

# Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands

## Questions and Answers

### 1. What is the purpose of *Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands*?

*Responsible Actions* is a 20-year strategic plan that will provide an integrated and coordinated policy approach to responsibly managing the oil sands areas.

It supports Alberta's long-term vision for the oil sands which includes:

- a balanced approach to economic development and environmental stewardship;
- innovative, responsible and collaborative development among all levels of government and stakeholders of the oil sands; and
- clean, healthy and vibrant communities for Albertans, now and for future generations.

The plan identifies strategies, goals and objectives and outlines an integrated approach for all levels of government, industry and communities to manage the challenges and opportunities presented by oil sands development.

### 2. Why is a plan for Alberta's oil sands needed?

Rapid economic growth from previous years has strained Alberta's environment, economy, and social and physical infrastructure. This is particularly true in the oil sands regions of the province.

The current global economic downturn gives us an opportunity to catch up and plan for the future.

With this strategic plan, Alberta will embark on a path to optimize development of the oil sands and economic revenue from the oil sands, while minimizing our environmental footprint. At the same time, the government will plan ahead to ensure necessary investment in social and physical infrastructure, and innovative technology.

### 3. What are the key strategies in *Responsible Actions*?

There are six key strategies:

1. Developed Alberta's oil sands in an environmentally responsible way.
2. Promote healthy communities and a quality of life that attracts and retains individuals, families and businesses.
3. Maximize long-term value for all Albertans through economic growth, stability and resource optimization.
4. Strengthen our proactive approach to Aboriginal consultation with a view to reconciling interests.

5. Maximize research and innovation to support sustainable development and unlock the deposit's potential.
6. Increase available information, develop measurement systems and enhance accountability in the management of the oil sands.

#### **4. Isn't the Government of Alberta already doing many of the things identified in *Responsible Actions*?**

Yes many, but not all, of the actions build on work already underway.

For example, the Government of Alberta has already taken significant steps to address issues related to the environment. The [Water for Life Strategy](#) and the [Climate Change Strategy](#) provide a base to further address environmental and growth pressures. In addition, an increasing focus on cumulative effects—managing environmental impacts regionally instead of project-by-project—assists us to better protect Alberta's air, land and water.

Another example is our continuing work on [carbon capture and storage](#) and an integrated CO2 network through a \$2 billion investment announced last fall.

As well, the Government of Alberta has invested over \$800 million in the Fort McMurray area to address critical infrastructure and social needs. The province has also started the process of developing new housing and community facilities in Fort McMurray.

#### **5. What is new in this plan?**

There are a number of new goals and objectives related to (but not limited to):

- Enhanced reclamation—e.g. require industry to achieve its project reclamation requirements and milestones to be met as a condition of further oil sands development.
- Increased conservation—e.g. review and establish protected areas in the oil sands regions to achieve biodiversity objectives, and allow for multiple uses such as traditional Aboriginal activities and recreation and tourism experiences.
- Assessment of community needs—e.g. identify social and infrastructure needs associated with oil sands development.
- Timely investment in physical infrastructure—e.g. work with industry in the oil sands regions to develop contribution strategies for public infrastructure.

#### **6. How was *Responsible Actions* developed?**

The development of this strategic plan was led by the government's Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat, Alberta Treasury Board and involved almost all government ministries.

*Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands* builds on best practices and is based on extensive stakeholder consultations, which were outlined in three reports released in 2007:

- [Investing in our Future: Responding to the Rapid Growth of Oil Sands Development](#)
- [Oil Sands Consultations: Multi-stakeholder Committee Final Report](#) (PDF), and
- [Oil Sands Consultations: Aboriginal Consultation Final Report](#) (PDF).

Consulted stakeholders included non-government organizations, environmental groups, industry, communities and municipalities, First Nations and Métis, and the public.

This plan builds on the vision outlined in the *Provincial Energy Strategy* and provides specific long-term policy direction for provincially as well as for Alberta's oil sands regions. This plan reinforces the *Land-use Framework*, which will help address the pressures on our landscape by providing a blueprint for decision-making. The *Land-use Framework* will help to manage growth and achieve a better balance with Albertans' economic, social and environmental goals.

## **7. Who will implement the plan?**

The strategies, goal and objectives of *Responsible Actions* will be incorporated into ministry business plans. The Oil Sands Sustainable Development Secretariat will work with Government of Alberta ministries, the federal government, industry, Aboriginal communities, municipalities, associations and other stakeholders to coordinate and support the plan's actions.

The plan will be coordinated with provincial and regional initiatives, including the [Provincial Energy Strategy](#) and the [Land-use Framework](#), to ensure consistency in approach and to avoid overlap and duplication.

All three plans share a similar vision: innovative, responsible development of our land and resources; a clean, healthy environment and communities; and a collaborative approach to achieving this vision. As such, they share many of the same strategies and reinforce one another.

## **8. What are the timelines for implementation?**

Some actions are already underway, while additional priority items will be acted on immediately (e.g. implement a community development plan to address

affordable housing in Fort McMurray, initiate an independent review of oil sands research and innovation systems to identify gaps and develop an integrated, efficient and coordinated approach to oil sands development). Planning for longer-term actions has begun, with many of the long-term priorities extending beyond to 2029.

## **9. What are the benefits for Albertans?**

By planning ahead, the Government of Alberta will make sure oil sands communities have a healthy environment, and the social and physical infrastructure needed to accommodate and support oil sands development.

Further, by balancing economic development and environmental protection, Albertans and all Canadians will continue to benefit from a thriving economy, healthy environment, strong communities and security of energy supply.

## **10. What are the benefits to the environment?**

*Responsible Actions* promotes responsible stewardship of our natural resources and the environment. It does this by building on current government initiatives like the [Climate Change Strategy](#), the [Land-use Framework](#), [Water for Life](#), and the [Provincial Energy Strategy](#).

## **11. Are there any benefits for the Aboriginal community?**

*Responsible Actions* will benefit all Albertans, including Aboriginal Albertans. In addition to employment opportunities, proactive approaches to consultation will help to address the potential adverse impacts of oil sands development on constitutionally protected rights.

## **12. How will oil sands communities benefit?**

All levels of government, local authorities, communities and industry need to work together to address the pressures related to growth. *Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands* further supports the Government of Alberta's priorities by promoting the development of sustainable, healthy, safe and vibrant communities through coordinated efforts to build community capacity, invest in social resources and develop physical infrastructure. The Government of Alberta has invested more than \$800 million in the Fort McMurray area to deal with critical issues related to rapid oil sands development.

## **13. What are the benefits for industry?**

With this strategic plan, Alberta will increase economic revenue from the oil sands, while ensuring adequate investment in infrastructure, people, innovation and environmental protection.

Industry will benefit from clear, sound and predictable government policy and economically efficient regulatory structures.

It will also benefit from healthy, well-planned communities that attract and retain workers and services required to develop the oil sands.

Strategies aimed at more research and innovation will help unlock the full potential of oil sands deposits.

**14. How will volatile oil prices affect government and industry's ability to fund Responsible Actions?**

*Responsible Actions* is a long-term plan to address economic, social and environmental issues in the oil sands. In the long-term, oil prices are expected to regain their former value as world demand grows and the economy stabilizes. The Government of Alberta expects to implement the plan as currently drafted.

**15. How will the strategic plan affect royalty rates?**

At this time, the strategy does not anticipate any increases to the royalty rates. As addressed in Alberta's Royalty Framework, the strategic plan commits to ensure that the oil sands royalty structure remains responsive to changing conditions and maintains investor certainty. For current and detailed information about royalty rates, please visit [Alberta's Royalty Framework](#).

**16. How does the plan address reclamation and tailings as it relates to oil sands development?**

One of the strategy's priority actions is to develop and implement regulations to reduce the inventory of tailings and increase the pace of reclamation in the oil sands areas. More information about reclamation is available from [Alberta Environment](#) and [Alberta Sustainable Resource Development](#). Additional information about tailings can be found through the [Energy Resources Conservation Board](#).

**17. How does the strategy address cumulative effects?**

The plan's priority actions includes revising the current environmental impact assessment process to support cumulative effects management, as well as increasing the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder groups and associations including the [Cumulative Environmental Management Association](#). More information about cumulative effects is available through [Alberta Environment](#) and the [Land-use Framework](#) web site.