

# PHASE 2 WORKBOOK SUMMARY



## LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN



Government  
of Alberta 





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# Overview

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## Background and Purpose

The Land-use Framework (LUF) sets out a new approach for managing lands and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic, environmental and social goals. The purpose of the LUF is to manage growth and to sustain Alberta's growing economy, while maintaining a balance with Albertans' social and environmental goals. One of the key strategies for improving land-use decision-making established in the LUF is the development of seven regional plans based on seven new 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 LUF identified the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP) as an immediate priority. In December 2008, the government established a Regional Advisory Council (RAC) for the Lower Athabasca Region (LAR). The RAC was comprised of 17 members with a cross-section of experience and expertise in the Lower Athabasca Region.

The RAC was asked to provide advice on current and future land-use activities and challenges in the region. The RAC's advice was presented in its document, the Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council's *Advice to the Government of Alberta Regarding a Vision for the Lower Athabasca Region* (RAC advice).

The Alberta government's Land Use Secretariat (LUS) oversees the development of each regional plan, providing policy analysis, research and administrative support to the RAC as well as leading the consultation process in each region. A draft regional plan will be developed by the Government of Alberta which will be informed by the RAC's advice, cross-ministry knowledge and the views of residents, businesses, communities, aboriginal communities and other governments that have a stake in the region and its future.

A regional plan will set a vision of how a region should look over several decades and will consider a planning horizon of at least 50 years. The plan will be reviewed every five years to ensure it is effective. Regional plans will set the overall objectives for the region and identify where major activities (such as industrial development, agriculture or recreation) should take place in order to better co-ordinate activity on the landscape. Regional plans are not intended to describe how a neighbourhood will look in the future or set rules about local property.



In support of the development of the LARP, three distinct phases of consultation with the public, stakeholders and municipalities are being undertaken. These phases are as follows:

- Phase 1 – Awareness – May/June 2009
- Phase 2 – Input on the Regional Advisory Council Advice – September 2010
- Phase 3 – Feedback on the Draft Regional Plan – 2011

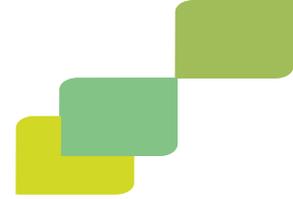
Aboriginal consultation is also critical to the success of the plan and will be conducted in an ongoing and continuous fashion throughout the planning process.

## Methods

This second phase of consultation focused on receiving input and comments on the RAC advice document by holding a series of open houses, workshops and meetings with the public, stakeholders and municipalities respectively. Approximately 490 people attended public open houses and 270 stakeholders attended workshops held in numerous locations within the region and in several centres outside of the LAR. As well, all Albertans were encouraged to review the RAC advice document and provide their feedback by completing either the online or hardcopy versions of a workbook called Advice to the Government of Alberta Regarding a Vision for the Lower Athabasca Region which was based on the advice document. In total, 813 completed workbooks were received in the two formats, the majority of which were electronic. There were also 281 partially completed online workbooks and 108 written submissions received.

The workbook was available for online completion from August 26 to October 8, 2010. Hard copies were also available at several Government of Alberta (GoA) offices and at the 27 public and stakeholder phase 2 consultations. Hard copies from the consultation events were accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope and mailed-in copies were accepted until October 29, 2010.





## Quantitative Data

All of the quantitative responses were analyzed using software called the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The frequencies and other descriptive and statistical measures are reported below. All analysis was conducted on the valid percentage – the percentage of respondents who answered the question – as opposed to the overall percentage of respondents who participated in the survey. Full results have been included in Appendix A.

A number of cross-tabulations were run to identify demographic differences (i.e., residence, work or affiliations, age), primarily on the single-topic agreement questions. Any demographic variations of more than 10 per cent from the overall percentage of agreement that were identified in the crosstabs are reported.

All qualitative responses were analyzed using computer software known as NVivo, which is a qualitative information database. The responses were coded for themes that emerged in relation to the questions and throughout the LARP phase 2 public and stakeholder engagement process. The themes that emerged are detailed in the response analysis for the individual workbook questions.

Workbook input does not constitute a random sample and as such, the results cannot be statistically generalized to the overall population. The 1,103 respondents do comprise a self-selecting sample group of persons with an interest in the Lower Athabasca Region. Input covers a wide range of interests and opinions that are likely reflected throughout the region and by external stakeholders. However, both the web-based tool and the hardcopy workbook allow for co-ordinated multiple responses by an individual, organization or interest group. It is evident, particularly in the qualitative comments, that there are a number of co-ordinated responses reflecting a variety of specific interest groups or individuals who may have submitted repeatedly. The result is duplicate response patterns or comments. Where this occurs, the specific comments are footnoted in Appendix A.

## Qualitative Data

Qualitative data provided in the workbook had significant breadth and depth of comment, and the information contained in this report is a general summary of those comments indicating overall trends and response similarities/divergences. Expressions of this summarization – many, most, some, few – are reflective of the overall level of acceptance or frequency of commentary, and is inherently subjective due to the difficulty in conducting quantitative analysis of responses that defy numerical tabulation. Response rates for all questions, quantitative and qualitative, varied by topic and so some themes may or may not have the same weight as others.



## Presentation of Findings

This document contains a summary of all results received from both the electronic and hardcopy versions of the workbook. Each section is comprised of the quantitative results from the corresponding theme section in the workbook, and a summary of the qualitative responses provided by participants. Full statistical results and analysis for each quantitative question are included in the attached Appendix A.

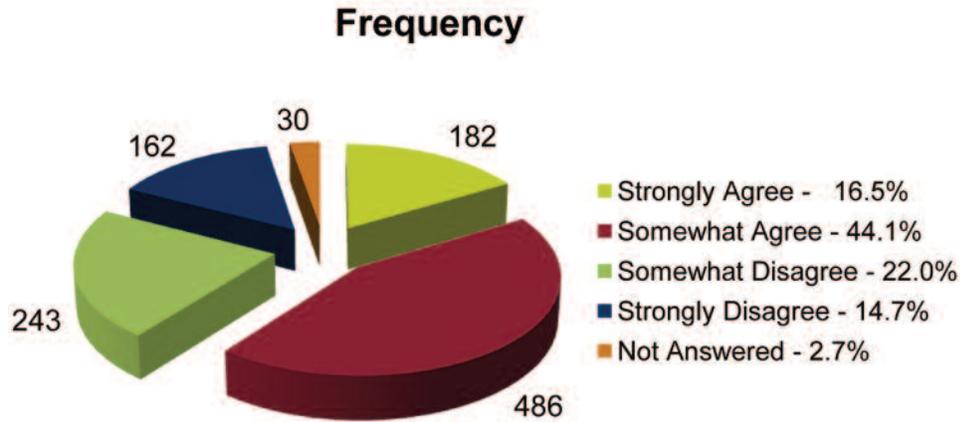


# Summary of Workbook Data

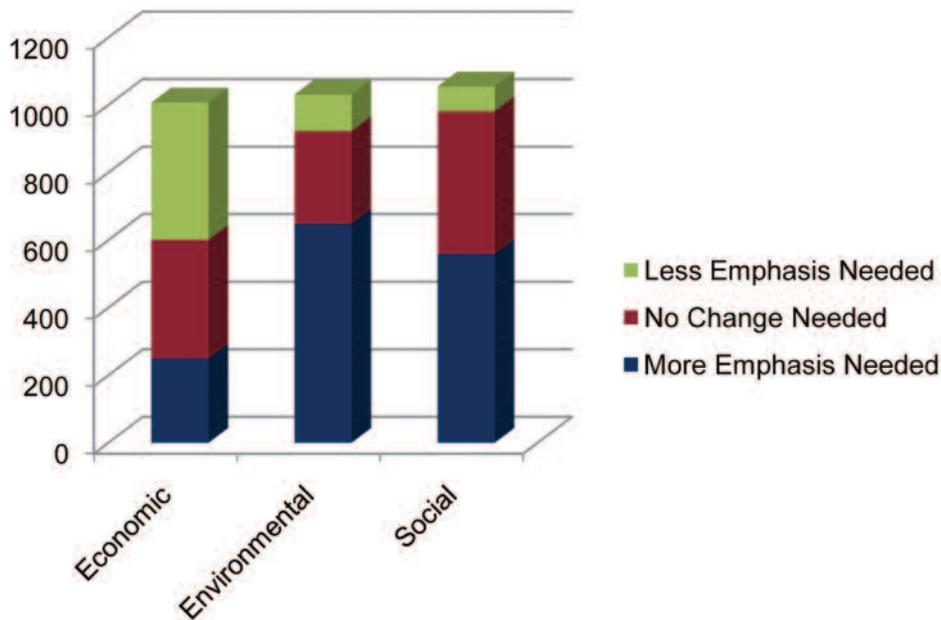


## Section 1: Vision for the Region

1. How strongly do you agree with the proposed vision for the Lower Athabasca Region?



2. In describing a vision for the region, the RAC has tried to achieve a balance among economic, environmental and social values. What do you think about the amount of emphasis given to each of these values in the proposed vision?





### 3. How would you improve the content of the proposed vision for the region? Consider the values and issues addressed and any that may be missing.

#### Improve Vision

There was general support for the vision proposed by the RAC, with the caution that the translation of this vision into solid objectives and actions that create the envisioned future for the region will be the portion of the plan that needs the real attention. Many felt that the vision, as written, is too long and too general, making it not “visionary” at all in that it does not focus on the future state of the region. There was also a nearly even split between those who felt that specific mention of the oil sands and its role in the regional economy should be mentioned, and those that felt that its mention and the region’s role as the “driver of the Canadian economy” should be removed.



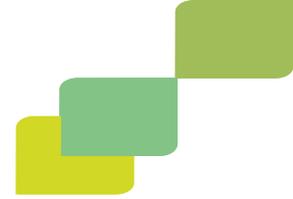
#### Aboriginal

The vision statement created a significant amount of interest from an aboriginal perspective. Respondents provided a host of opinions on this front with one main topic dominating the responses, from the concept in the last statement of the vision – “accommodation of rights and interests of all Albertans.” A large majority of the respondents felt that the needs of the region’s aboriginal peoples cannot be balanced with economic interests, and specific mention of the need to honour treaty and constitutional rights were frequently cited. Many felt that the aboriginal peoples of the region are being disproportionately affected by oil sands development, especially due to the perceived associated environmental impacts leading to diminished opportunities to practice traditional land uses. However, a small minority cautioned that the protection of these rights cannot come at the expense of the rights of the remainder of the residents of the region and the province.



#### Agriculture

There were very few comments regarding agriculture as it relates to the vision, with the general feeling being that the region’s agricultural food production needs to be protected and sustained.



## **Balance**

Many of the respondents' references to balance related to a perceived imbalance between the economic focus of the vision and the social and environmental aspects. The environmental impacts of current development were felt by most to be unacceptable, and there was concern that this would only worsen in the future with more development and more pressure to be the "major driver of the Canadian economy." While some felt that there is no possibility of a true "balance" of the three components of sustainability, many felt that there is a definite need for increased environmental protection in an area that is projected to encounter a substantial amount of economic development and diversification.

Many others stated that, while the region and the province must derive the full economic value of these resources at a sustainable rate, there is also a need to provide increased levels of protection for the environment and society to mitigate the effects of this development. This includes creation of more parks and recreation opportunities across the region, both for their value for recreation and economic diversification. A few also mentioned the need for the province and nation to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and begin developing other energy resources in the region, such as hydroelectric and nuclear power.

## **Economic**

Of all of the responses received on the topic of the vision, the volume of comments relating to the economic factors of the region dominated by a very large margin. Of these comments, two main themes emerged. The first was a feeling that the pace of development in the region must be slowed so that the benefits of the resource extraction can be spread over a longer period of time with more opportunity to mitigate impacts. The second theme that emerged was that protection of the environment and regional social needs require much more attention, even if it causes economic impacts in the short-term. A large number of respondents felt that a focus on oil sands development in the vision may cause short-term economic gain at the price of long-term social impacts and environmental damage, which they felt were unacceptable. Many added that the oil sands were vaguely referenced in the RAC's vision, and should have been addressed directly, in that everyone knows that development of Alberta's world-class oil sands resource is the main economic driver of the region, yet it has not been specifically referenced in the vision.



## Environmental

There was a general sense that more attention needs to be paid to the environment in the region and in the province. Many noted that the only way to ensure sustainable development of the region is to work from the principle that a healthy environment will drive a healthy economy. On this front, one suggested change to the vision was the addition of a statement that “progressive environmental and social stewardship will shape the future of economic development.” Overall, there was a general feeling that air and water pollution in the region is unacceptable at current levels of development and that this should be countered through the use of strict limits on contamination and a move towards the creation of a greener energy profile. Many also explicitly stated the need to protect the boreal forest, wetlands and rivers within the region. This led to general support for the creation and enforcement of a biodiversity threshold for the area, with the woodland caribou frequently mentioned as examples. Several respondents also stated that the level of conservation proposed for the region is insufficient at 20 per cent of the land base, and specifically mentioned a goal of 50 per cent coverage of the region in conservation lands.



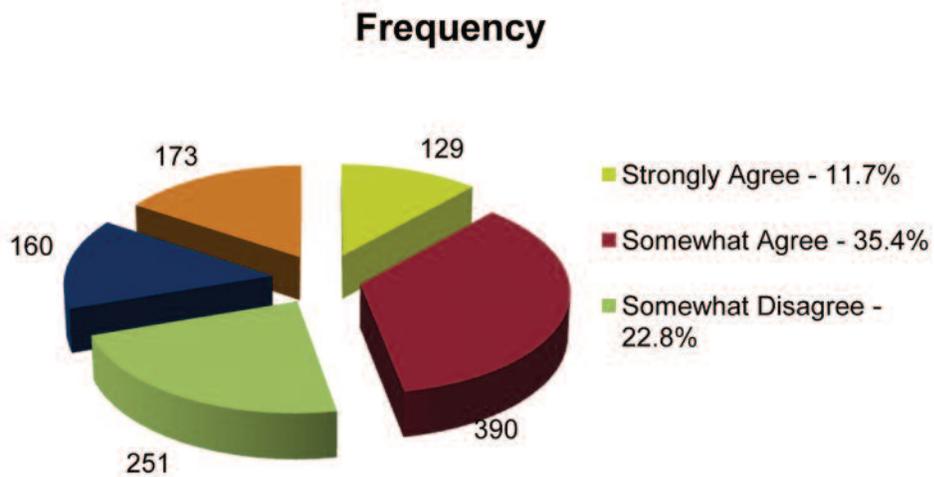
## Social

Overall, many stated that the region is in need of improved physical and social infrastructure, a better work/life balance, and more attention to community social issues. There was also frequent mention of the need to build and utilize local capacity to deal with these and other issues in the region due to the wealth of local knowledge on existing and past land uses.

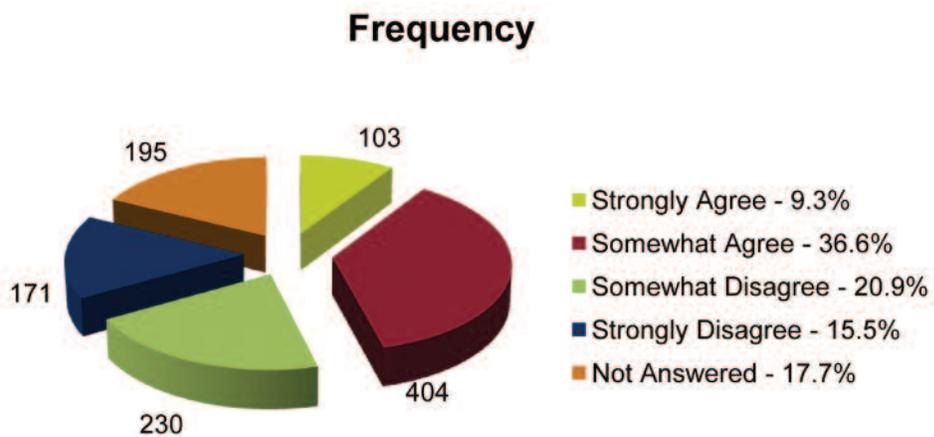


## Section 2: Economic Growth and Development

4. How strongly do you agree with the recommendation for a land-use classification system as proposed above?

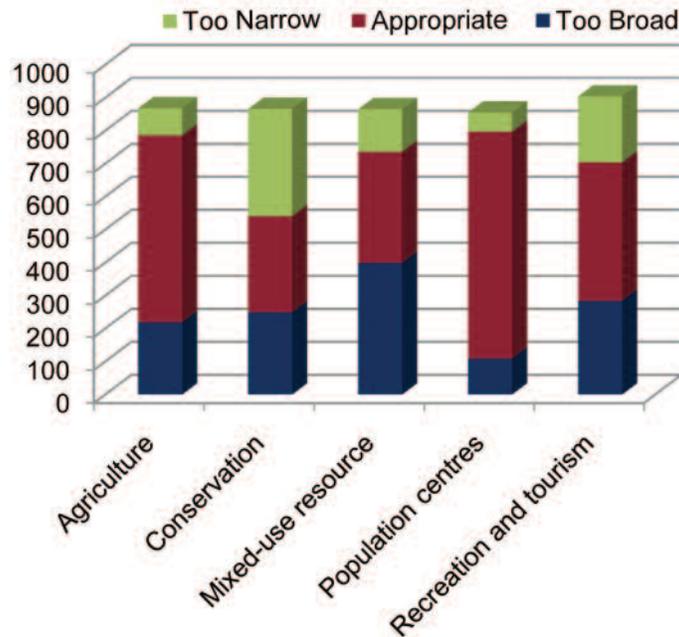


5. How strongly do you agree that these land-use classifications are representative of values expressed in the LARP vision?





## 6. How appropriate are the priority uses for each land-use classification?



## 7. Please share any additional comments regarding the proposed land-use classification system.

The responses to this question were highly reflective of the quantitative responses to the previous two questions. However, a wide variety of comments did indicate that there is relatively strong agreement with the general concept of the land-use classification system but that the agreement is qualified by uncertainty in regard to a lack of details about how it would be implemented. Relatively few comments indicated complete endorsement of the RAC recommendations. However, a very large number of comments indicated some level of support for the recommendations and identified related concerns or suggestions. The majority of the concerns and suggestions raised address either the conservation or the mixed-use resource land-use classifications which, in the responses to question six, were identified as having priority uses that are too narrow and too broad, respectively.

Likewise, comments regarding the overlays - particularly the multi-use corridors and the river corridors - were generally well-received, with most comments directed towards specific elements or challenges associated with implementation, as opposed to challenging the concept of the overlays.





## Priority and Secondary Uses

Specifics regarding primary and secondary uses as they relate to the individual land-use classifications will be addressed in more detail in the analysis of responses for questions that address the different land-use classifications. However, in general there is support for the primary uses within each land-use classification while the secondary uses were viewed by many as being too broad with the potential to challenge the primary use with secondary uses that are not true to the intent of the land-use classification.

Overall, the comments were supportive of the five different land-use classifications, with only three clear comments indicating that five land-use classifications are too many. However, there were a substantial number of comments that address overlapping secondary uses between the different land-use classifications and that there may be opportunity to collapse some of them. Combining recreation and tourism with conservation was identified as one possible pairing, with the frequent caveat that some of the areas would have to have a preservation status and would not be accessible for recreational purposes. Also suggested was a tiered approach that would collapse the five categories into three: intensive (agriculture, population centres and oil sands), extensive (mixed use) and protected (conservation).

More frequent than suggestions for collapsing land-use classifications were questions and concerns regarding the degree of potential overlap in land uses between the land-use classifications. Comments stressed either that there is too much overlap or that the different uses are not compatible, particularly noting between conservation and industrial or to a lesser degree recreational uses. A number of comments stated that with new technologies, progressive reclamation, land and forest management practices and current tenure commitments, there is an opportunity or need to allow some level of industrial development on conservation lands, and that opening some conservation, mixed use, and even agricultural lands to recreational access is vital to quality of life of the residents in the area.

Furthermore, a number of respondents commented that the boundaries of the land-use classification areas should be fluid to respond to the introduction of reclaimed lands, emergent technologies that facilitate resource extraction while minimizing environmental compromise and evolving economic realities. This was strongly challenged by comments that question the value and outcomes of reclamation management efforts or the priority of conservation and preservation, and quality of life considerations related to population growth in the region.

## Management Intent

Throughout the workbook respondents stated that the management intent is too vague, that timelines were unclear, there is a lack of firm objectives and metrics and that terms such as “should be”, “other uses”, and “minimize impacts” leave too much room to interpret the land-use



classifications and their intended directions to suit specific interests. Furthermore, there was uncertainty as to whether or not the boundaries of the different areas are permanently fixed or may be subject to revision as reclaimed lands or new technologies change the industrial landscape. These and other perceived uncertainties are discussed in greater detail throughout the workbook analysis.

As it applies to the overarching land-use classification system as a whole, the primary concern regarding management intent is the tension between the region's role as an economic and industrial driver, and conservation and preservation objectives.

A strong contingent of responses acknowledge the region's economic importance through resource extraction, oil sands, forestry and, to a lesser degree, mining. Related population growth has its own impacts on land use and the natural environment. Most proponents of industrial development in the region commented that responsible industrial development can occur as part of management (forestry) and with reduced impacts through the use of new technologies, reclamation (oil sands and mining), and monitoring and enforcement of regulations.

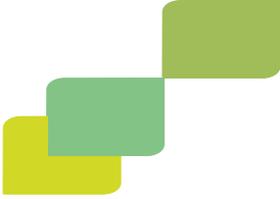


A small number of comments indicated industrial development and population growth should cease immediately in favour of conservation, preservation and minimizing environmental damage on local, regional and global (climate change) scales. A much larger contingent stressed that environmental and conservation objectives should be more highly weighted by the government in determining the appropriate land-use balance, with a slower pace of industrial growth and more restrictive environmental thresholds and regulations.

Respondents on both sides of the economic/environmental debate saw vagueness in the land-use classification definitions and saw secondary uses as too susceptible to change in the face of future popular, political and international pressures. However, both sides expressed concern with the lack of a specified relationship between the proposed plan and the three development scenarios that the RAC was asked to consider, adding to uncertainty regarding preferred or targeted development levels and resulting impacts. A number of comments endorsed a strong environmental agenda, stating a lack of trust in the GoA's commitment to environmental issues and the likelihood that the LARP would include a suitable environmental stance.



Finally, a number of comments noted a perceived lack of clear reference to the oil sands in the workbook as an issue of concern, either because they feel it omits the region's world-



class energy resource and primary economic driver, or because they believe the omission appears to gloss over the environmental impacts associated with oil-sands development. In both instances, there was a perception that a lack of explicit reference to the oil sands does not allow for clear management of the Lower Athabasca Region's resources.

### **Allocation of Land Uses**

A number of concerns were raised regarding both the overall percentage of the region that is allocated to the various land uses and to specific areas within the region. Again, the main focus of comments related to the allocations and areas identified as mixed-use resource and conservation areas, although similar concerns were raised in regard to recreation and tourism, and to agriculture areas, albeit to much lesser degrees.

Among those comments that leaned towards continued economic and industrial growth, the most common concerns expressed were over;

- specific areas allocated as conservation that may negatively impact future exploration and development;
- conservation areas that have current tenure and/or operations and the uncertain fate of these tenures/operations; and
- potential compensation for lost investment and future revenue.

There was relatively little concern about the overall percentage of land allocated to mixed-use resource, although some noted that the proposed disturbance thresholds should be set at a level that will not impede development. There are also some concerns that the proposed distribution of conservation areas significantly favours oil sands development over forestry and mineral mining, especially with the large amount of conservation area that RAC identified in the northern portion of the region.

Comments that prioritize conservation tended to stress that there should be a larger allocation of conservation lands , with comments ranging from 20 per cent as a minimum, to inclusion of the maximum 32 per cent that RAC discussed (20 per cent recommended + 12 per cent optional), to 50 per cent of the region and occasionally more. Likewise, these comments encouraged a lower allowable land disturbance threshold and expressed greater concern regarding oil sand disturbance than they did over forestry.

### **Private Lands**

Concerns were expressed that the LARP might impact on privately owned lands, noting that private ownership should be respected and that private lands should not be included in conservation or recreation areas. When there is a conflict, it was felt that the property should be bought by the province or the owner compensated for impact on the private land use.



## Municipal Lands

It was stated by some that municipalities should retain the ability to determine land use within their boundaries.

## Consultation

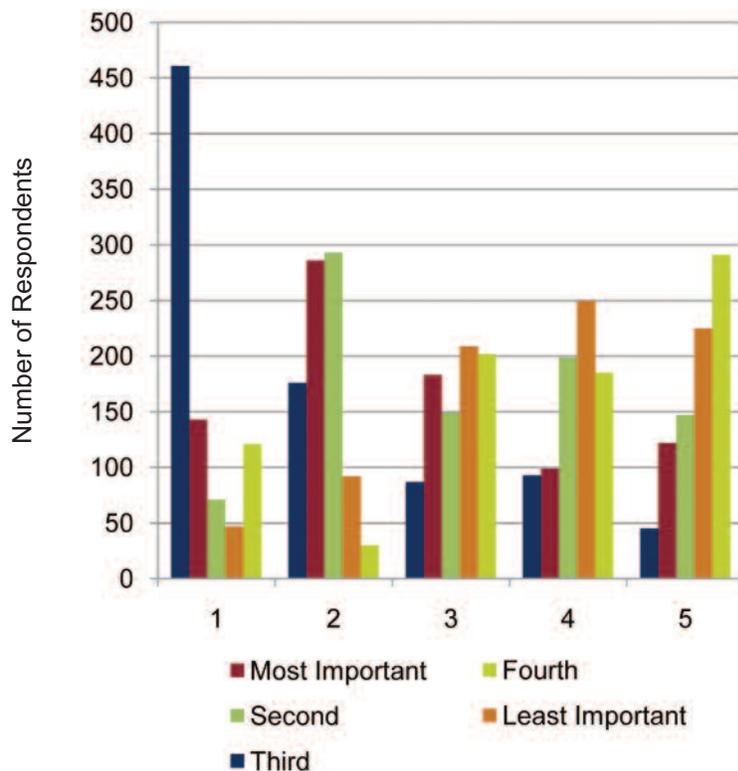
A number of parties felt there should have been more consultation with affected parties before the current stage, and that future consultation should occur before the plan is approved. These assertions were most commonly associated with recreational users and with aboriginal persons, particularly from Fort McKay.

## Traditional Use

Some respondents were unclear about the term traditional use and to whom it applies. Although traditional use is indicated as allowable in all land-use classifications, there is still concern that access will be limited, or that the proposed land-use classification system would have impacts on those who engage in traditional use.



- The RAC suggested a number of key strategies for mitigating timber shortfalls to support the long-term viability of the forestry industry. Rank the following key strategies from most to least important for mitigating timber shortfalls.





Reference Number	Workbook Content – Key Strategies to be Prioritized
1	Require oil sands producers to minimize the size and duration of land disturbance
2	Implement integrated land management
3	Expand intensive forest management on public lands
4	Increase timber production from tree plantations on private lands
5	Work to reduce timber losses due to natural factors

**9. Please share any additional comments regarding the RAC’s recommendations related to mitigation of potential timber shortfalls.**

As indicated in the responses to question eight, minimizing land disturbance from oil sands development was the preferred strategy and was frequently referenced in the responses, along with comments that a closer working relationship between oil and forestry industries could also lessen the impact of the LARP on the forestry industry. It was also noted that, while there may be room for improvement, there was support for integrated land management (ILM) and reimbursement for lost timber due to oil sands disturbances through the existing timber damage assessment.

Some comments opposed industrial development in general, and promoted conservation of the boreal forest as the primary goal for the region. However, there were comments that forestry is an important industry in the region with strong economic and social contributions.

**Management Intent**

A number of comments questioned the management intent of timber mitigation strategies. The key issues raised were a perceived lack of detail regarding the different strategies and the overall intent of their implementation. There were also a number of comments questioning to what degree there actually would be timber losses, and others indicated that too much attention was being paid to the forestry industry given its value relative to the oil sands. A number of comments suggested that forestry is a valuable and sustainable industry that should not be secondary to oil sands. Several cautioned against increasing timber harvesting, while others noted the need for monitoring and enforcement to ensure that the practices meet Alberta standards.



## **Intensive Forestry Management**

Support for intensive forestry management was moderate to low, with frequent concerns voiced regarding the value, practicality and potentially harmful effects of human activity such as fertilizing and using insecticides, monoculture and watering of tree stands. The need for biodiversity, including maintaining old growth tree stands, was repeatedly emphasized. Natural disturbances such as fire and insects were largely considered unavoidable. However, a number of comments also suggested that forest management practices do a good job of preserving the landscape in a natural state, and new techniques are designed to mimic natural processes (i.e. cutblocks looking like natural fire disturbance, etc.). They added that they are appropriate and should continued to be implemented according to current and emerging best practices as part of an overall land management program.



## **Economic Impact**

A number of comments indicated a need for a thorough understanding of the impact of implementing the RAC's advice on the overall economics of the region, including compensation for lost production. It was noted that some timber agreements currently in place can run up to 80 years and that if the RAC's advice is implemented, these would have to be bought out. Regarding the economics of forestry, comments suggested that there should be more focus on economical access to timber harvesting areas in close proximity to processing facilities, and increased processing capacity in the region instead of sending raw timber away for processing.

## **Integrated Land Management**

There was general support for ILM, however, there were a number of comments indicating a need for greater information regarding the intent and proposed approach. Comments suggested that a closer working relationship among all industries in the area could improve ILM outcomes. There were a small number of comments that questioned the use of ILM, primarily noting that there is a lack of understanding regarding cumulative effects.



## **Forestry Practices**

A number commented on forestry practices indicating a need to evaluate and implement best practices. Several comments opposed clear cutting, both as an environmentally stressful practice and because the clear cut regions were often

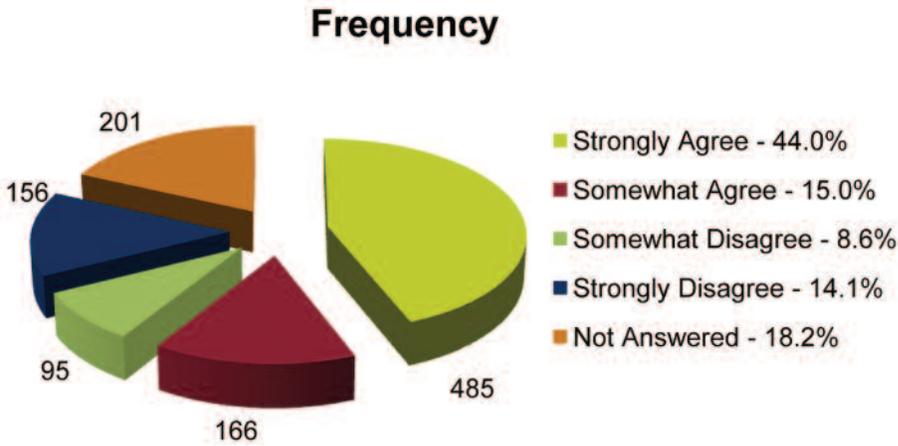


perceived to become popular unmanaged off-road recreation areas, harming the environment. There was also opposition to the use of genetically modified trees in replanting efforts, although replanting efforts that minimize long-term effects of harvesting and promote biodiversity were generally viewed as appropriate. Concern was also expressed regarding harvesting in watersheds.

**Agri-forestry**

This received the least support of RAC’s agricultural recommendations. Concerns ranged from the long-term impacts of monoculture forestry and the lack of bio-diversity, to tree-stock vulnerability, insects and disease, and the environmental footprint of related agricultural practices. In spite of the low-level of support for agri-forestry, there were a small number of comments that propose private agri-forestry should be allowed and, in one instance, even promoted economic supports to help the owner during the initial maturation period. Comments were made that there is virtually no support in the region for agri-forestry on public lands except when referenced as a reclamation practice.

**10. The RAC recommends setting a land disturbance threshold in the mixed-use resource area. How strongly do you agree with need to establish a land disturbance threshold?**





## 11. Please share any additional comments regarding the proposed land disturbance threshold.

Respondents supported this concept but commented that details describing how and when (timelines) thresholds would be implemented were lacking. Some strongly agreed that there is a need to protect ecosystems within the mixed-use resource area, even suggesting that a threshold should become law. Many recommended that the disturbed areas need to be reclaimed as soon as possible. A cap on disturbance was generally described as a good idea by supporters of the disturbance threshold. Some supporters did not want government or industry to set the limit; rather they recommended an independent environmental standards commission should be set up instead.

## 15 Per Cent Land Disturbance Threshold

Some industry representatives commented that there was no rationale for the threshold number chosen. Others disagreed with threshold limits because large producers develop faster than smaller companies with less impact. Some non-industry respondents said the number should be higher; others said it should be decreased because current industry practices were seen as highly destructive and disruptive. Others stated that a disturbance threshold makes more sense for areas like conservation and agricultural lands, but not within the mixed-use resource area.

Respondents suggested that people who live in the area, especially aboriginals, should be involved in establishing the threshold number. The intensity of the disturbance should be used as a factor. The limit should be based on sound science. To some, the number seemed arbitrary; they wanted to know what the number should be from an ecological perspective. Suggestions were made that a complete range of information on the impact to all industries and interests must be considered. Some preferred a target rather than a threshold. Others stated the threshold should carefully consider cumulative effects as well as the impacts of reclamation.

Some said the use of a threshold is a simple approach. They added that another option is a more effective and complex framework approach whereby ecological indicators are monitored and thresholds would trigger different management actions. Wetlands should be included in this area as they are a dominant feature on the landscape. Also include recreation features, trails and buffers around developments. Disturbances should take into account the effect on surrounding communities and sensitive environmental areas,



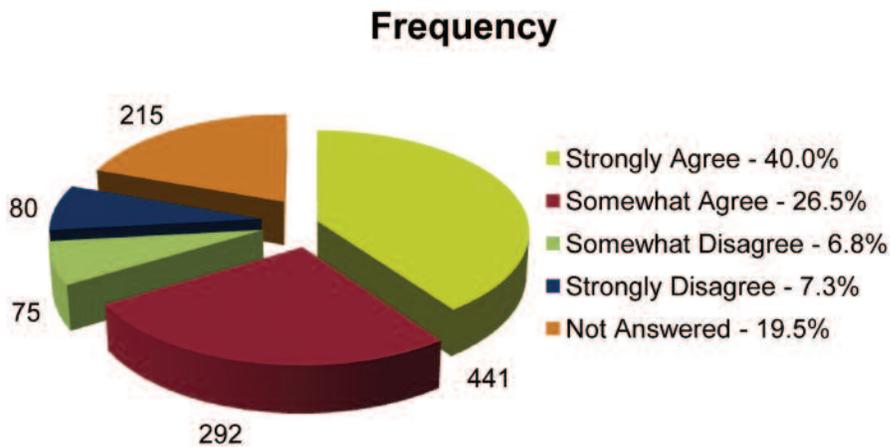


not just on how much natural resource can be extracted. Aboriginals, ecologists, conservationists and others should be a part of the decision-making process that sets thresholds.

## Development

Some industry respondents noted that the investment community is taking note of increased government restrictions on development, and this affects the flow of capital to the province. Some people commented that they believe the forest industry needs to adopt harvesting and forest management practices that are ecologically sound and consistent with the natural ecology of the region. The basis of the 15 per cent land disturbance threshold for oil sands was unclear for some, and they felt that it must be defined in order to create an appropriate effects-based management framework consistent with other management frameworks. Others wanted industries to work together to reduce disturbance. Some people voiced their opposition to the development of the oil sands beyond what is being developed today, and many also recommended a reduction in production.

**12. The RAC proposed that disturbed lands be progressively reclaimed and repurposed for a variety of new uses based on the evolving needs of the region. How strongly do you agree with this recommendation?**





### 13. Please share any additional comments regarding progressive reclamation and re-purposing to a variety of other uses.

Several respondents suggested that reclamation is necessary and that they believe reclamation needs to be sped up. Some felt that repurposing land (not returning to the original state, but using for another purpose) should be the exception not the rule. Aboriginal groups noted that traditional land use needs to be prioritized in all reclamation processes. Some respondents recommended that a progressive reclamation certification process be implemented to provide clear expectations and transparency for industry throughout the life of their projects. Suggestions were made to repurpose lands near northern population centres, especially Fort McMurray, to agricultural land to offset the high cost of produce. Comments were made that access for low-impact tourism and recreation should be a priority.

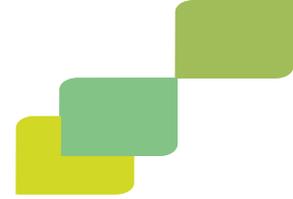


Some people noted that they preferred the existing equivalent land capability system as the standard rather than progressive reclamation and repurposing. Others went on to state that industry has not honoured existing requirements; therefore, new concepts should not be introduced at this time, including repurposing lands with progressive reclamation. This has many people concerned that a sub-standard process has been combined with progressive reclamation that provides an easy out for industry. Others wanted to see more specific information about repurposing land before they can support this concept.

### Implementation Timeline

Respondents recommended a more rapid reclamation process, especially in the boreal forest and in gravel extraction areas. Minimizing industry's footprint would help in this regard. Others commented that the timing has to make sense for the resource developer in accordance with plans submitted at the project application stage. Some people felt it was vital that access for recreation be maintained and well managed throughout the reclamation/repurposing cycle. A desire by industry to obtain reclamation certificates faster was mentioned, and that incentives should be offered to execute reclamation within a given timeframe or be subject to substantial fines. Some felt current operations are being reclaimed in a timely fashion; while other oil sands operators felt it is unfair to rush reclamation.





## **Ecology Concerns**

Some people felt forestry interests should be weighed against timber supply and other critical ecosystem services provided by boreal forests. They said that ecological needs of the region are as important as any other needs. Others commented that many landscapes such as bogs, fens, wetlands and riparian zones, (integral to maintaining biodiversity) are very hard to reclaim. Some believe there is evidence that reclamation has not worked to the level asserted by industry, especially in the boreal forest. Others recommended actions included proper planting of new trees, and giving the land a break from industrial production in high intensity areas. There is a concern that there is no clear plan on how to reclaim tailing ponds.

## **Reclamation Responsibility**

Many people felt oil and gas companies should be held more responsible for reclamation and that more regulations, controls and penalties be applied for non-compliance. Some said that governance within industry needs to be improved. It was suggested that clean-up occur on a continual basis in order not to saddle future generations with the cost and disturbance. There were arguments both for and against access to disturbed areas for motorized and non-motorized recreation with a general consensus that the province monitor and enforce existing and future access management policies.

## **Criteria for Repurposing Land**

Generally there was concern about the quality of land once it was repurposed and with access after the fact. Some people wanted to see pristine areas awarded a higher value than reclaimed areas and that this be reflected in determining the per centage of disturbed areas. Some felt there's a lack of understanding about how to repurpose and reclaim land successfully and a clearer definition is needed as to what are acceptable uses..

Some said excessive costs will diminish the success of repurposing land and, where some land accommodates more than one industry, future industrial activity should not be off-limits. A concern was raised that a decrease, or a potential decrease, in the annual allowable cut (AAC) for forestry would need to be mitigated and to honour forestry management areas (FMAs) and water withdrawal agreements.

It was felt that repurposing land should emphasize conservation, traditional aboriginal use and low-impact recreation. Some people felt it is important that public input and notification be a key driver with a repurposing of land mandate going forward and that it be determined who is best to manage this system. Others suggested a science-based, third party council could fulfill this role. Some requested that consultation take place at the local level with affected groups and municipalities.



## Access

Some respondents felt that RAC didn't comment on how traditional and new recreation pursuits will be allowed. They felt that trails and trail corridors should be included as recreation opportunities and that the all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use be allowed on mined areas. Hunters and fisherman wanted unrestricted access to carry out their activities, as they feel they are not having a negative impact on the land. Others recommended that all access be restricted in reclaimed areas to help achieve successful reclamation. Some felt that government should implement access control through regulations and enforcement and not hold others responsible.

### 14. Please share any additional comments regarding the RAC's advice on agriculture areas.

Overall, the answers to this question indicate moderate agreement with the RAC's advice on agriculture. The view of agriculture ranges fairly evenly between being a relatively minor use in relation to other land-use classifications, to having a significant long-term regional value that should be a priority. A number of comments noted there should be a zero net loss of agricultural land in the region, or that the current level of agricultural land is appropriate, while other comments proposed a need for increased agricultural land for food crops.

The proposed agricultural lands are mainly privately owned. A number of comments stressed that private ownership needs to be respected, ensuring owners' significant self-determination in regard to their land use. Depending on the amount of private land in some of the conservation and recreation areas, the compensation could be significant.

## Uses of Agricultural Land

### Food Crops

There were comments stating that there is an increasing need and demand for locally grown (often organic) food. This was also frequently identified as sustainable economic development by promoting regional or national crop self-sufficiency as a desirable objective. A small number of comments propose that climate change will lead to improved crop productivity and the potential for greater crop diversity at more northern latitudes; while others cautioned against drought that may stem from climate change. An equally small number of comments mentioned that much of the region's agricultural land has relatively low agricultural value. It was also mentioned that many agricultural practices – particularly





land-clearing, chemical treatments (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides) and irrigation practices – have a large and significant environmental footprint which raises questions regarding agriculture’s long-term sustainability.

### **Livestock Grazing**

A small number of comments specifically addressed grazing as an appropriate agricultural use. Some concerns were stated that grazing on public lands, particularly reforested land (i.e. lands that have been replanted after harvest) causes damage and impacts reclamation efforts. There is also concern that intensive grazing practices are not environmentally sustainable.

### **Country Residential**

A few people opposed country residential development (without noting a reason). Where country residential was referenced positively, it was in regards to landowner rights and the ability to subdivide and sell property.

### **Oil Sands**

The issue of oil sands development evoked strong comments on both sides. A number of comments challenged the statement that “intensive resource development is an overriding temporary use” on agricultural lands, stating that resource development should not supersede the primary agricultural use on productive agricultural lands. Overall, there was moderate support for in-situ resource extraction on agricultural lands, with acknowledgement there is a well-established precedent of the coexistence of hydrocarbon production and agriculture. There was some support for open-pit resource extraction on agricultural lands.

### **Private Ownership**

Private ownership was identified as another consideration, and it was felt that owners’ rights should be respected and compensation paid for lands accessed for resource extraction. A very small number of comments suggested that resource extraction should always take precedence over agricultural uses, and private ownership should not be allowed to hold up development.

### **Conservation**

Agriculture was viewed as a potentially sustainable land use, depending on the agriculture practices applied and impacts of future climate change. However, agriculture was noted to have a significant impact on the land and does not meet conservation criteria.



## Population Centres

The main theme was that as population centres grow they often expand into agricultural lands. Comments cautioned against urban sprawl and compounding the practice by expanding agricultural lands into forested areas. Comments that referenced private ownership upheld owners' rights to develop lands for residential purposes.

## Recreation

A small number of comments noted agricultural land-use areas have substantial recreation value with recreational trails (for motorized vehicles and non-motorized applications) hunting, fishing and trapping. They noted that considering the close proximity of agricultural land to population centres, recreation opportunities should be maintained. Some pointed out that recreational value is important in terms of quality of life, and recreation pursuits have economic potential as well.



## Management Intent

The key topic in regard to management intent of agricultural lands was the RAC's recommendation that "intensive resource development is an overriding temporary use" on agricultural lands. This statement was frequently challenged in the comments, giving secondary use priority over the land-use classification's primary use. However, the approach was also frequently supported. By extension, there was some question as to how the "overriding temporary use" will work in regards to private ownership of lands and owners' rights.

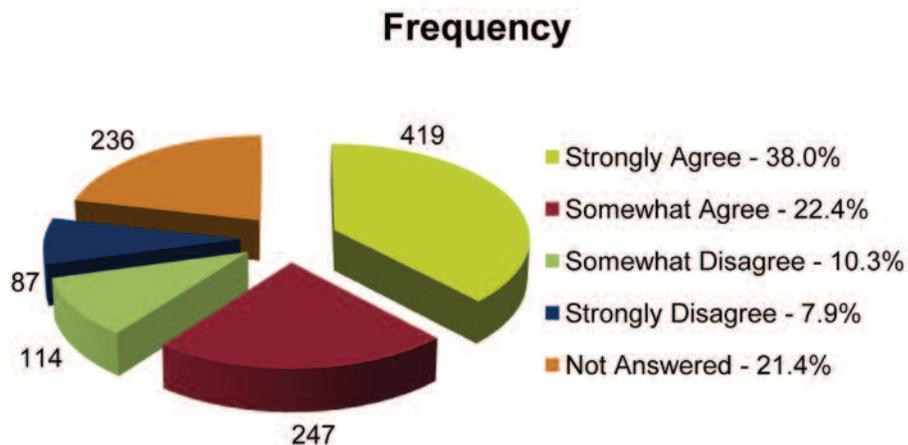
Other concerns mentioned included:

- Potential impacts on agricultural lands that are within conservation and recreation areas;
- Clarification of what constitutes "the most productive agricultural lands"; and
- The RAC's recommendations do not take advantage of potential agricultural growth opportunities.





**15. The RAC proposes that the government proactively plan and develop infrastructure in anticipation of economic and population growth. How strongly do you agree with this recommendation?**



**16. Please share any additional comments regarding the RAC’s recommendations on infrastructure planning in the region.**

Some respondents warned that future lack of infrastructure in Fort McMurray due to the growth and development of the oil sands industry could occur without proper planning. They said that oil development and wealth creation should be reflected in better infrastructure. The value in having a transition plan that promotes development of infrastructure where desired was mentioned. It was stated that information for planning oil sands development is possible through information submitted as part of the project regulatory process. A critical point was the development of social and health infrastructure.

A need to plan for recreational infrastructure, especially non-motorized trails was indicated. It was suggested that industry should pay more of the costs than current taxes and royalties cover. A more sustainable pace of growth was recommended. Respondents wanted to see Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plans (CRISPs) incorporated for all three oil sands areas into the LARP. While twinning of Highway 63 was noted as important, it was thought roads should not cross all over the land to support growth. Many supported planning for new residents, but would like to see a less transient population in the area. Project approvals need to be tied to the area’s ability to accommodate growth in the form of adequate schools, hospitals and roads.

### **Growth and Planning Comments**

Some thought basing Alberta’s future on continued growth was a mistake and not sustainable. To them, growth needs to be slowed and better managed. Further, they felt that the region should demonstrate a cutting-



edge example of high-tech, green solutions to energy development and production. Respondents suggested considering the full cost of production including the value of forest, water and air quality and other ecological factors when looking at the cost of industrial development. Orderly growth is needed for all aspects of the oil sands. Respondents suggested that industry has to have certainty that planned developments can take place. Some were concerned that regional plans may jeopardize industry development potential, having detrimental effects on economic growth. They stated that it's important to balance economics, environment and social development; expansion of one at the detriment of another is wrong. Life cycle infrastructure improvements were deemed required because resources in the areas are largely non-renewable.



It was recommended by some that growth should be capped until the infrastructure deficit is removed. Support was expressed for ecosystem-based sustainable forestry and tourism, not non-renewable bitumen. They felt while planning and building transportation infrastructure is required to meet future needs, this can encourage new development and should be done in a sustainable way.

They said that LAR lacks a proactive strategy for infrastructure demands.

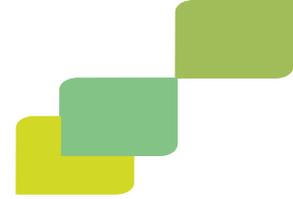
### **Infrastructure Cost**

Some said not to over-build and pay needlessly for infrastructure that may not be needed. There must be certainty expensive infrastructure is required. It was suggested industry should pay for infrastructure development, not taxpayers. Some respondents felt royalties are small compared to the profit margins of industry and they should be required to plan, fund and develop the required infrastructure. The infrastructure needs to withstand the impact of heavy trucks.



### **Impact to Municipalities**

Some felt municipalities should not have to support a large shadow population and work camp residents. They said communities should play the lead role in decisions involving economic development and population growth in their regions. Some suggested the province needs to help create vibrant and welcoming communities and needs to partner with communities and community agencies.



## Environmental Impact

It was mentioned that development should:

- Build to reduce footprints;
- build up, not out;
- build using green energy; and
- employ local people.

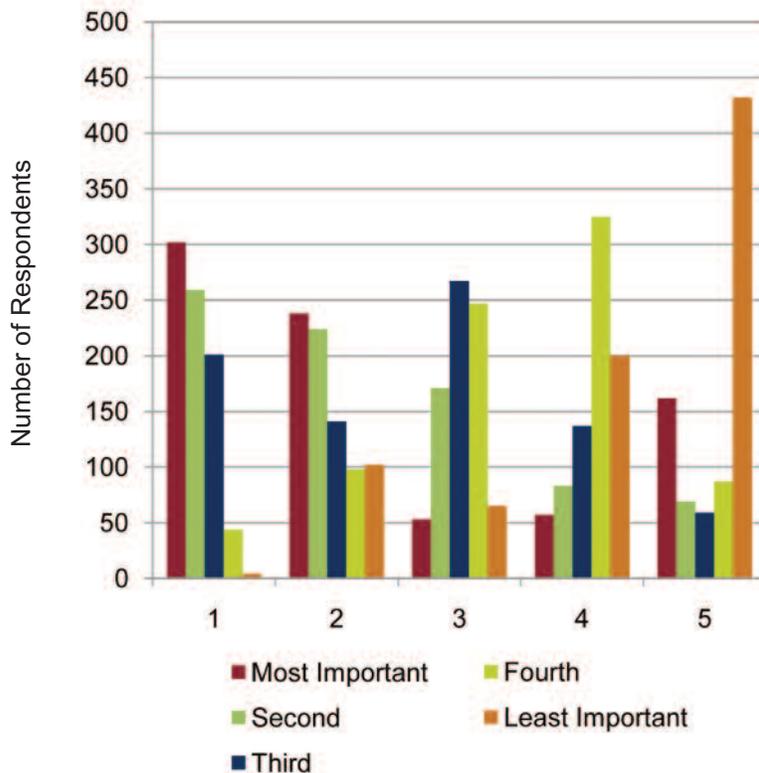
They added that infrastructure should not take precedence over clean water, critical habitat or conservation areas.

## Recreation

According to some respondents, recreation infrastructure was largely missed. They wanted more consideration for trails, campgrounds, protected land where it is possible to connect with nature. They said with more people, there is a need for more recreation.

## Section 3: Land Conservation Objectives

**17. Rank the importance of the following factors/considerations from most to least important when deciding which landscapes to conserve. Use each option (most-least important) only once.**

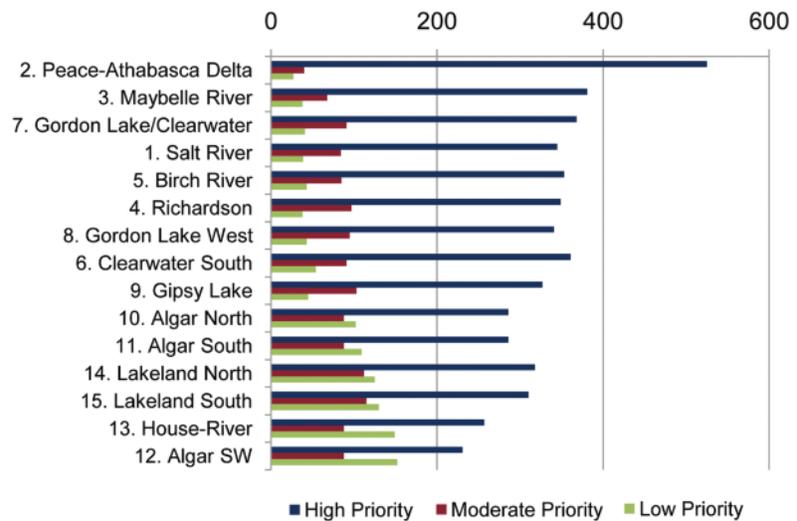




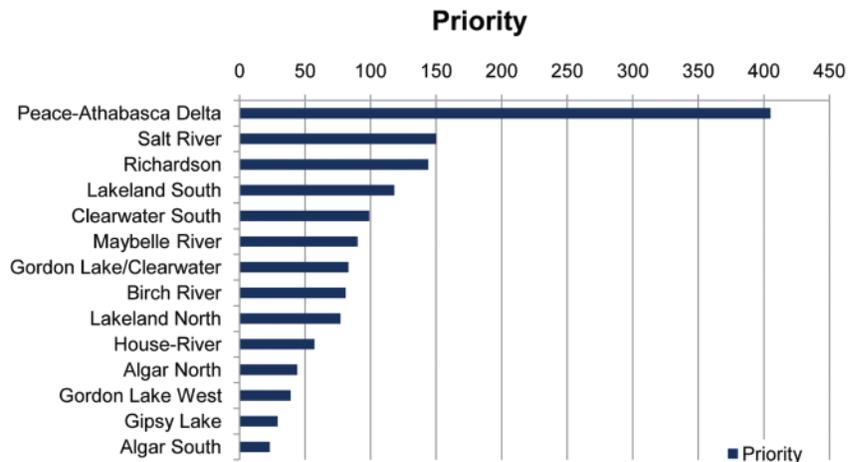
Reference Number	Workbook Content – Options for Conservation of Landscapes
1	Protecting the most environmentally sensitive lands and features
2	Creating areas that are large in size and well connected
3	Matching the habitat patterns of the woodland caribou
4	Ensuring conservation lands are dispersed throughout the region
5	Minimizing the economic costs to Albertans

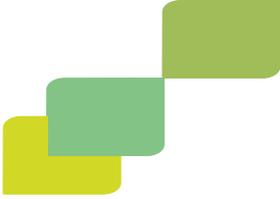


**18. The RAC has proposed a number of lands for designation as conservation areas. Rate the importance of each of the proposed conservation lands. You only need to rate the ones you wish.**

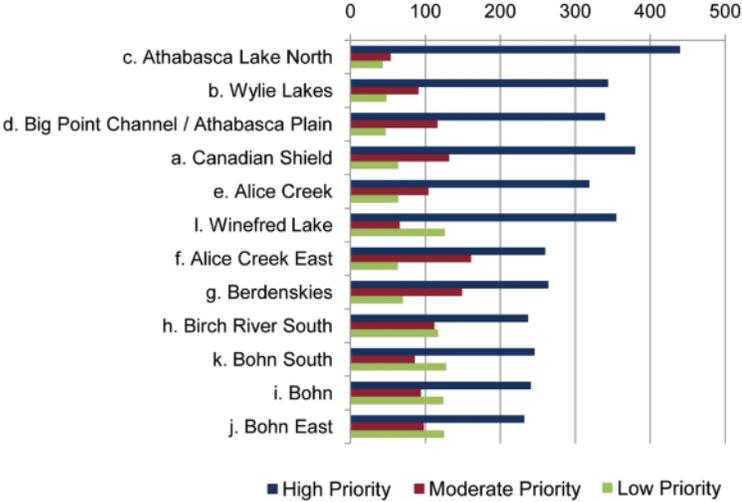


**19. Identify your top three priorities from the list above.**

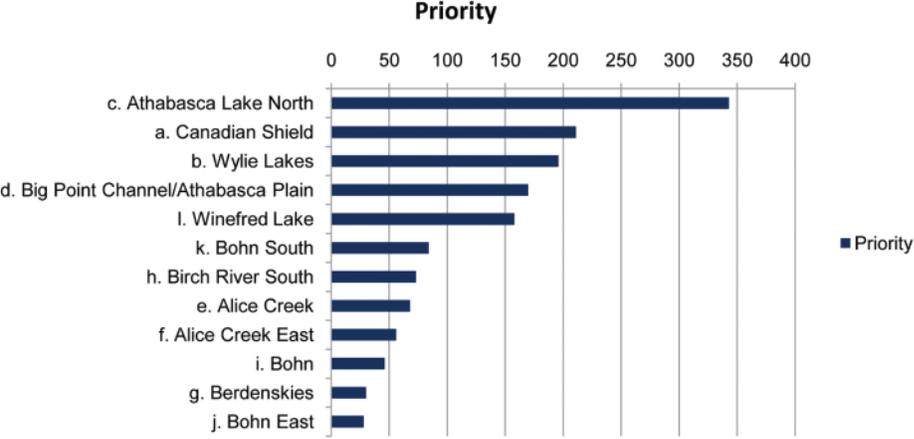




**20. RAC recommended additional conservation areas for greater than the 20 per cent conservation target. Rate the proposed additional conservation areas.**



**21. Identify your top three priorities from the list above.**





**22. Is there an area you would like to see conserved that has not been proposed by the RAC? Identify up to three additional areas.**

Areas frequently mentioned as potential conservation areas included the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range, the Athabasca River, McClelland Lake and Fen, the Firebag River watershed, the shores and surrounding area of Lake Athabasca, the Clearwater River and the area around Fort McKay. Numerous other individual suggestions were also put forth by respondents, including general calls for more protection of water resources and more conservation areas in the southern portion of the region, regardless of the size limit in the terms of reference. Many questioned why Wood Buffalo National Park was not included in the borders of the Lower Athabasca Region, feeling that it already serves as a conservation area and links to existing and proposed conservation areas within the region. Other respondents referred to the need for connectivity between conservation areas to increase their value as habitat for various species, especially the woodland caribou.



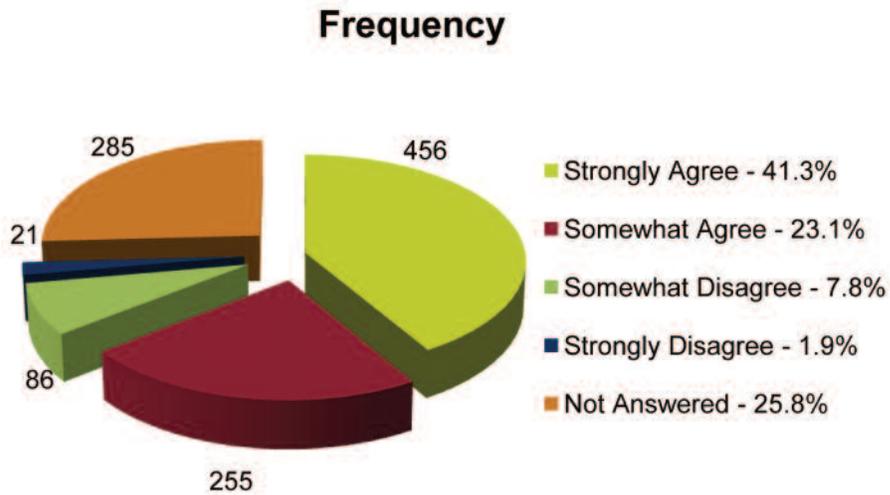
**23. Please share any additional comments regarding land conservation objectives in the region.**

Generally, respondents supported the need for an increase in the amount of conservation area within the Lower Athabasca Region. This desire was tempered with the caution that more clarity on the management objectives of the conservation areas, the reasoning behind the choosing of each specific area, and the means by which existing and future industrial activity in proposed conservation areas would be managed. Many felt that if industrial activity will not be allowed to occur in the proposed areas, a clear method for fair compensation for losses must be outlined by the Government of Alberta

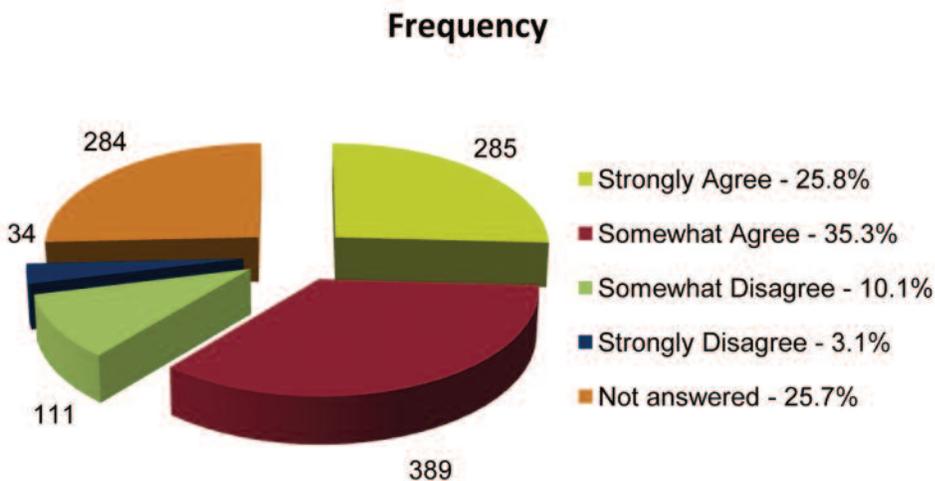


## Section 4: Regional Air and Water Thresholds

24. How strongly do you agree with the RAC's recommendations to establish air and water thresholds, limits and triggers?



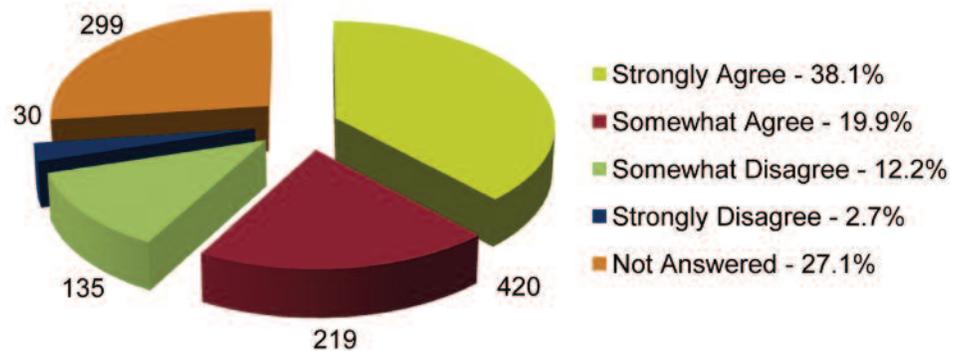
25. Based on the description provided earlier, how strongly do you agree that establishing and using air and water management frameworks will improve management of the region's air and water?





**26. How strongly do you agree with the RAC's suggestion that a land and biodiversity framework be developed and implemented?**

**Frequency**



**27. Please share any additional comments regarding the RAC's recommendations on air and water management frameworks.**

Consistent with the results from questions 25 and 26, the comments on the development of air and water frameworks and a land and biodiversity framework were highly supportive of the RAC's recommendations. Strong, well implemented thresholds were generally identified as important to both human and ecological health. They were also identified as having the potential to improve the international image or understanding of oil sands development, and having the potential to build trust locally, regionally and provincially.

Many of the responses to this question indicated concern with the management intent, particularly not having the frameworks available to evaluate the details. Further, respondents provided input on how the frameworks should be developed, as well as specifics of what measures the frameworks should address. A small number of comments indicated concern that lowering cost is considered a desirable outcome, stating that the main outcome must be enhanced ecological protection. There was substantial agreement that the frameworks will only be effective if strongly monitored and enforced.



### **Framework Development**

There was strong agreement that the frameworks must be science-based and not influenced by special interests. It was noted in a couple instances that reconciling scientific



knowledge with emotional responses of the public may be difficult. Some respondents felt that scientific knowledge is limited in regard to long-term effects, and the frameworks should prioritize caution. It was frequently noted that the frameworks should be clear, transparent, developed on sound research, be independent of special interests and peer reviewed.

It was recommended that the frameworks contribute to a comprehensive environmental management strategy that incorporates all development and impacts on human health and the natural ecosystems. Respondents said the outcomes must be measurable, as must be the thresholds and triggers. As well, there were a number of comments that indicated the frameworks should incorporate an adaptability strategy to ensure that they continue to reflect the best practices, knowledge, science, and technology over time.

## **Measures or Additional Frameworks**

### **Air**

As well as the existing measures, a number of other measures were suggested. Occasional reference was made that all pollutants be monitored, although no specific measures were referenced. Suggested measures or additional frameworks included: heavy metals, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), particulate matter and ozone, acid deposition, greenhouse gasses (GHGs) and carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). However, it was noted that CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring was outside the RAC's terms of reference, that CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring may not be effective on a regional scale, that urban areas have a significant impact on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and that urban areas are already regulated under the Specified Gas Emitters Regulation.

### **Water**

The only specified pollutant in water that was identified was arsenic. There were several references that water quality must ensure human and wildlife health and, therefore, any toxic chemicals that enter the river system must be assessed. In regard to water quantity, there were a number of comments that recommended regulation of water flow and, in some instances, recommended that there be no withdrawal of water during low flow years. A number of comments were received proposing the creation of a wetland management framework that would protect the quality and quantity of all wetlands in the region. In some instances, this could lead potentially to a zero-net loss of wetland.

### **Land and Biodiversity**

There was strong support for land and biodiversity objectives. There were some general assumptions that the frameworks would protect habitat, endangered species and both plant and wildlife biodiversity. However, the largest number of comments regarding such a framework indicated a



need for more information on management intent and questions about what would be included in the framework as well as the measures and metrics that would be included. In addition, there were requests that the frameworks be based on sound science.

### **Waste Management**

Waste management was referenced by a few respondents, indicating a need to include industrial waste (tailings, sulphur, etc.) as well as landfill management.

### **Thresholds and Triggers**

Thresholds and triggers were generally positively received. The only negative comments were that some felt triggers and limits are academic and may not yield results. They believe there could be an undesired effect of a resource extraction race before thresholds and triggers are reached. It was suggested that triggers and thresholds be science based. In regard to the monitoring, management and mitigation requirements, it was advised these should be subregional, focusing on the sources of the environmental impact as opposed to a blanket policy across the region.

A large number of comments were received recommending that thresholds and triggers be set at low levels. A few asserted that current levels or lower are what is required. There were also a small number of comments recommending that thresholds and triggers be set low and they have a significant impact on the ecological integrity of the region. An industry perspective was also noted that suggested undue or artificial restrictions on development must not be imposed. The use of best available technology economically available (BATEA) was referenced as a suitable consideration in establishing the thresholds and triggers.

### **Monitoring and Enforcement**

Monitoring and enforcement will be discussed later in this document in the analysis of responses to question 29. However, the need for strong monitoring and enforcement was evident in the comments on this question. Comments like the “frameworks need to have teeth,” they need to be supported from the top and have legislated authority were common. There was strong support for an independent reporting and monitoring component, as well as for a strong provincial lead, often with a recommended arm’s length body conducting the monitoring. A large number of comments mentioned the province should support monitoring and enforcement with financial and human resources.

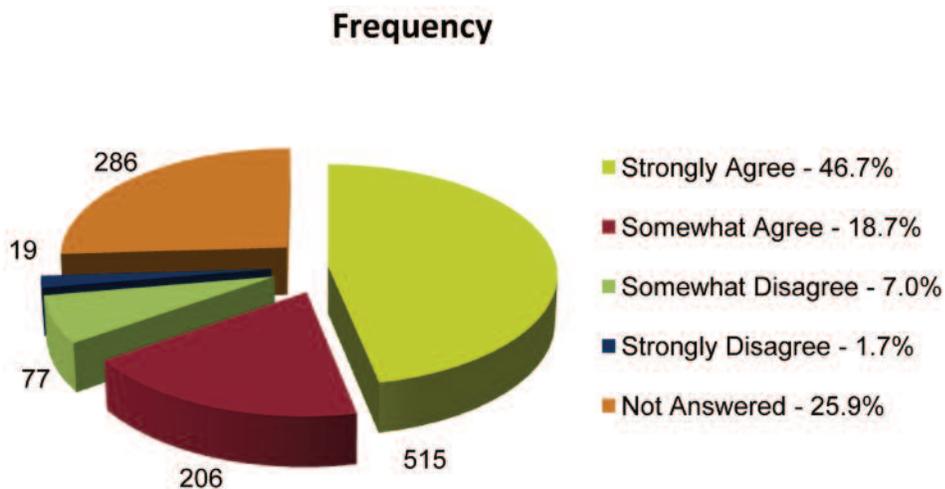




## Integration of Authorities

Many stakeholders were identified whose input was important to the development and implementation of air, land, water and biodiversity frameworks. Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories, and their respective agencies and organizations, have a significant interest, as do Alberta regions upstream (water) from the LAR and bordering it. Within the region, a significant amount of work has been done by watershed planning advisory councils (WPACs), watershed stakeholder groups (WSGs); monitoring groups such as the Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA), Wood Buffalo Environmental Association (WBEA), the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program (RAMP) and the proposed Greenhouse Gas Working Group (GGWG) may all have a role to play. Industrial stakeholders suggested that they generate a substantial amount of data in the area that can be used in development and monitoring, which they feel is not being effectively used today. With the expected government ministries and departments (Sustainable Resource Development (SRD), Alberta Environment (AENV), etc.) that will be involved, a number of comments suggested there was a need for input from aboriginal peoples. Only one recommendation was made regarding these bodies working effectively work together by creating a governing body to organize and co-ordinate efforts. Additional strategies were offered in the discussion of question 29.

### 28. How strongly do you agree with the RAC's recommendations to improve regional monitoring and reporting?





## **29. Please share any additional comments regarding the RAC's recommendations on improving reporting and monitoring.**

Responses to this question were consistent with the responses to question 28, demonstrating strong support for a regional monitoring system, with a shift to a cumulative effects management system. As with other topics, there was some uncertainty as to the management intent in the absence of the completed regulations, however a number of important elements were identified:

### **Management Intent**

There was some concern that the lack of clear regulation and implementation plans at this time makes evaluating the management intent impossible. Respondents also said that streamlining processes and reducing cost were not suitable objectives for improved monitoring and enforcement.

### **Current Monitoring and Enforcement**

Several industries are involved in monitoring and reporting. Comments on current practices were split, with some saying current strategies were effective, and others saying they were largely inadequate. There was also comment that the quality of science and monitoring in Alberta is effective – even world class – but is also fragmented, complex and expensive, resulting in programs that do not meet industry or stakeholder needs.

### **Cumulative Effects Management (CEM)**

There were a few comments suggesting CEM is too complicated and relies on too many unknowns to be effective. However, the vast majority of comments viewed CEM as key to overall management. In regard to monitoring and enforcement, it was mentioned that CEM should address the impacts of development, agriculture and recreation, as well as industry.

### **Consistency**

Viewed as vital to enhancing monitoring and enforcement as well as:

- ensuring industry compliance;
- consistent measures;
- methodology for data collection;



- 
- application across industries; and
  - standardization of reporting.

The identified outcomes of improved consistency and standardization were: less duplication; improved knowledge and understanding; and increased value from the data collected. To be most useful there was also a suggestion that improvements in data collection and reporting are best accompanied by improvements in analysis and interpretation. A noted caveat was that consistency does not equate to quality, and so care must be taken to ensure the measures and methodologies are valid, rigorous and applicable, with monitoring occurring at appropriate times.

## **Reporting and Communication**

Strong data collection and reporting were seen as vital to evaluating and improving management approaches and should have a clear line-of-sight to decision-making, within reasonable timeframes. A large number of comments stated that transparency was a key element, especially in building public co-operation and support. Many comments recommended that standardized data be available to the public, industry and government stakeholders. They said access by third party groups and stakeholders has the potential to further enhance ecological, economic and social outcomes. Publication through an online database was frequently recommended.

## **Enforcement**

Comments such as the policy “needs to have teeth,” “there needs to be stringent fines,” and that there needs to be a judicial component of enforcement appeared throughout the responses to this question. While it was acknowledged that the provincial and possibly the federal governments need to be responsible for enforcement, some comments were skeptical towards government’s commitment to enforce ecological regulations. Improved reporting and communication were seen as tools to address such skepticism. Comments both supporting and opposing a trading and credit system in the enforcement regime were included.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Government of Alberta**

Stakeholders strongly believe the GoA must take the lead in monitoring and enforcement. Specific recommendations were for government to:

- Be responsible for monitoring and enforcement;
- Commit to sufficient funding and human resources
- Co-ordinate involvement by different authorities and independent bodies engaged in monitoring and enforcement.



AENV and SRD were the only ministries specifically identified for involvement.

### **Industry**

Several respondents commented that industry should not be responsible for monitoring and enforcement efforts. They said that industry currently monitors and reports on each project as a condition of approval, and the information is available for assessment by existing organizations as well as being useful in guiding the effectiveness of management practices.

### **Third Party/Independent**

A large number of comments expressed the need for impartial, independent involvement in monitoring and enforcement efforts to remove any potential for stakeholder influence. Suggestions ranged from involvement in establishing thresholds, triggers and evaluation methodologies, to conducting monitoring and reporting, to an independent audit and validation process that could include an independent body of environmental scientists.

### **Stakeholder and Stewardship Groups**

Although a clear strategy or process was not indicated, a number of comments suggested that there was a role for stakeholder and stewardship organizations to play in monitoring and enforcement. Identified organizations included recreation, other user groups, non-government organizations (NGOs) and aboriginal peoples.

### **Funding**

Comments on where funding for monitoring and enforcement initiatives should come from were split. A number of respondents commented that industry should be responsible for a significant portion of the funding, while some argued that the full, or even most, of the burden for funding should not be placed on industry.

### **Integration of Authorities**

A number of authorities currently involved in monitoring and enforcement were identified including AENV, SRD, RAMP, WBEA, CEMA and the Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI). As noted in comments on current monitoring and enforcement, fragmentation, complexity and cost could all have a detrimental impact on the value of monitoring and enforcement. No specific strategies were offered for co-ordination or improving the efficacy of the range of authorities involved.



## Section 5: Human Development Considerations

### 30. Please share any of your comments regarding the RAC's advice on population centres.

Respondents noted a strong belief that communities in the region have not kept pace with population growth. They said the disparity between the population and the physical and social infrastructure and services necessary to support the population has led to a number of challenges and deficiencies that need to be addressed, especially as continued growth is projected. A number of comments propose a moratorium on industrial development until local capacity catches up to current demand and is capable of meeting future growth needs.

Other comments challenge the assumption of continued growth, especially regarding challenges of continued oil sands growth and development in the region, the comments were generally supportive of the RAC's advice on population centres, including the addition of population centres as a land use.

#### Population Centre Growth and Planning

A number of considerations for population centres were identified in responded comments.

#### Management Intent

Other than questioning growth projections, the main concern with management intent in regard to RAC's advice for population centres was that provincial/municipal responsibilities and processes be equitably and responsibly split to facilitate planning and development. There were queries regarding how the inclusion of population centres as a land use will result in cost savings for municipalities.

#### Economic Development

It was frequently noted that strong economies are a significant influence on the development of safe and vibrant communities. Many comments suggested that resource extraction is the most significant contributor to the economy in the region, however a number of others suggest that economic diversification should be promoted as well.

#### Growth

Growth as the result of oil sands development is challenged by some respondents as an unsuitable basic premise. However, even allowing for growth, a number of comments predict that new energy technologies, climate change, shifting global attitudes, practices and resource extinction will lead to significantly reduced demand for hydrocarbons from the region in a timeframe that ranges from 40 to 100 or more years. The fear



expressed was that this will result in significant excess capacity and infrastructure (i.e., ghost towns) in a similar timeframe if the RAC's recommendations for population centres are followed. Likewise, respondents felt population centres need to plan for temporary economic downturns that are likely to occur even if development continues.

### **Integration of Authorities**

Respondents stated the need for clear strategies, roles, responsibilities and process to ensure the province and municipalities work effectively together. It was suggested the province support municipalities before infrastructure deficit situations arise to better meet growth objectives. Several examples of plans and initiatives that need to be considered and incorporated into population centre planning and development were given, and Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plans were mentioned frequently and favourably in this regard.



### **Planning Challenges**

It was acknowledged that urban growth is difficult to predict and to plan for accurately. Respondents said planning and building infrastructure in advance of growth could lead to excess capacity and high costs if growth does not occur. Just-in-time development has difficulty keeping up with growth that exceeds predictions, while responsive development is prone to significant lag-times in infrastructure development. Comments suggest that all three approaches should be considered, but planning and building infrastructure in advance of growth is the most commonly suggested. Several proposed collecting regular data from industrial stakeholders to assess predicted growth on a rolling three-five year basis.

### **Residential Development**

Several comments were made that land available for development has not kept pace with residential demand, especially in areas surrounded by Crown land. Some suggested that while sustainability objectives may be best achieved through increasing density, land must still be made available to ensure access to affordable high-quality housing (for both purchase and rent, as well as for temporary workers).



### **Shadow Population**

A few commented that the large number of temporary workers in the region require and utilize municipal infrastructure. They feel that accommodations are required to recognize the use

that exists beyond the resident tax-base and there needs to be adequate funding and infrastructure development.

## **Transportation Infrastructure**

Roads and air travel are the historic transportation methods of choice throughout the region. Comments reflected that there is a need for additional development of the infrastructure for road and air services, with suggestions that triggers be put in place for incremental enhancements as required. There were also comments that rail be increasingly considered, with consideration given to a high-speed connection.

## **Physical Infrastructure**

As well as regional transportation infrastructure, other requirements for growth included development of municipal transportation infrastructure, as well as adequate utility and waste management infrastructure

## **Social Infrastructure**

Schools, advanced education and training, hospitals, public safety, and recreation and leisure facilities were all identified as necessary social, sustainability and quality of life components in the region. It was mentioned that these facilities are reliant on both the physical infrastructure in which they are housed and on the region's ability to attract qualified professionals.

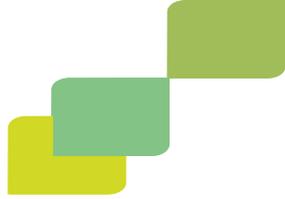
## **Funding**

Beyond the municipal tax-base, both the provincial government and industry were identified as key funding sources. Suggestions included infrastructure funding be derived from royalties, royalty sharing regimes for municipalities be developed and industry redirect some camp funding to municipal infrastructure that would accommodate workers. It was also noted that there can be disparity in tax-base between centres that are relatively close together (Cold Lake and Bonnyville were the examples provided). In this situation, it was suggested that industries located in one community, with employees in another community, cause a tax-dollar disparity between the industrial and residential tax-bases that requires provincial involvement to facilitate equalization.

## **Planning Priorities**

Respondents identified a number of planning priorities. The most frequently mentioned included:

- Minimizing urban footprint (sprawl), limiting area for growth and increasing population density in communities through a range of strategies including criteria placed on Crown land dispositions;





- Sustainable development practices (energy and resource efficient building practices, green energy and sustainable water-use initiatives) and clear identification of resource availability and demand (especially water);
- Communities that are seen as vibrant and attractive places in which to live with leisure and recreation resources, full range of services and infrastructure and access to nature;
- Protection of surrounding forests, waters, wetlands and agricultural lands from overuse and harm, including extensive residential development on shorelines; and
- Incorporation of population impacts into the approval process, and ensure planning and infrastructure will be in place before development is approved.

Less frequently mentioned were:

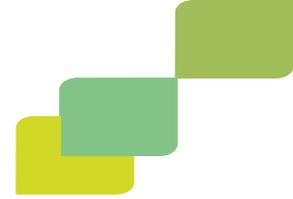
- Strategies to accommodate decreasing population without leaving substantial unused infrastructure when demand for resources decreases or resource extinction occurs;
- Location of population centres near, but not intrusively close, to industrial development;
- Expansion of existing population centres before considering the development of new ones;
- Ensuring support for both large and small centres as necessary;
- Establishment of a process and criteria for identifying and establishing new population centres when identified as the best response to changing conditions;
- Plans for waste management;
- Funding allocation commensurate with the regional contribution to the provincial tax and royalty base; and
- Monitoring centres near resource extraction for environmental effects.

Priorities specific to individual municipalities or locations and frequently mentioned were:

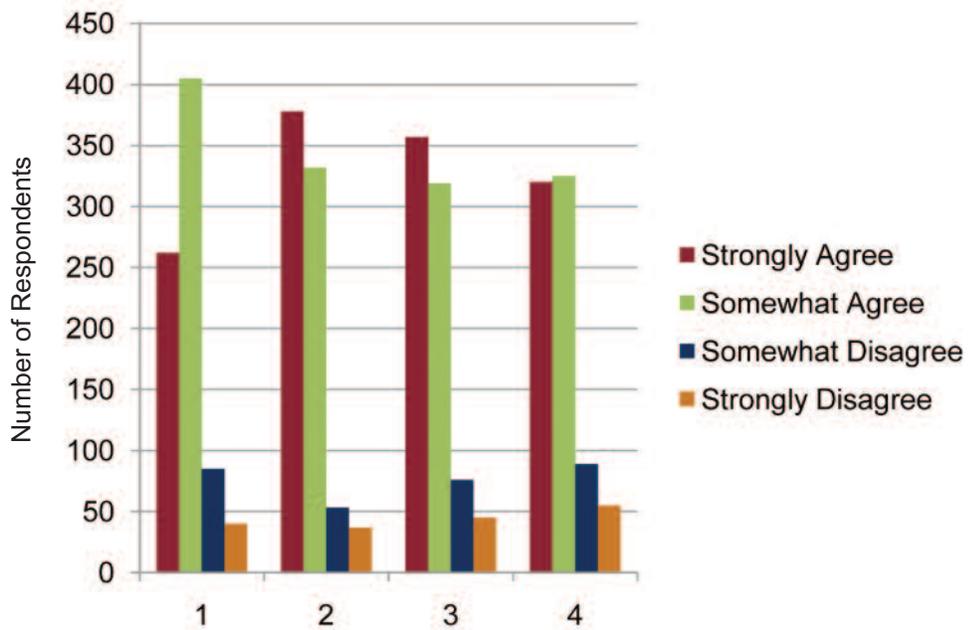
- Municipal development for Fort McMurray; and
- Consultation and development in Fort McKay to address industry growth north of Fort McMurray, where much of the industrial development is occurring. Servicing growth in this region could also include establishing a new community north of Fort McKay.

Additionally, establishing a new community near Conklin is referenced once.





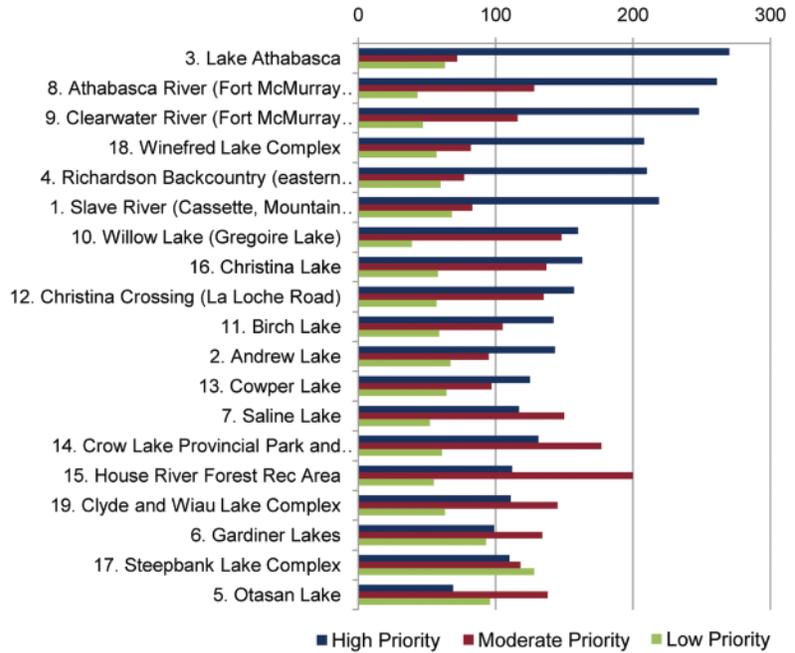
**31. How strongly do you agree with each of the following strategies to enhance recreation and tourism opportunities in the region?**



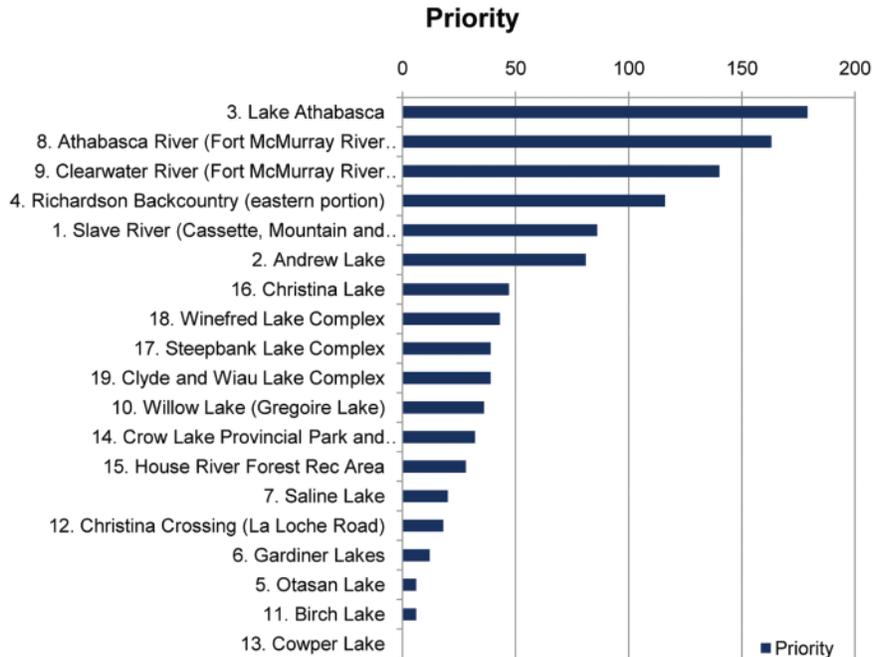
Reference Number	Workbook Content – Key Strategies to be Prioritized
1	Expanding the region's campground capacity
2	Planning and developing a designated regional trail system
3	Designating some reclaimed land as new recreational and tourism areas
4	Developing Lakeland Country as an iconic year-round provincial tourism destination



32. The RAC has proposed a number of lands for designation as recreation and tourism areas. Rate the importance of each area as a recreation and tourism resource. You only need to rate the ones you would like



33. Identify your top three priorities from the list on page 34.



### **34. Do you have any other comments regarding the RAC's recommendations on recreation and tourism?**

Accommodation of recreational opportunities was generally indicated as vital to maintain and enhance quality of life in the region for both current and future residents, as well as for other Albertans, visitors from outside the region and for workers and temporary residents in camps. A small number of comments opposed allocation or enhancements for recreation, generally citing increased use and higher population as undesirable for the region and ecologically damaging. Overall, there was moderate agreement with the RAC's recommendations, although there were a large number of comments that recreational land-use needs have not been adequately addressed in the RAC's advice.

Management intent was questioned, primarily because of the level of detail regarding selection of proposed areas. Other issues raised with management intent for recreation and tourism were:

- Recreation and tourism development is dependent on profitable operations;
- Skepticism about the commitment of three per cent of the regional land base to recreation and that it does not meet demand or requirements;
- Concerns about motorized recreation; and
- Concerns regarding approved other uses on recreation lands, particularly industrial uses were stated (both opposed and in favour of allowing limited industrial use on recreation lands).

Key topics of concern that arose were:

- Type and intensity of recreational development and use;
- Compatibility of tourism and recreation with other uses;
- Management, monitoring and enforcement of recreational lands, access and activities; and
- Specific recreation and tourism areas proposed by the RAC.

## **Recreational Development and Use**

### **Lakeland Country**

There is strong support for Lakeland Country as a recreational area in general, with it being identified as a popular recreational destination for camping, hunting, fishing, boating and motorized vehicle use (ATVs, snowmobiling). There is slightly less support for intensive recreational development and promotion of the area as an "iconic destination for tourism and recreation." Concerns regarding such development and promotion include:

- The economic viability of the area is potential to attract wide-spread tourism from outside the region; and



- Over utilization that detracts from what makes the area popular among current users and leads to ecological compromise.

### **Motorized Use**

There is acknowledgement that motorized vehicle use can have an environmental impact, particularly when not operating on approved off-road facilities. There is moderate support to see all-season, off-road facilities and trails developed for motorized vehicle use. A number of comments stated that providing facilities, combined with monitoring and enforcement, is necessary to minimize damage that can be done by off-road vehicles. There is less support for allowing off-road vehicles in forested areas, particularly those that have environmentally sensitive populations such as caribou. There were also frequent comments that motorized access needs to be accompanied by areas that are explicitly identified for non-motorized use. Motorized and non-motorized pursuits are often seen as incompatible, and there are safety risks when the two are combined.



### **Trails**

Development of a regional trail system received moderate support with greater support for it as a tool for recreation management, enforcement and minimizing ecological impact in recreation areas. As noted above, trails are seen as valuable for motorized pursuits. Likewise, there were a number of comments that recognize trails in general as important for pursuits like backcountry hiking and camping, interpretive and educational opportunities.

### **Camping**

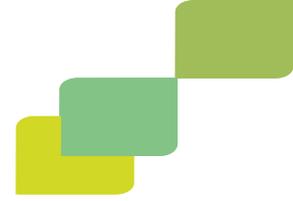
A number of comments indicated there was a decrease in provincial management and monitoring of campsites, with a number of campsite closures in the region. Comments also noted that camping, particularly in uncontrolled areas, has been abused and that some managed campsites are often used as living locations for workers as opposed to recreational use. The majority of comments support an increase in camping facilities and campsite monitoring.



### **Ecotourism**

Ecotourism was recognized as a growing sector of the recreation and tourism industry, and one with desirable principles including minimizing impact and building environmental and cultural awareness and respect.

Ecotourism was raised as a possible promotion in the region, with little comment on what would be involved or how it might be developed.



## **Compatibility with other uses**

### **Mixed-use**

Most comments indicated that many recreation pursuits (including traditional uses such as hunting and fishing, as well as motorized pursuits) were seen as compatible in the mixed-use resource areas. While a number of comments indicated that industrial development is not desirable for recreational areas, others suggested that development can be of interest to a different group of users. Repurposing of some resource areas is also seen as a tool for enhancing the region's recreation offerings.

### **Population Centres**

Proximity to population centres was one of the criteria that the RAC used in determining recreation and tourism areas. A number of comments indicated that the remote nature of the region and its recreation offerings was an attraction; others indicated a strong desire to see recreation opportunities close to population centres, particularly high-density ones, as important to quality of life. A small number of comments expressed concern that many of the proposed recreation areas in the northern part of the region are very distant from population centres.

### **Multi-use Corridors (MUCs)**

A large number of comments suggested the MUCs have significant recreation potential, and should be developed with trails and other facilities to accommodate motorized recreation (although not exclusively, as cycling paths were identified as another possible use). Respondents said the MUCs, along with being a far-reaching source of disturbed land suitable for recreation, also offer opportunities for improved connectivity between conservation areas. A smaller number of comments opposed the use of MUCs for recreation (and off-road vehicles in particular), with others noting that such uses may be viable but require strict regulation and monitoring.

### **Conservation**

As noted in the discussion on the land-use classification system, there were a number of comments that said recreation and tourism land use and conservation land use are redundant, suggesting they could be combined with a caveat for protected areas. There were, however, a number of comments asserting recreation and tourism are not inherently compatible with conservation outcomes, and while conservation areas may be very attractive to recreational users, risk of ecological damage to the land and wildlife is great; concluding that conservation is not generally



compatible with recreation and tourism. Concern was also expressed that recreation and tourism uses could be damaging to heritage rivers that are included under the river corridor overlay (particularly the Clearwater River), as well as to lake water and shores. There were single references for each of tourism and recreation areas four, six and nine, saying they would be better classified as conservation areas.

### **Aboriginal**

A small number of comments stated that proposed recreational areas near reserves could have impacts on wildlife and traditional uses, and there is a need for aboriginal consultation.

### **Selection Criteria**

A number of additional considerations to the RAC's selection criteria were identified including:

- Proximity to roadways to enhance accessibility;
- Connectivity to create a system of trails and amenities, as opposed to islands of recreational use. Smaller areas can also be used as staging areas for larger connectivity;
- User affordability;
- Recreation and tourism amenities should be considered an enhancement, rather than a disturbance, due to their significant contributions to quality of life. and
- Including a well-rounded variety of recreational opportunities (water, land, motor, traditional, etc.) in a variety of locations of different size, and using intensity to accommodate the wide mix of user interests.

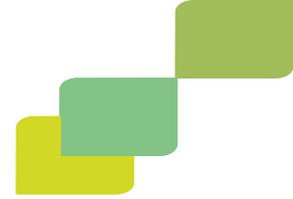
### **Management, Monitoring and Enforcement of Recreational Lands, Access and Activities**

Although there was a small segment of the respondents who identified regulation of recreational access on public lands as an intrusion of the rights of the general public, the majority of comments on this topic acknowledged some need for regulation and enforcement in both public and ecological interests. This topic will be addressed in detail in the analysis of comments in answer to question 36.

### **Specific Recreation and Tourism Areas**

It was frequently noted that few people are familiar with all of the RAC-proposed recreation areas for rating purposes.



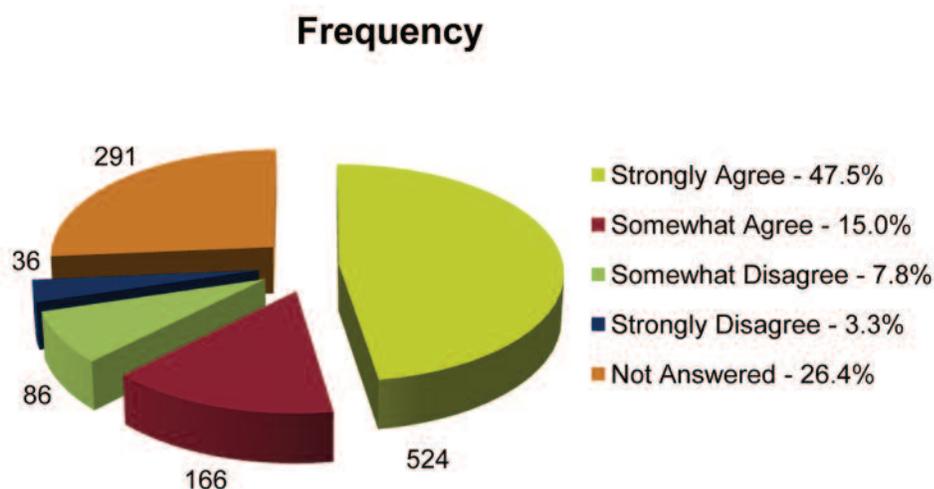


Concerns were expressed with the following RAC-proposed tourism areas:

- Area 4, Richardson Backcountry: most advanced and extensively explored uranium prospect in Alberta;
- Area 7, Saline Lake: travertine terraces susceptible to damage;
- Area 13, Cowper Lake: muskeg, and likely only suitable for winter access;
- Area 16, Christina Lake: heavy industrial investment;
- Area 17, Steepbank Lake:
  - small shallow lake likely susceptible to over use, remoteness limits recreation and tourism value;
  - restricting resource and multi-use corridor access could add significant cost to development and sterilize resource extraction; and
- Area 19, Clyde/Wiau: small shallow lake likely susceptible to over use.

Of the list above, Richardson Backcountry (ecological interest) and Christina Lake (fishing with nearby spawning lake) were also identified by respondents as important recreational areas, as were Winefred Lake (area 18) and Lake Athabasca (area 3). Another area listed as valuable was the Slave River. Areas having recreation and tourism potential were Richardson West (dunes), the Clearwater River (top 10 Canada heritage river), the Slave River (unique ecological setting), Christina River, Cold Lake, Goodwin Lake, locally known Wapaw Lake, the Fort McMurray river valley and the Lac la Biche area in general. It was felt these could be developed for recreation as important contributions to recreation for communities near the southern border of the region.

### 35. How strongly do you agree that access to public lands has to be managed?





### **36. Please share any additional comments regarding the RAC's recommendations on managing recreational access to public lands.**

Responses to this question were consistent with the qualitative responses to question 35. There was strong support for managing accesses to public lands for recreational purposes. While a small number of comments indicated that any restriction of access to public lands would be an infringement of public rights, the majority of comments acknowledged that management of access is necessary for both public safety and environmental protection. A number of comments asserted that achieving the stated goals for the LARP will not be possible without some degree of access management. Considerations that were identified for managing access are:

#### **Conservation Intent**

All comments that referenced recreational access and conservation areas indicated that access management is vital to achieving the preservation and biodiversity objectives, including accessing water and riparian areas.

#### **Type of Recreation**

Motorized recreation was identified as potentially more damaging to public lands than non-motorized activities, with comment extremes suggesting both no access and complete access for motorized use on public lands. It was generally noted that managed motorized access to areas is important. Hunting and fishing were identified as requiring management in accordance with wildlife preservation objectives. Caution was advised against limiting types of recreational access, or limiting access to particular user groups or interests. Random camping was also identified as a recreational use that needs to be managed with regulations enforced.

#### **Public Safety**

No specific examples were provided, but when access poses a danger to the public limiting access was generally considered acceptable.

#### **Industrial Use**

A number of comments asserted that industrial use is more ecologically damaging than recreational use of public lands, in a few instances some stated that recreational use be prioritized over industrial use. Others suggested that both uses require some management, and that a balance could be





achieved; particularly as industry roads and other activities that are often co-developed with public interests or funding have opened up many lands to public access. Selective logging and in-situ resource extraction were two industrial uses explicitly identified as compatible with recreational use.

### **Management Intent**

Comments stated a need for a more complete plan and a need to manage recreational access to public lands for reasons of public safety and conservation, as opposed to providing additional support or preference to industrial use.

### **Aboriginal Use**

Although there were some comments challenging distinct rights for aboriginal uses, the majority of comments on the topic noted that aboriginal use is a separate category that requires recognition, accommodation and consultation.

### **Evaluation**

Some felt that if management of recreation and tourism is to be sustainable over the long term, clear and measurable objectives are necessary.

### **Population Growth**

If, as current projections suggest, the population in the region and across Alberta continues to grow, respondents felt recreational use in the area will continue to increase, as will the management challenges for public lands.

### **Strategies for Managing Access**

#### **Education**

Signage, both interpretive and instructive (rules and appropriate usage), as well as clear demarcation of recreation amenities and other educational opportunities for public living in and outside of the region were identified as valuable tools for access management of recreation areas.

#### **Enforcement**

There was a strong acknowledgement that management without enforcement will not be successful. Several said effective enforcement requires regulation and financial and human resources. Several comments indicated a belief these resources have been lacking in Alberta over the past several years (backcountry guardian positions were a



resource identified as having been eliminated). Enforcement was thought to be the responsibility of the GoA, and should be accompanied by fines or other consequences for misuse.

### Infrastructure

Providing facilities to support recreational uses was identified as a priority that would contribute to access management and help limit land-use damage. Suggestions included garbage and recycling facilities, interpretive and other use centres, managed campgrounds, maintained roadways and access to preferred public access areas, washrooms, motorized access trails and off-road areas (including backcountry off-road) and an extensively developed and managed trail system.

### Stewardship Organizations and Partnerships

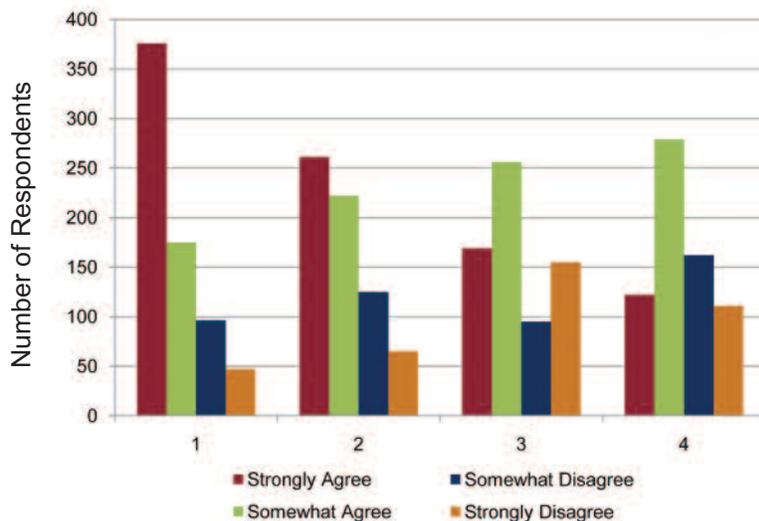
A number of comments noted that user groups and other stakeholder organizations may be able to contribute to management objectives. Specific strategies were not identified.

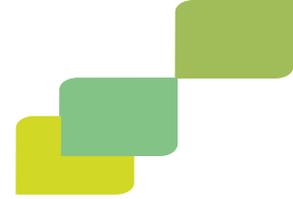


### Thresholds

Several comments suggested that management thresholds based on safety and the land's capacity to accommodate use should be set for recreational uses in the region.

**37. Multi-use corridors are proposed to provide better long-term transportation and utility connections to areas within and adjacent to the Lower Athabasca Region, while reducing the fragmentation of lands. How strongly do you agree or disagree with each of the following proposed multi-use corridors?**





Reference Number	Workbook Content – Key Strategies to be Prioritized
1	North/south linking the Industrial Heartland and the Fort McMurray area
2	North/south linking Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche along Highway 881
3	East/west linking Fort McMurray to La Loche, SK (east) and Red Earth Creek (west) along conceptual Highway 686
4	North/south linking Fort McMurray and the Northwest Territories

**38. Please share any additional comments regarding multi-use corridors in the region.**

Overall, there was moderate to strong agreement for RAC’s advice regarding multi-use corridors (MUCs). Generally, there was support for the principle of MUCs as an effective means of planning and delivering transmission, transportation and other requirements for the region, while managing the environmental impact of doing so. The lowest support came from those who disapproved of continued growth and development in the region. Considerations that were identified for the development of MUCs include:

**Management Intent**

Comments included a perceived lack of detail about why the particular routing for MUCs was chosen. Requests were made for more explicit routing detail, information regarding secondary corridors and continued growth and land disturbance built on resource extraction.

**Fragmentation**

Respondents want to ensure MUCs are constructed in a manner that reduces fragmentation by avoiding barriers, including above-ground utility and transportation infrastructure that impedes wildlife movement. They want wildlife over/under passes included to allow safe movement of wildlife across transportation routes and the inclusion of rail transport, especially for non-liquid goods, within the MUCs.

**Land Disturbance**

Some commented that MUCs should be built to minimize land disturbance and environmental footprint while providing cost-effective access to development. Several said MUCs should be routed away from



actual or potential conservation areas, and incorporate strategies to minimize ecological disturbance along the corridors. Water and riparian area protection should also be considered planning priorities.

### **Flexibility**

Ensuring there is capacity for the MUCs to respond to future development through the planning and development of new primary and secondary corridors as necessary over time, while avoiding the pitfalls of ad-hoc development was a concern for some respondents.

### **Social Benefit**

Comments included considering the impact of MUCs on population centres (economic and population impact etc.) and routing MUCs to maximize social benefits. They added that consulting with municipalities, stakeholders and aboriginal communities was necessary.



### **Integration with Other Regional Plans**

Some felt it was necessary for co-ordination of MUCs within the region and with other regions, provinces, and territories to ensure full adoption and maximum efficiency.

### **Economic Return**

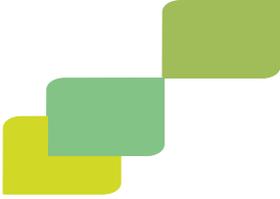
Respondents believe MUCs will be costly to build. They say it's important to ensure long-term need (incorporating reduction and conservation strategies), stakeholder support and collaboration, and thorough and reliable cost-benefit analyses are in place before development. Consideration for maintenance and management costs such as severity and enforcement, and secondary uses (i.e., the range of recreation uses and opportunities that may be incorporated into MUCs) must be included.



### **Corridor-specific Considerations**

#### **Fort McMurray South**

Comments were generally supportive of the proposed corridors from Fort McMurray South. However, a few did suggest that the two connections may be redundant and should be prioritized, or that a combined route should be considered. There were no suggestions to indicate what the priorities should be. Comments continued to indicate that minimizing environmental damage and fragmentation are



important. There were also a small number of comments about railway being a preferred method of transport, and questions as to how the corridors would continue south to the United States.

### **North-South, Heartland to Fort McMurray**

All comments specific to this corridor were supportive, with comments suggesting that Highway 63 should be twinned.

### **North-South, Highway 881**

Most comments were supportive of this route as a corridor.

### **North-South, Fort McMurray to Northwest Territories**

A small number of the comments on this corridor questioned its value, and suggested it is not necessary and it will be environmentally disruptive, particularly as it may be routed through conservation areas. The remaining comments were supportive, with a small number suggesting the corridor should be developed in two phases, with Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan the priority. One comment suggested this corridor be routed through Fort Vermillion.

### **East-West, Fort McMurray to La Loche, SK**

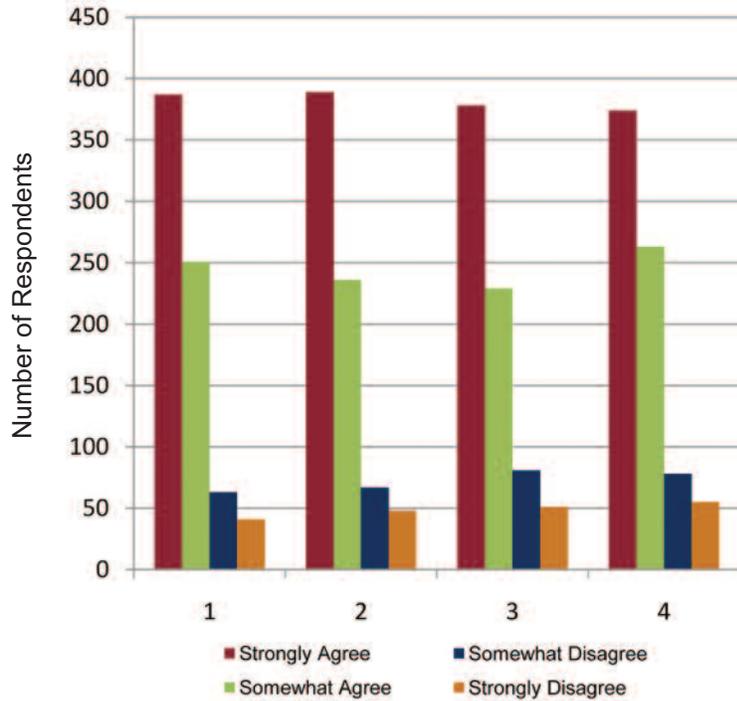
Comments on this corridor were divided. A number suggested there is little economic value in a corridor, and it could result in lost economic opportunities to Saskatchewan. A smaller number of comments suggested the corridor would open important economic markets in Saskatchewan,

### **East-West, Red Earth Creek, along conceptual Highway 686**

A number of comments questioned the value of this corridor, and felt it seemed to be routed through remote areas and areas susceptible to environmental damage, particularly wetlands. However, a small number of comments believed the corridor will be an important tool in opening up economic markets, particularly in Prince Rupert.



**39. How strongly do you agree with each of the following recommendations of the RAC related to better collaboration with aboriginal peoples?**



Reference Number	Workbook Content – Key Strategies to be Prioritized
1	Develop formal roles and responsibilities to participate in land-use planning
2	Develop formal roles and responsibilities in stewardship
3	Develop formal roles and responsibilities in environmental assessment and monitoring
4	Develop formal roles and responsibilities in reclamation and reuse



**40. Please share any additional comments regarding the recommendations from the RAC on better collaboration with aboriginal peoples.**

Workbook respondents felt there needs to be better collaboration and consultation with aboriginal peoples for the LARP to ultimately be successful. Several comments were made as to what extent and how this should be done.



Although many respondents felt aboriginal peoples should be a part of the process, they believed they should be treated as an equal partner or stakeholder group with no greater authority or powers than other Albertans and stakeholders. They added the process needs to be clearly established, defined and communicated, and it should encourage trust and motivation with aboriginal peoples. A solution-based approach was recommended to avoid what they thought could be a lengthy process that does not produce results.

Many concerns were raised about how “formal roles and responsibilities” and co-management will be defined within the process. Often it was suggested that clarity needs to be provided when defining these terms prior to commenting on them in detail.

Others said collaboration should not only be with chiefs and councils, but also with Elders and community members. It was felt by some that chiefs and councils do not accurately represent their people, nor communicate well with their communities. Thoughts were shared about how consultations should occur, including face-to-face, in the appropriate aboriginal language, etc.

Some felt that aboriginal peoples have vast knowledge and experience of the land to bring to the discussions, however, for certain aspects (i.e., reclamation, stewardship of the land and environmental assessments) they are lacking the education and experience to participate fully.

Concerns were raised with how aboriginal peoples have been involved in the LARP to date, and they felt there was a lack of time, funding and capacity, as well as questioning how the feedback provided will be integrated into the plan moving forward.

Various comments were received regarding how industry currently collaborates with aboriginal peoples, and that many do not want this process to be impacted by other consultation processes like LARP.

#### **41. Please share any additional comments you may have regarding the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.**

Most additional comments reinforced earlier statements in response to other questions, and have been incorporated into the question-specific summaries. Comments and opinions that were strongly emphasized, but have been previously addressed are described as follows:

##### **Detail**

Several comments suggested the RAC’s advice and workbook were too high-level and requested more detail regarding:

- Context and background for the RAC’s advice;
- Planning directions and outcomes, based on the three proposed development scenarios;



- Overall management intent for the region (especially economics vs. ecology);
- Specific definitions and uses of the land-use classifications; and
- Detail on frameworks, thresholds and targets and on other specific strategies.

Many comments indicated a need for certainty to ensure effective regional and corporate planning.

### **Land Allocation**

The amount of land allocated to different land-use classifications was a common concern, with the amount and locations of mixed-use resource land and conservation land being of greatest concern. Comments reflected interest in seeing changes based on economic or ecological arguments. Both arguments asserted a need to better balance land-use allocation and priorities, although perspectives on what constitutes an appropriate balance differed. These comments often included references to specific areas which are addressed in the relevant questions.



### **Development Pace**

Concerns regarding the pace of development ranging from “stop completely” to “meet the economic demand” were expressed. Although most concerns were directed at oil sands development, development pace needed to include all industrial development and related impacts. Where existing leases are affected by changing land-use designations, industry indicated a need for careful consideration and a thoughtful approach to compensation.

### **Mineral Interests**

Comments suggested that the mineral value of the region has not been adequately considered, and an assessment of the region’s potential for mineral resource extraction be conducted and incorporated into the plan. The peat industry was also referenced as an unacknowledged industry in the RAC advice.



### **Monitoring and Enforcement**

Comments emphasized the desire for strong, transparent and accountable monitoring and enforcement programs supported by appropriate human and financial resources. The importance of using sound science in planning and monitoring, including establishing solid baseline measures from which to work, was

emphasized. There was a strong interest for including independent study and monitoring to build public trust. Communication of results was also noted to be an important aspect of monitoring and enforcement, especially in regard to building public trust.

## **Ecology**

Comments addressed aspects of the ecology and the need to protect the environment. Global warming factors, the protection of water and wetlands, wildlife (especially caribou) and general protection of the boreal forest were frequently referenced.

## **Recreation**

Comments stated a need for strong recreation and leisure planning, and resources to serve the local population (and to a lesser degree, those outside the region). Resources should address the variety of recreational interests (traditional use, motorized and non-motorized, etc.), and may have potential to build a dynamic tourism industry. There was a strong interest in seeing current recreation areas protected for recreation use.

## **Integration of Authorities**

Several comments noted the LARP will impact and be impacted by planning and development in other regions, provinces and territories, and that related policies and planning should be considered as part of the LARP. Processes to co-ordinate the various agencies as well as government and other organizations involved in planning will be important to the successful implementation of regional plans.

Many comments asserted that the RAC's advice was a good start to the land-use planning process, and that there were a number of additional considerations including:

## **Global Perspective**

A number of comments noted that the world is watching what happens in the region, from both economic and environmental perspectives. These comments assert that the region is the subject of significant international pressure and scrutiny, and that it could be a model of either ecological protection or industrial and social development, as well as a model for how to achieve both effectively. It was suggested the region's current reputation needs improvement, and how the region moves forward has to acknowledge international concerns for both the environment (especially factors that contribute to global warming) and energy demands.

## **LARP Development and Implementation Pace**

A small number of comments suggested concern over the pace of developing the LARP. Of these, several indicated a need to move quickly and see the recommendations implemented; others expressed a need for





caution and careful consideration, establishing the right plan as the priority over speed.

### **Engagement**

A number of people felt local residents and stakeholders, including industry, need to be engaged in the planning process and the local public should benefit from employment opportunities. These were strong themes about aboriginal communities, but were also mentioned in regard to other communities. Several comments indicated a desire for more consultation (especially aboriginal and recreation groups) as part of the land-use planning process, while others indicated appreciation for the engagement that has occurred. Several comments expressed a need for careful consideration of input to ensure a balanced and thorough understanding of public desires and interests, and that specific stakeholder groups are not overly represented. There were also a small number of comments stating the workbook was too difficult for many Albertans to comment on effectively, and others indicated a need for the GOA to clearly identify how input has been used in developing the plan.



### **Complexity**

Some comments stated the RAC's proposals were very complex, with a large number of outcomes, objectives and strategies, making the overall plan difficult to grasp and confusing. These comments suggested there must be more ways to integrate strategies, and other content to improve clarity.

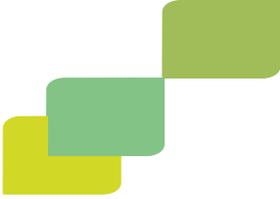
### **Technology**

Overall, there was recognition that new technologies have the potential to minimize the impacts of industrial processes, mitigate impacts that do occur, clarify uncertain ecological outcomes and improve monitoring. Comments suggested that developing new technologies should be promoted, and the LARP should take new technologies into consideration over time. A small number of comments cautioned against over-reliance on technology, noting long-term impacts of new technologies are uncertain.



### **Planning Duration**

It was questioned if a 50-year planning time frame is appropriate. Some comments suggested it is too long to realistically plan for, while others suggested it is short-sighted and could lead to damaging ecological impacts and/or



excessive infrastructure development. There were also comments acknowledging the need for a built-in review and renewal process for the plan, mitigating the long-term nature of the plan.

### **Approvals Process**

A number of comments addressed the approval process for industrial projects. In general, they identified the need for high standards from project inception through reclamation, and for greater consideration of social and infrastructure impacts. Other comments asserted the need for a conflict resolution process when land-use designation and development come into conflict, including the impact of land-use classifications on current tenures.

### **Energy and Resource Consumption**

A number of comments linked industrial development in the region to energy and resource consumption practices across Alberta, Canada and beyond. These frequently suggested that promoting more efficient energy use and building codes, etc. would lead to a more sustainable level of development in the region.

### **Government Lead**

There were a very large number of competing interests in the region named, and comments indicated that the provincial government has to take the lead in the overall planning process to effectively manage development.

### **Human Rights**

A small number of comments asserted that the plan infringes on human rights, from access to aboriginal consultation, and including health and other factors impacted by development.

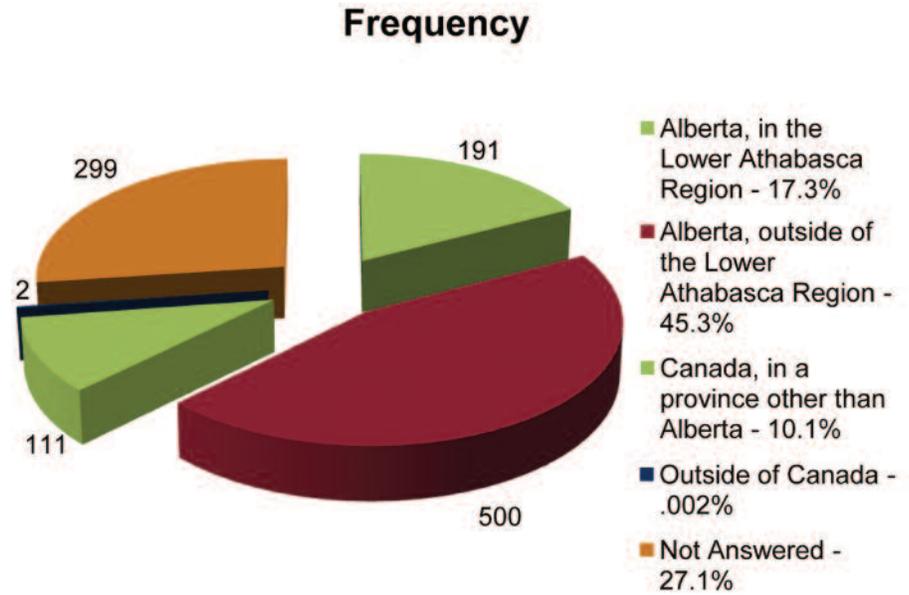
### **Economics**

While a small number of comments discounted the region's economic value or prioritized other values over economics, the region was widely acknowledged for its economic importance and continued economic health was a priority in many comments. The development of the LARP was indicated to have potential for a positive impact on the economics of the region. However, it was also suggested that the planning process has had a negative impact on some development in the region due to uncertainties (management intent, how tenure will be addressed, etc.) that have arisen from the process. Several comments assert that the GoA needs to address these uncertainties quickly to ensure Alberta's economic competitiveness and reputation are not harmed, and that uncertainties do not lead to what they believe could be greater impact on the region and on those who invest in it.



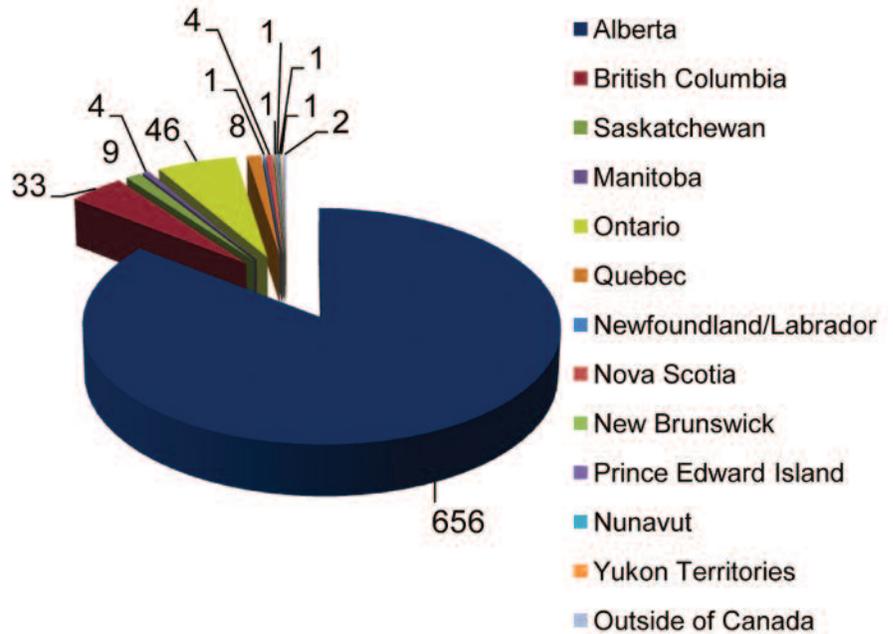
## Section 6: Demographics

42. Where is your primary residence?

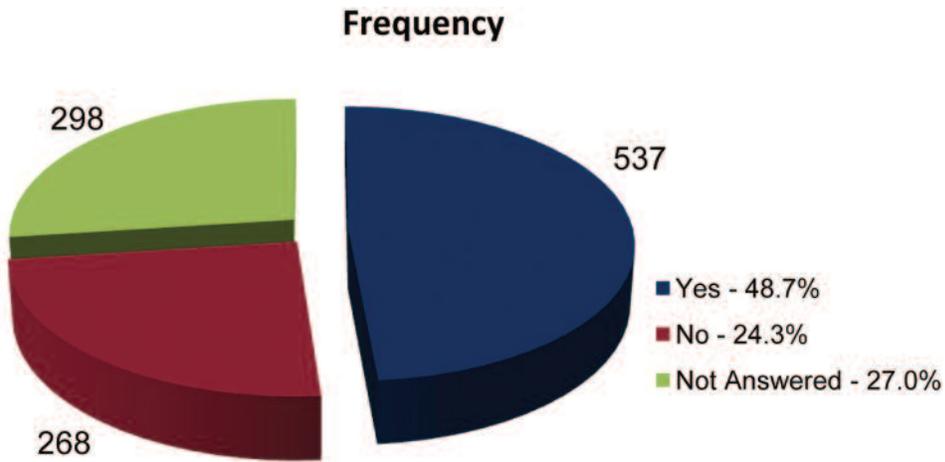


43. What are the first three characters of your postal code?

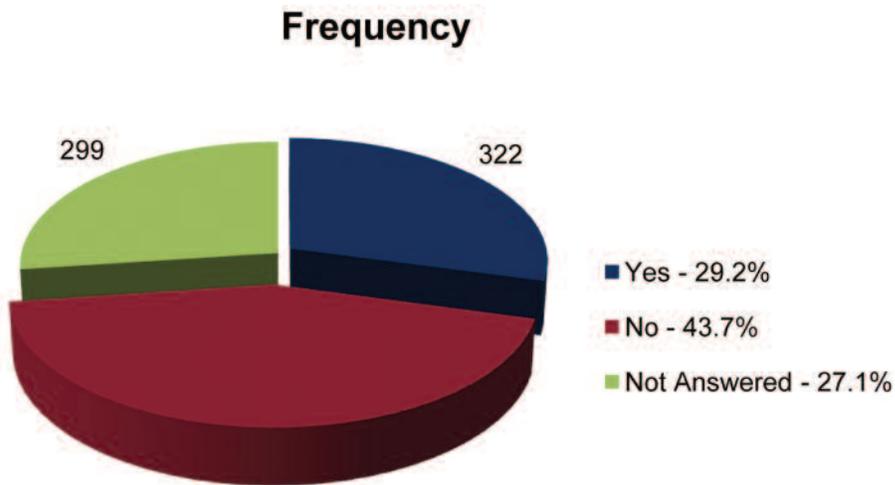
**Responses by Location**



44. Do you participate in recreation and tourism experiences within the Lower Athabasca Region?

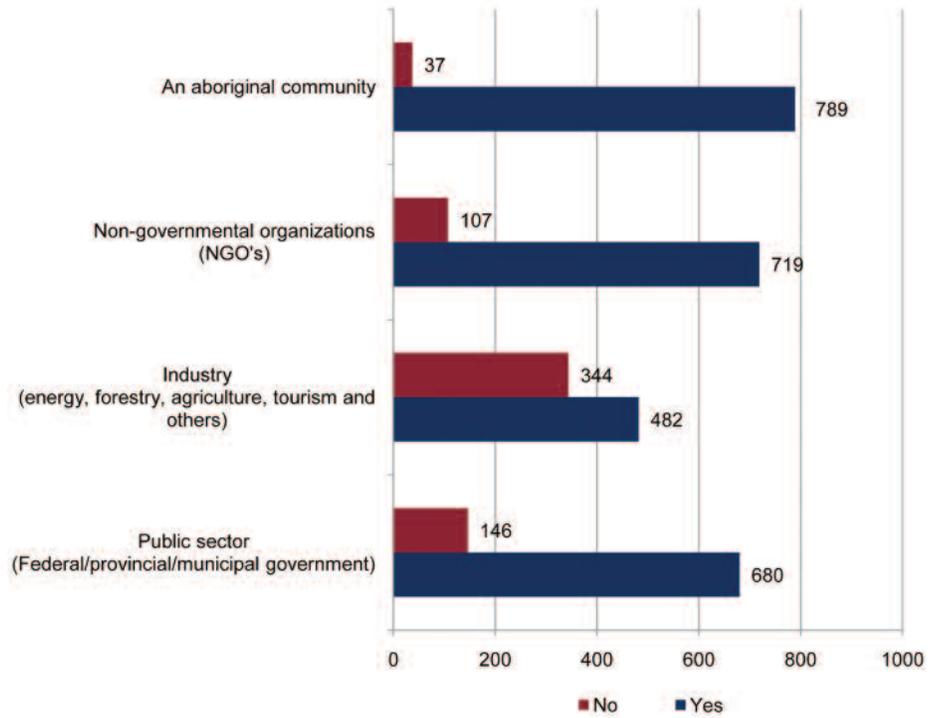


45. Do you currently work within the Lower Athabasca Region?





46. Are you employed by or associated with any of the following? Check all that apply.



47. To which age group do you belong?

Frequency

