:

In 2014, routes, trails and waterways of the Lower Athabasca region were identified. Over the years, work continued with local communities to address tourism development around these scenic byways.

Live the Athabasca, a recreation and tourism concept plan for the Lower Athabasca River from Fort McMurray to the Northwest Territories was completed in 2017. Live the Athabasca - Arctic Water Route, the second phase of the strategy, celebrated the natural and cultural heritage of the lower Athabasca and upper Slave Rivers. The project focused on creating a signature boreal and Canadian Shield river experience along Trans Canada Trail's The Great Trail Arctic Water Route.

14. Continue to clarify rules for physical access to energy, mineral and coal resources

Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Energy – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Government of Alberta provides environmental stewardship direction and regulates access (during exploration, development and extraction), allocation and use of natural resources through planning, policy and policy assurance programs. Clear rules for physical access to energy and mineral resources are necessary for the province to attract investment and benefit from resource development.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta made significant progress under this strategy in 2020 and 2021, advancing land-use planning in the Lower Athabasca Region and working with the Alberta Energy Regulator to clarify access rules and requirements in regulatory processes.

The Government completed the Moose Lake Access Management Plan in 2021. The plan identifies management actions that support the achievement of three outcomes: ecological integrity, exercise of Section 35 rights and traditional land uses, and well managed development of resources. The plan includes a 10 kilometre zone adjacent to Fort McKay First Nation's Moose Lake reserves. This planning area is located approximately 100 kilometres northwest of Fort McMurray.

Sub-regional planning initiatives taking place in the region include planning for the Cold Lake area. A task force for the Cold Lake planning area was announced in August 2019 with a mandate to provide recommendations on land use planning, including caribou recovery actions. In 2021, the Government of Alberta gathered feedback on the draft Cold Lake Sub-regional Plan to support caribou recovery with an approach that considers a broad range of land-use activities, including accessing non-renewable resources. The plan was informed by recommendations provided by the Cold Lake Caribou Sub-regional Task Force.

Alberta developed the *Geothermal Resources Development Act (2021)* and the *Mineral Resources Development Act (2021)*, clarifying the regulatory framework for developing Alberta's geothermal and mineral resources and establishing the Alberta Energy Regulator as the single regulator of these resources. Once published, the Geothermal Resource Development Rules

and the AER's Directive 089: Geothermal Resource Development will complete the regulatory framework for geothermal resource development. In addition, the AER's Manual 12: Energy Development Applications Procedures and Schedules will provide guidance for geothermal applications.

On the regulatory side, the Alberta Energy Regulator continues implementation of the Compliance Assurance Program, which is guided by the Integrated Compliance Assurance Framework (2016). The framework commits to continuous development of requirements that are clear, effective, and enforceable. In addition to supporting sub- regional planning efforts directly, the Alberta Energy Regulator also supported government in working on the Land Use Reservation Program, Exploration Directive and minerals mapping initiatives.

As of January 2021, jurisdiction over borrow pits supporting energy activities was transferred from Alberta Environment and Parks to the Alberta Energy Regulator. The regulatory amendments reduced application timelines, and improved consistency in borrow pit applications supporting energy activities and allowed more appropriate dispositions to be used in cases where one larger borrow pit was more appropriate than several small pits.

Work is progressing on updating centralized fluid storage requirements to better incorporate the on-site storage of water for reuse, decrease industry's reliance on rivers and lake, and significantly reduced red tape. These efforts will lead to updates in Directive 055: Storage Requirements for the Upstream Petroleum Industry and Directive 058: Oilfield Waste Management Requirements for the Upstream Petroleum Industry.

15. Continue to promote new investment in energy, mineral and coal resource development Alberta Energy – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Government of Alberta continues to improve strategic, integrated systems and approaches to ensure responsible resource development and diversification through programming and policy work in order to strengthen overall environmental, economic and social outcomes for the benefit of Albertans.

Progress:

Maintaining Alberta as an attractive destination for energy and mineral investment remains a strategic priority involving the promotion of Alberta's interests nationally and internationally and putting in place effective policies and programs provincially.

The Government of Alberta works with regulators, industry and other stakeholders to continue to advocate for the federal government to streamline the regulatory environment for energy development, improve pipeline access, win back the confidence of investors, restore the competitiveness of the energy sector and create jobs. The Government of Alberta took an active role in 2020 and 2021 coordinating intergovernmental discussions with provinces and territories regarding policies, decisions or legislation affecting oil market access.

In 2020 and 2021, Alberta put into effect new strategic policy direction and legislative regimes that provide critical foundations for attracting investment in new and emerging resources like geothermal and minerals. The focus is to place Alberta at the forefront of global mineral exploration and development while strengthening and diversifying our economy. Progress was also made on market access and in other areas that are important for attracting investment into our traditional energy resources.

Geothermal:

In December 2020, the Government of Alberta established the *Geothermal Resource Development Act*, which was proclaimed and became effective on December 8, 2021. The Act provides the Alberta Energy Regulator with the authority to regulate the safe, efficient, and responsible development of Alberta's geothermal resources. The legislation also clarifies industry requirements, and establishes the government's ability to receive revenues, such as royalties and fees, for geothermal development. This was the first step in enabling a geothermal legislative framework in Alberta. New geothermal regulations, such as the Geothermal Resource Development Regulation and Geothermal Resource Tenure Regulation, and amendments to existing regulations such as the Conservation and Reclamation Regulation, Specified Enactments (Jurisdiction) Regulation, and the *Responsible Energy Development Act* General Regulation came to force on January 1, 2022.

Minerals:

- The Government of Alberta released the minerals strategy and action plan, "Renewing Alberta's Mineral Future" on November 4, 2021. The strategy will help capitalize on Alberta's potential to become a preferred international

producer and supplier of minerals and mineral products such as lithium, uranium, vanadium, rare earth elements, potash, and diamonds. Alberta has the opportunity to be a global leader in responsible next generation mineral exploration and development – an opportunity that exists because of the province's wealth of natural resources and experienced workforce.

- As a first step towards implementation of the minerals strategy, Alberta established the *Mineral Resource Development Act*. The Act helps ensure the responsible management and development of the province's mineral resources and establishes Alberta Energy Regulator as the full-lifecycle regulator for Alberta's mineral resources – from exploration through reclamation – providing certainty for the industry, helping position the province as a preferred mineral producer and spurring growth in the sector.

Pipelines:

- The Government of Alberta continued to advocate for increased market access and protecting the value of Alberta's energy exports. Enbridge's Line 3 replacement officially went into service on October 1, 2021, increasing Alberta's egress to the U.S. Midwest and other connecting markets for the first time since 2010. The replacement project restored the pipeline to its original capacity of 760,000 barrels per day. As of the end of 2021, construction on the Trans Mountain Expansion Project was more than 50 per cent complete, and is estimated to be in-service by the end of 2023. In addition, Alberta continues to advocate for a "team Canada" approach on Line 5 to ensure this vital piece of infrastructure stays operational. Finally, as part of the Government of Alberta's ongoing efforts to protect the province's investment in the Keystone XL project, Alberta submitted an amicus brief in the Texas lawsuit challenging President Biden's cancellation of Keystone XL. Through the Alberta Petroleum Marketing Commission, in February 2021, Alberta has also taken formal steps to initiate a legacy North American Free Trade Agreement claim under the Canada-United States- Mexico Agreement over the cancellation of the presidential permit for the Keystone XL pipeline border crossing.

Regulatory:

- Effective May 2021, and as a result of legal challenges to the previous version of the legislation, the Government of Alberta strengthened the *Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act* to ensure it can withstand future legal challenges. The act replaces the previous act with the same name and provides the Minister of Energy the authority to restrict the export of crude oil and natural gas from Alberta – with the exception of refined fuels.
- In 2020, the Oil Sands Tenure Regulation, 2020 came into force. This regulation contains some elements of the previous Oil Sands Tenure Regulation, 2010, such as the minimum level of evaluation and the ability for lessees to remove offsetting costs from escalating rent. There are several outcomes this change helped address, such as operators are better able to allocate their capital, while the reduction of government-mandated drilling will decrease surface activities not associated with development. There will also be a marginal increase in expected revenue from escalating rent.
- In 2021, the Government of Alberta implemented some targeted changes to the oil sands royalty regulatory framework to provide certainty and clarity for both government and industry.

Provincial Outcome: Healthy Ecosystems and Environment

LARP Outcome 3: Landscapes are managed to maintain ecosystem function and biodiversity

16. Create new conservation areas on provincial Crown land

Alberta Environment and Parks – in progress

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan established an additional 16 per cent of the region as new conservation areas, bringing the total area of conserved lands from approximately six per cent to 22 per cent, or approximately two million hectares. In order to establish new conservation areas in the Lower Athabasca region, forest tenure, Crown oil sands, and metallic and industrial minerals agreements that fell within, or partially within, new conservation areas established under the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan were subject to cancellation in accordance with section 8(1)(c) of the *Mines and Minerals Act*.

Progress:

Building on the 5 conservation areas (Birch Mountain expansion, Dillon River, Richardson, Birch Mountain, and Kazan) that were designated under the *Provincial Parks Act* in 2018, the Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland Provincial Park was established in 2019. In 2021, Alberta Environment and Parks gathered input from Albertans on a plan to expand the Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland.

There is one remaining conservation area held under the regional plan (Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Provincial Park) yet to be designated under the *Provincial Parks Act*.

17. Continue to manage existing conserved lands
Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation

Description:

Conservation areas are clearly defined areas that have special rules to protect ecosystems and biological diversity. Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Wildland Provincial Parks, Natural Areas, Heritage Rangelands, and Conservation Area Public Land Use Zones are examples of the different types of conservation areas. Each of these has different ecological objectives and different land use rules associated with it. These rules dictate what kinds of activities, including recreation, development and industry, are prohibited in the area and which ones are permitted.

Progress:

Schedule F in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan identifies permitted activities for existing and new conservation areas in the region. The remaining conservation area (Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Park) will continue to be managed with that intent under the Regional Plan until it is designated under appropriate legislation.

The draft Lower Athabasca Regional Parks Plan, which is aligned with the Regional Plan, will continue to guide management direction and objectives for the region's parks.

18. Develop a biodiversity management framework
Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2013, in progress

Description:

Biodiversity management frameworks seek to maintain terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity while also achieving environmental, social and economic objectives for the region. Frameworks provide a systematic approach to environmental management.

Progress:

Work continues on completing a Lower Athabasca region Biodiversity Management Framework. The framework proposes a suite of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity indicators that would be monitored, evaluated and reported against trigger values to help assess whether biodiversity objectives are being achieved.

In 2021, a stream connectivity indicator and an updated interior habitat indicator were developed by the Government of Alberta. Province-wide data layers for the stream connectivity indicator were published on [GeoDiscover Alberta](#) and the [Open Government portal](#). A province-wide data layer for the interior habitat indicator and detailed technical reports will be published in 2022. Biodiversity indicator data and supporting methodology are being made available to communicate current and past conditions of a suite of complementary biodiversity indicators to inform and enable the management of cumulative effects of development on terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity.

19. Develop a landscape management plan for public lands in the Green Area
Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2013, in progress

Description:

A Lower Athabasca Region landscape management plan for public land would incorporate strategies and management actions to reduce the extent and duration of human footprint in order to achieve biodiversity outcomes and objectives for the region and support Indigenous peoples' values.

Progress:

Sub-regional planning initiatives taking place in the region will inform of form part of landscape management planning.

The Government of Alberta is implementing the Moose Lake Access Management Plan, which includes a 10 kilometre zone adjacent to Fort McKay First Nation's Moose Lake reserves, and was approved on February 8, 2021.

Sub-regional planning initiatives taking place in the region include planning for the Cold Lake area. A task force for the Cold Lake planning area was announced in August 2019 with a mandate to provide recommendations on land use planning, including caribou recovery actions. In 2021, the Government of Alberta gathered feedback on the draft Cold Lake Sub-regional Plan to support caribou recovery with an approach that considers a broad range of land-use activities. The plan was informed by recommendations provided by the Cold Lake Caribou Sub-regional Task Force. The Cold Lake Sub-regional Plan is one of several sub-regional plans that are in development. These sub-regional plans support a working landscape, which considers the economy, while also supporting caribou and other species, Indigenous traditional land use, and recreational activities.

20. Complete a tailings management framework

Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Tailings Management Framework for the Mineable Athabasca Oil Sands provides direction to manage fluid tailings volumes during and after mine operations in order to reduce liability and environmental risk resulting from the accumulation of fluid tailings on the landscape.

Progress:

The Tailings Management Framework was completed in 2015. The Government of Alberta continues to work with industry, Indigenous communities and organizations, and other stakeholders to advance implementation of priority initiatives of the framework, focusing on the treatment and potential release of mine water.

The Tailings Management Framework enables release of treated mine process-affected water to the environment provided necessary conditions are met. Maintenance of aquatic ecosystem health in the downstream receiving environment will require a robust, considered, and well-informed management approach, designed with the input of multiple affected parties. Alberta Environment and Parks is working with industry, Indigenous communities and organizations, and other stakeholders to update the regulatory system and support a science-based approach to the management of oil sands mine water that appropriately addresses aquatic ecosystem and human health.

The Government of Alberta has established various tables to support implementation of Tailings Management Framework-related initiatives. For example, the Oil Sands Reclamation Interest Group is a strategic policy advisory table for reclamation issues made up of representatives from provincial and municipal governments, Indigenous communities and organizations, industry and environmental non-governmental organizations. The Oil Sands Mine Water Science Team is focused on addressing technical information related to informing supplementary regulatory guidance for treatment and potential release of oil sands mine water, and is made up of technical experts from academia, Indigenous communities, industry and federal and provincial governments. In addition, in 2021, the Government of Alberta offered a commitment to work with Indigenous communities to explore what a co-designed process for assessing impacts of oil sands mine water management would look like and remains committed to meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities as a path to understanding impacts.

Work on the Mine Financial Security Program related to fluid tailings management in 2020-2021 was focused on the 2015 Auditor General's findings and recommendations. Alberta Environment and Parks is planning to complete the review by the end of 2022.

Development of policy direction to support research on oil sands water capped fluid tailings (pit lakes) was temporarily suspended, and when reinitiated, the project will provide guidance to oil sands operators and research organizations on water capping as a treatment process for fluid tailings. Work on fluid tailings reclamation, reclamation criteria, and indicators for terrestrial (uplands and wetlands) landscapes was initiated by the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Energy Regulator in 2020-21. The Alberta Energy Regulator continued to develop and release industry performance reports that provide data on in-deposit performance about operators' tailings treatment technologies or new technology pilots being conducted. The Alberta Energy Regulator continues to work with oil sands mine operators to assess new technologies for reducing fluid tailings volumes.

21. Continue to implement the progressive reclamation strategy
Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation

Description:

To increase the pace of reclaiming oil sands mines, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan adopted a progressive reclamation strategy. This strategy includes a suite of initiatives and tools to improve financial security and environmental performance within the oil sands mining sector. It has three key components: an updated reclamation security policy, enhanced reclamation reporting and clarification of the reclamation certification program.

Progress:

Work in 2020 and 2021 continued on the following initiatives:

Updated Reclamation Security policy: The Mine Financial Security Program was introduced in 2011 and collects financial security from oil sands and coal mine operators to protect the public from mine reclamation liabilities associated with project closure.

The Government of Alberta is reviewing the program to ensure appropriate funds are being collected to cover mine reclamation liabilities as part of continuous program improvement. The review focuses on the program's asset calculation, reporting requirements, and timing of security payments. Mine operators and Indigenous communities and organizations are being engaged during the review to gain their input regarding program change options. The review is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

Enhanced Reclamation Reporting: Updated information on oil sands mine disturbance and reclamation was received from mine operators through the Reclamation Information System. All oil sands mines have submitted disturbance and reclamation data annually through the Reclamation Information System since 2009.

Reclamation Certification Program: Government of Alberta staff collaborated with the Alberta Energy Regulator to update the draft criteria and indicators framework for reclamation certification of oil sands mines in 2020 and 2021.

LARP Outcome 4: Air and water are managed to support human and ecosystem needs

22. Continue to implement the Air Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca Region
Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Air Quality Management Framework is designed to proactively manage the cumulative effects of human activity on ambient air quality within the region by setting ambient air quality triggers and limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and sulphur dioxide (SO₂).

Progress:

The Government of Alberta and regulators continued to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on air quality in the region. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions and progress of management responses relative to the framework. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at open.alberta.ca/publications.

As of 2020, no limits have been exceeded for this framework, however triggers have been crossed at some monitoring stations. As part of the management response, a detailed investigation of SO₂ for the Athabasca Oil Sands region is being conducted. Modelling work got underway in 2021 to better understand key emission sources and the influence of meteorological and topographical conditions near stations where triggers have been crossed. Management actions include the installation of equipment for additional sulphur recovery capability and for reducing produced gas volumes (the primary source of sulphur) received at a central processing facility. These upgrades are anticipated to be completed by December 31, 2023 and result in a substantial reduction in SO₂ emissions.

23. Continue to implement the Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River
Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River supports monitoring and management of long-term, cumulative changes in ambient surface water quality within the Lower Athabasca River.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta and regulators continued to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on surface water quality in the Lower Athabasca River. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions and progress of management responses relative to the framework. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at open.alberta.ca/publications.

No limits have been exceeded for this framework to date, however, proactive triggers were crossed for six parameters in 2020 (i.e. arsenic, lithium, potassium, uranium, phosphorus, and nitrogen). Trend analyses were completed on these and other water quality parameters that had previous trigger exceedances. The analyses considered the influence of river flow on water quality conditions. Investigations are ongoing for twelve of the framework indicators, with work underway to incorporate data from regulatory submissions, the Oil Sands Monitoring Program, and watershed stewardship programs. The Government of Alberta continues to explore seasonal patterns and refine trend analysis. Where undesirable trends exist, department- and community-led management plans and available land use activity information is being compiled to identify potential source areas, prepare for stakeholder engagement, and support the development of mitigation measures. A technical report is in preparation that describes this work and identifies any additional analyses that may be needed.

24. Complete and implement the Groundwater Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca Region
Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2014, in progress**Description:**

The Lower Athabasca Region Groundwater Management Framework helps protect groundwater resources from contamination and over-use in three management areas: North Athabasca Oil Sands; South Athabasca Oil Sands; and Cold Lake – Beaver River areas.

Progress:

Characterization of the groundwater regime and regional groundwater monitoring has been continued under the Oil Sands Monitoring Program. Approaches for regional scale management of groundwater quality and quantity are being developed to support the management of cumulative effects of development on groundwater resources in the region.

25. Complete an updated Surface Water Quantity Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River
Alberta Environment and Parks – complete and in implementation**Description:**

The Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quantity Management Framework focuses on managing water use by the mineable oil sands sector and seeks to establish an appropriate balance between water needed for environmental protection, community and industry needs. The framework includes weekly management triggers and water withdrawal limits and is built upon a foundation of continuous improvement, employing a series of adaptive management indicators and triggers that enable ongoing testing of assumptions around climate change, upstream water use, and industrial development in the basin.

Progress:

The Surface Water Quantity Management Framework was completed in 2015 and is being implemented. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions and progress of management responses relative to the framework. The Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quantity Management Framework and annual reports can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at open.alberta.ca/publications.

Water Management Agreements for 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 have been submitted to the Alberta Energy Regulator, Alberta Environment and Parks, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada by oil sands mine operators. These agreements specify water

allocations of individual mine operators under various stream flow conditions to ensure that cumulative water withdrawal limits under the framework are not exceeded.

The Government of Alberta has committed to actions through the Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site Action Plan (2019). In 2020, initial collaborative work on the navigation component of the Framework was completed with Indigenous communities and organizations that have been the most directly involved in work and discussions on navigation in the lower Athabasca River. This work identified priority tasks for further development of the navigation component of the Framework. In 2021, a work plan was developed to address ecological knowledge gaps identified in the Framework.

The Athabasca River Conditions and Use website (environment.alberta.ca/apps/OSEM/) supports reporting of weekly management triggers and water withdrawal limits under the framework.

Provincial Outcome: People-friendly Communities with Ample Recreational and Cultural Opportunities

LARP Outcome 5: Infrastructure development supports economic and population growth

26. Use CRISP to augment and facilitate planning where oil sands development causes growth pressures Alberta Energy – complete

Description:

The Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plan (CRISP) for the Athabasca Oil Sands Area (2011) was a long-term flexible and integrated approach to planning for growth in the Athabasca Oil Sands Area intended to complement similar plans for the Cold Lake (2012) and Peace River oil sands areas. The decreased pace of oil sands development and evolving government priorities resulted in deferral of the Peace River CRISP.

Progress:

Policy and programming required to manage any growth pressures associated with oil sands development continue to be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

27. Continue to ensure opportunities for future routes and siting for pipeline gateways, transmission corridors, utility and electrical transmission corridors are maintained Alberta Energy and Alberta Transportation – complete and in implementation

Description:

Ensuring opportunities for future routes and siting for pipeline gateways, transportation corridors, and utility and electrical transmission corridors helps plan the land base available for development while facilitating population, economic growth and efficient use of the land.

Progress:

At the strategic level, Canada's Premiers agreed to begin exploring the concept of pan-Canadian economic corridors in an effort to enhance the existing connections between provinces and territories at the 2019 Council of the Federation summer meeting. To that end, Alberta Energy led a provincial/territorial working group to foster discussion and develop a report for Premiers. The report was provided to the COF Secretariat in fall 2021 to determine next steps.

28. Continue work on critical economic linkages to markets Alberta Transportation and Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation – complete and in implementation

Description:

Critical economic linkages to markets include: connecting the Mackenzie Delta to Asia-Pacific markets; connecting Fort McMurray to the Northwest Territories and northern British Columbia (via Highway 686 from Fort McMurray to Red Earth Creek); connecting Fort McMurray to Lac La Biche and the Alberta Industrial Heartland (via Highways 881 and 831); and connection to La Loche, Saskatchewan from Highway 881.

Progress:

A number of planning studies and projects to identify and implement improvements for highway safety, efficiency and the future expansion are underway or complete, such as:

- Highway 881 Planning Study for re-alignment around Gregoire Lake remains underway;
- Highway 881 Corridor Management Planning Study from Lac La Biche to Highway 63 was completed;
- Highway 63 Planning Study for twinning of Highway 63 from south of Mildred Lake to the Athabasca River was completed in 2021;
- Highway 63 Corridor Planning and Access Study in Fort McMurray Urban Development Sub Region (UDSR) remains underway;
- a Cost Benefit Analysis study for the East Clearwater Road was completed in 2021; and
- proposed planning study recommending an alignment for extending Highway 813 from Wabasca to proposed Highway 686 is identified.

In preparation for construction, the design for improvements to Highway 881 between Lac La Biche and Anzac is currently underway and will include passing lanes, safety rest areas, and intersection improvements.

LARP Outcome 6: The quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for recreation and active living

29. Designate new provincial recreation areas to address the growing demand for recreational opportunities Alberta Environment and Parks – delayed

Description:

To address growing demand for recreational opportunities in the region and provide a secure land base to support tourism development for both residents and visitors, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan provides for nine new Provincial Recreation Areas.

Progress:

Designation of the new Provincial Recreation Areas under the *Provincial Parks Act* has been delayed. It is anticipated the following areas will be designated under the *Provincial Parks Act*: Andrew Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Christina Crossing Provincial Recreation Area, Clyde Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Cowper Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Gregoire Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Slave River Provincial Recreation Area, Crow Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Goodwin Lake Provincial Recreation Area, and Winefred Lake Provincial Recreation Area.

30. Create public land areas for recreation and tourism that contain unique features or settings Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation and Alberta Environment and Parks – delayed

Description:

New public land areas for recreation and tourism in the region contain unique features, scenery or settings to address the growing demand for recreational opportunities and provide an attractive land base for tourism investment. To optimize the recreation and tourism potential for both residents and visitors, the Lower Athabasca Regional

Plan provides for five new public land areas for recreation and tourism development. These are: Lake Athabasca, Richardson, Athabasca River, Clearwater River, and House River.

Progress:

New public land areas for recreation and tourism have not yet been established. The Government of Alberta is working to identify suitable locations that advance outdoor recreation and tourism, and where tourism development and investment opportunities could be directed.

The government and Travel Alberta are currently working together such that policies and initiatives align to advance the government's strategic outcomes, including the establishment of new public land areas for recreation and tourism.

A committee was established in 2021 to oversee and facilitate tourism related development projects and to develop a framework for identifying potential tourism and outdoor recreation opportunities on Crown Lands to increase tourism investment opportunities.

31. Develop the regional parks plan for the Lower Athabasca
Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2013, in progress

Description:

The Regional Parks Plan provides management direction to achieve the integrated recreation and conservation mandate of the Alberta Provincial Parks Program. The Regional Parks Plan summarizes current recreation and conservation values on a site-by-site basis, provides broad, future-focused management direction of those values, and identifies where further planning is required. It also provides Albertans with better information about the values of each park as well as the challenges faced in managing these values for current and future generations.

Progress:

A draft Regional Parks Plan for the Lower Athabasca Region was developed in 2015. Final approval and release of this plan was put on hold in 2015. Content that was developed for a draft Regional Parks Plan is being incorporated into other initiatives and guidance for management of parks in the region.

32. Develop the Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan
Alberta Environment and Parks – in progress

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan will evaluate existing trails and locate designated, sustainable land-based trails for various motorized and non-motorized trail users, water based trails and routes, and potential associated activity areas. It will link communities, tourism destinations and other park and open space features. The plan's objective is to lay a framework for an enhanced recreation and tourism based trail system that will create opportunities for greater physical activity and enjoyment of the outdoors by all Albertans.

Progress:

Developing the Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan was put on hold in 2017. Considerations for recreational trails will occur during sub-regional planning across the Lower Athabasca region.

Under the Crown Land Vision released in 2020, the newly created *Trails Act* will allow for the designation of both motorized and non-motorized trails on public lands. This work will support the development and management of broader trail networks, minimize the impacts on environmental sensitivities, and increase collaboration with recreation partnerships.

33. Continue to collect regional data including completion of recreation and tourism inventory, a scenic resource assessment inventory, and a regional recreational demand and satisfaction survey
Jobs, Economy and Innovation – complete and in implementation

Description:

Data in the form of a recreation and tourism resource inventory that is dependent upon the completion of a scenic resource assessment inventory and a regional recreational demand and satisfaction survey is fundamental to informing recreation and tourism planning. This strategy assures the ongoing collection and analysis of relevant data to inform planning and help prioritize product, service and infrastructure development.

Progress:

In 2020, data from the recreation and tourism resource inventory was reviewed to identify the current state of recreation and tourism use in the Cold Lake sub-region and presented to the Cold Lake Caribou Sub-regional Task Force as part of the Cold Lake sub-regional planning process.

In 2021, further planning and analysis, completed by a Recreation and Tourism Working Group, culminated in the validation of existing high value recreation and tourism areas and the identification of new ones that were proposed and included in the

draft Cold Lake sub-regional plan. Also in 2021, data from the recreation and tourism resource inventories was reviewed to identify the current state of recreation and tourism and presented to the Wandering River Caribou Sub-regional Task Force as part of the Wandering River sub-regional planning process.

LARP Outcome 7: Inclusion of Indigenous peoples in land-use planning

34. Continue to consult with Indigenous peoples in a meaningful way when government decisions may adversely affect the continued exercise of their constitutionally protected rights

Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Energy, Alberta Culture and Status of Women, Alberta Indigenous Relations, and Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan reaffirms Alberta's commitment to honour the constitutionally protected Treaty and aboriginal rights of Indigenous peoples and seeks opportunities to engage with Indigenous communities and organizations by inviting them to share traditional knowledge to inform land and natural resource planning.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta is committed to partnering with Alberta's Indigenous peoples in pursuit of reconciliation, inclusion, and opportunity. Alberta will continue to work with Indigenous peoples.

The Government of Alberta continues to be committed to working with First Nations, Métis Settlements and Métis organizations on implementing the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and on:

- developing a Biodiversity Management Framework;
- sub-regional planning that supports caribou recovery;
- implementing the Moose Lake Access Management Plan approved by Government in 2021; and
- cooperative management approaches for managing the Ronald Lake Bison Herd and Wildland Provincial Parks

Efforts to work with Indigenous peoples remains a continuing priority of Government.

A cooperative management program that involves 23 participating Indigenous communities and organizations was initiated in spring of 2018 for the Richardson Wildland Provincial Park, Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park, Birch River Wildland Provincial Park, Kazan Wildland Provincial Park, and Dillon River Wildland Provincial Park. Parks specific management plans are anticipated to be drafted by 2023.

The Government of Alberta created the Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland Provincial Park in 2019 following months of collaborative discussions with Indigenous peoples, industry and other stakeholders. In 2021, the Government of Alberta gathered input from Albertans on the plan to expand Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland, which was made possible by the collaboration of Indigenous communities and organizations, industry partners and the Government of Alberta. The plan for the expansion was to add 143,805 hectares to the existing 161,880 hectare wildland provincial park. After learning about the Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland expansion, a new oil sands leaseholder offered to support the expansion by voluntarily surrendering Crown mineral agreements in the middle of the area to create a greater contiguous wildland provincial park and bring the total expansion to around 152,000 hectares.

Kitaskino Nuwenëné Wildland supports Indigenous peoples' traditional activities, including the exercise of treaty rights.

The Alberta Energy Regulator made progress by improving working relationships with the Aboriginal Consultation Office through applied Indigenous awareness training and delivering joint learning initiatives with Indigenous communities and organizations.

The Alberta Energy Regulator in collaboration with the Government of Alberta, industry proponents, and Indigenous communities and organizations made enhancements allowing the Alberta Energy Regulator's OneStop system to accept consultation applications through the Aboriginal Consultation Office's Digital Service. This significantly improves information sharing, making the consultation process more efficient, effective and transparent.

35. Continue to invite First Nations expressing an interest in the Richardson Backcountry to be involved in a sub-regional initiative called the First Nations Richardson Backcountry Stewardship Initiative (Richardson Initiative)

Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Energy, Alberta Culture and Status of Women, Alberta Indigenous Relations, and Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation – complete and in implementation

Description:

The Richardson Initiative was originally set up as a discussion forum for the Government of Alberta and local First Nations who expressed an interest in the Richardson Backcountry. The discussion forum was intended to address specific issues identified in the Richardson Backcountry area, such as impacts to Treaty rights, fish and wildlife management, access management, economic and business opportunities, as well as the management of new Wildland Provincial Parks and the Richardson public land area for recreation and tourism.

Progress:

Planning initiatives are underway for the Richardson Backcountry to include certain issues of interest and concern that were intended to be addressed under the First Nations-Richardson Backcountry Stewardship Initiative. For example, the Government of Alberta is proceeding with a cooperative management process for five northeast wildland provincial parks, one of which is the Richardson Wildland Provincial Park. Additionally, a sub-regional plan for the Richardson planning area will be developed.

Cross Reference Table

Over time, responsibility on behalf of the Government of Alberta, for leading a particular strategy or developing a particular supporting indicator may have changed as ministry mandates evolved. The table below lists the titles of lead ministries in effect as of this report and department titles when the regional plan came into force.

2012	2021
Aboriginal Relations	Indigenous Relations
Agriculture and Rural Development	Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Economic Development
Culture	Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Energy	Energy
Enterprise and Advanced Education	Jobs, Economy and Innovation
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development	Environment and Parks
Human Services	Seniors and Housing
Infrastructure	Infrastructure
Labour	Labour
Municipal Affairs	Municipal Affairs
Tourism, Parks and Recreation	Jobs, Economy and Innovation (Tourism) Environment and Parks (Parks and Recreation)
Transportation	Transportation
Treasury Board and Finance	Treasury Board and Finance