

SUMMARY OF THE 2009 PHASE I CONSULTATION



LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN



**Government
of Alberta** ■

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Alberta's Land-use Framework (LUF) sets out a new approach to managing public and private lands and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic and social goals. The purpose of the LUF is to manage growth and sustain Alberta's growing economy, while balancing this with Alberta's social and economic goals.

One of the key strategies for improving land-use decision-making under LUF is the development of seven regional plans based on seven new land-use regions. Each regional plan will address the current conditions in a region and will anticipate and plan for relevant development-related activities, opportunities and challenges in that region over the long-term.

The Alberta government identified the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) as an immediate priority and appointed the Regional Advisory Council (RAC) in December 2008 to provide advice to government on the regional plan.

During May and June 2009, the government held 14 public open houses and 10 stakeholder consultation sessions as part of phase I of the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

Aboriginal consultations for input into the regional plan are ongoing.

The objectives of the public open houses and stakeholder consultation sessions were:

- provide awareness and information on the Land-use Framework, Bill 36 (the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*), the Lower Athabasca Region and the regional planning process; and
- gather input and comments from Albertans.

Date		Location
Wednesday	May 20	Lac La Biche
Thursday	May 21	Bonnyville
Tuesday	May 26	Cold Lake
Wednesday	May 27	Vermilion
Thursday	May 28	St. Paul
Monday	June 1	Fort McKay
Tuesday	June 2	Fort McMurray
Wednesday	June 3	Fort Chipewyan
Thursday	June 4	Fort Smith
Tuesday	June 9	Fort McMurray
Wednesday	June 10	Athabasca
Thursday	June 11	Smoky Lake
Tuesday	June 16	Wabasca
Thursday	June 18	Fort Vermilion



The dates and locations of these sessions are listed in the table below:

A broad range of stakeholders participated in the sessions, including the following:

- municipal, provincial and federal government staff,
- agriculture/landowners,
- industry (oil/gas industry, oilsands, forestry, seismic, peat, gravel),
- First Nations,
- Métis Nation of Alberta,
- Métis Local 1935,
- Wood Buffalo Métis Corporation,
- Native Friendship Centre Society,
- NWT Métis Nation,
- ATCO Electric,
- Alberta Fish and Game Association,
- Lakeland Industry & Community Association,
- Beaver River Watershed Alliance,
- Alberta Goat Breeders Association,
- Alberta Chamber of Resources,
- Alberta Water Well Drillers Association,
- St. Paul Grain Association,
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police,
- Keyano College,
- Northern Alberta Institute of Technology,
- Athabasca University,
- College of Alberta Professional Forest Technologists,
- Clearwater Horse Club,
- Northern Alberta Development Council,
- Energy Resources Conservation Board,
- Fort McMurray Historical Society,
- Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and
- Andrew/Whitford Lake Historical Society.





About 271 people were involved in the public and stakeholder sessions. Participation ranged from a high of 38 people in Fort McMurray to fewer than 10 in remote communities.

A summary of input received from the public and stakeholders is provided below.

Scope, Authority and Impact of Plan

Questions received:

- Will the plan address specific lakes or would it be broader in nature?
- Will there be conservation easements and directives in the regional plan?
- Who initiates and pays for conservation easements and directives?
- Can a group petition for a conservation directive and would others have input into this decision?
- How will an appeal of part of the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan be handled?
- How will conflicts with a municipal development plan be handled?
- How will changes to a regional plan occur if amendments are needed?
- Will the work of the municipal appeals board become more “black and white” as a result of the regional plan?
- How will the regional plan affect tourism, agriculture, recreation – especially on public leased land?
- How will the regional plan be administered, including the length of its terms of operation?

Comments received:

- There needs to be more coordination between the Government of Alberta and existing plans (regional development plans, air quality management plans, etc.).
- The regional plan should try to integrate existing/ongoing work as much as possible (i.e., Special Places 2000, CEMA, etc.).



Regional Planning Process

Questions received:

- Who has input into the plan and its process?
- How are Regional Advisory Council members appointed and by whom?
- How will the government ensure an equitable, fair and representative selection of RAC members?
- What is the role of Parks Canada in the LARP process?
- How will the Land Use Secretariat deal with the Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories and federal governments?
- How will the Land Use Secretariat deal with organizations such as the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute?

Comments received:

- Stakeholders and the public should meet together to ensure that all different viewpoints are heard.
- Recreation groups need to be included in future phases.

Authority and Decision Making

Questions received:

- Will the provincial government have a say in development on federal lands, such as being able to reject a landfill on First Nation lands?
- Will the regional plan remove some of the authority and discretion for municipal development now held by municipal governments?
- Will the regional plan affect the ability of the municipalities to grow according to their plans?
- Will the regional plan deal with the increasing municipal densities, etc?





Land Management

Questions received:

- Will LARP affect access management and control of leased public lands?
- Will grazing leases still exist and if so, how will they be used (e.g., conservation directives, etc.)?
- How will the conservation of agricultural land affect urban municipalities' ability to grow?
- Can a conservation easement be removed and how would this occur? Or, are they held in perpetuity?
- How will the regional plan deal with the designation of utility corridors?

Comments received:

- The Department of National Defense bird hazard management plan should be incorporated into the regional plan. The bird hazard plan could affect municipal development.
- The air weapons range controls airspace north of the air weapons range.
- Fragmentation of farmland is a concern.

Industry

Questions received:

- How will the plan affect industrial development in the region? Concern that the regional plan would slow industry operations.
- How will the regional plan deal with drilling for oil and gas in and under lakes?

Water

Comments received:

- The protection of groundwater resources does not appear to be the priority it was a few years ago.
- Water is a main concern, particularly in terms of upstream industry impacts.



Conservation, Recreation and Tourism

- Fort Smith's tourism is an untapped resource. Whitewater rafting and the Trans-Canada trails are some of the recreation opportunities. If the Slave River hydro project takes place, three white water rapids would be affected.
- Limited recreation opportunities exist in the Fort Smith area, and numerous areas would require protection.
- The need exists for another provincial park in the region, specifically in the northwest corner of the Alberta bordered by British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.

Post-reclamation Opportunities

- The opportunity exists to reclaim lands for agricultural use after oil sands production is finished, as the area has already been disturbed from its natural state.
- A need exists for new economic potentials, and local food production would greatly decrease living costs in the area.

Overall Consultation Process

Attendee observations and recommendations:

Engagement and Advertising

- Input is needed from hunting, fishing, tourism and agricultural stakeholders and with local educational institutions such as Keyano College and the secondary schools.
- Existing stakeholder groups and grassroots organizations can help encourage attendance at future sessions.
- Engage the public and local stakeholders in later phases of consultation through:
 - targeted interviews and articles,
 - posters on community billboards (grocery stores, Legions, etc.),
 - notices sent out by the counties as part of their tax notices, newsletters, etc., and
 - advertising and invitations for phase 2 events that are easy to discern from similar work being done by organizations such as Cumulative Environmental Management Association.





Subsequent Phases

- Hard copies of public documents must be available because Internet access is limited in some areas.
- Make pertinent documents available prior to consultations so that Albertans are knowledgeable about what will be discussed.
- While some web content is acceptable, avoid public and stakeholder overload.
- Discussion needs to be presented in a way that the public and stakeholders can relate to – conservation goals/areas, land-use changes, recreation access, etc.
- Input should be collected using a combination of face-to-face discussions, workshops and written submissions.
- Feedback needs to be provided as quickly as possible to understand how input was used.

