

**Advice to the  
Government of Alberta**

**Regarding a Vision for the  
Lower Athabasca Region**

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Note, this document is advice to the Government of Alberta. This advice considered existing Government of Alberta policies and information provided by Government of Alberta staff. The Government of Alberta's views and intentions may not necessarily coincide with the recommendations of the Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council.





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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

#### 1.1.1 Land-use Framework

Released in December 2008, the Land-use Framework sets out a new approach to managing the province's land and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic, environmental and social goals. The Land-use Framework establishes three desired outcomes:

- A healthy economy supported by our land and natural resources;
- Healthy ecosystems and environment; and
- People-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities.

These outcomes recognize that Alberta's goals are highly integrated; how we choose to pursue one set of goals ultimately affects the others. The framework is intended to provide a blueprint for making decisions that will address Alberta's growth and land management pressures.

The *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*, legislation complementary to the policies outlined in the Land-use Framework, was brought into law in October 2009 and governs the establishment and implementation of regional plans. Regional plans offer a mechanism for interpreting and reconciling Government of Alberta policies in a meaningful way to achieve regional outcomes focused on priority values.


The Land-use Framework calls for the development of seven regional land-use plans. The first of these is the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP).

#### 1.1.2 Lower Athabasca Region

The Lower Athabasca Region comprises a large section of north-eastern Alberta, covering approximately 93,260 square kilometres. It encompasses the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, Lac La Biche county, the municipal district and town of Bonnyville, and the city of Cold Lake. Twelve First Nations reserve lands, two Métis Settlements, and several communities with high Métis populations are in the Lower Athabasca Region. Details of the region can be found in the profile of the Lower Athabasca Region, located at [www.landuse.alberta.ca](http://www.landuse.alberta.ca).

Much of the Lower Athabasca Region is in the Boreal forest and is home to many diverse landforms, types of vegetation and species. The southern part of the region has valuable agricultural land. There are two major watersheds associated with the Athabasca and Beaver rivers, separated by the continental divide, plus many wetlands and a large series of groundwater aquifers within the region.

The Lower Athabasca Region has experienced rapid economic development, particularly over the past decade. This rapid growth has placed many pressures on the region. The most prominent and growing land-use activity in the region has been the development of Alberta's oil sands resource. The region is also home to other economic activity, including agriculture, forestry, natural gas production, and recreation and tourism.



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In some cases, challenges have arisen in reconciling the expansion of oil sands development with other sectors, such as forestry. Facilitating successful coexistence and growth of multiple industries, while minimizing land impacts, is therefore a priority. There is also an opportunity to support a growing tourism industry throughout the region, including the unique Lakeland Country area.

The Lower Athabasca Region has emerged as an important economic driver for Alberta and for all of Canada. It has created substantial employment and income for Canadians, and contributes significant revenues to the provincial and federal governments, helping to finance public programs, services and infrastructure. While its economic outlook is subject to shifts in commodity prices, the region is expected to grow in the future to meet rising worldwide demand for resources. At a bitumen production level of six million barrels a day, the population in the Lower Athabasca Region is predicted to increase to as much as 303,000 by the year 2045. This population surge would be driven by considerable migration to the region and supplemented with a large scale shadow workforce.

The scope and pace of development has had significant impacts on aboriginal peoples in the region and their way of life. Increasing development has also required better planning to supply housing, public services and recreation opportunities, and has placed increased pressure on transportation infrastructure. Continuing to serve the needs of a growing population and managing environmental impacts to meet Alberta's economic objectives will be priorities for the region.

## **1.2 Developing the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan**

### **1.2.1 Regional Planning Process**

The Government of Alberta is responsible for the development of regional plans. The Government of Alberta's Land Use Secretariat (LUS) manages the regional planning process and is responsible for developing the LARP.

Regional planning also requires significant local input during both plan development and implementation. To enhance the depth of local input, in December 2008 the Alberta government established a Regional Advisory Council (RAC) comprised of members with a cross-section of expertise and experience. Having worked until March 2010, the RAC provided advice based on local insights and perspectives regarding current and future land-use activities and challenges in the Lower Athabasca Region. The advice provided by RAC was guided by a terms of reference, located at [www.landuse.alberta.ca](http://www.landuse.alberta.ca).

In particular, the RAC was asked to provide advice on the following aspects of land use in the Lower Athabasca Region:

- future resource development – examining growth under low, medium and high growth scenarios, based on a continuum of peak bitumen production levels of up to six million barrels per day, with regard given to cumulative environmental management considerations;



- land conservation objectives – assessing lands in the region that could contribute to an overall land conservation target of 20 per cent or more, with regard to established key criteria;
- regional air and water thresholds – examining various development scenarios with reference to established air and water thresholds for the region, and identifying options for satisfying these thresholds; and
- human development considerations – considering options for community development, physical and social infrastructure needs, recreation and tourism development, population growth and labour needs, and impacts to local communities as well as aboriginal communities.

The RAC has been supported in its work by the LUS and a Regional Planning Team consisting of Alberta government ministries and agencies as well as planning consultants. This support included research, policy and technical analysis, and the identification of key social, economic and environmental factors that should be considered in regional planning. Also identified were current land uses, important trends, and noted potential land-use conflicts and tradeoffs. An integral part of a comprehensive planning process is the integration of aboriginal traditional knowledge, or ATK, to the maximum extent possible. The RAC's work has also been informed by many people living, working and doing business in the region through feedback to the RAC, consultation meetings, workshops and written submissions.

The creation of this vision document completes a key stage of work. Its content will inform the development of the LARP. Development of the LARP will also continue to be informed by Albertans through public, stakeholder and aboriginal consultations.

When complete, the LARP will provide direction for local land-use plans, which provide more detail and will need to be consistent with the regional plan. Implementation of regional and local land-use plans will be supported through local policies, such as zoning, and by provincial laws, regulations and policy tools. The following figures illustrate how the regional plan will provide direction on public and private lands.

Once a final version of the LARP has been approved by Cabinet, the plan will become a legal document and its implementation will be stewarded by the LUS.



**Provincial Authority**

**Regional Plans**

- Vision and desired future for the region
- Integrated economic, environmental and social outcomes
- Objectives/goals (quantitative , measurable targets, trade-offs and choices)
- Strategies/actions (both regulatory and non regulatory)

**Municipal Authority**

**Municipal Development Plan**

- Future land use
- Transportation and services
- Coordination with neighbours

**Land-use Bylaws**

- Divides the municipality into districts
- Permitted and discretionary uses in each district
- Sets standards for development/permitting/subdivision design

**Area Structure Plans**

- Specific pattern of land use and servicing

**Subdivision Control**

- Divides land into two or more parcels
- Municipality can take some land for municipal/school/environmental reserve

**Regional Plans**

- Vision and desired future for the region
- Integrated economic, environmental and social outcomes
- Objectives/goals (quantitative , measurable targets, trade-offs and choices)
- Strategies/actions (both regulatory and non regulatory)

**Management Frameworks**

- Air (SO<sub>x</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>), Water (ground, surface), Land, Biodiversity, Rivers (e.g., Beaver, Athabasca, Clearwater, etc.)

**Resource Management Policy and Standards**

- E.g., Alberta Forest Management Planning Standard

**Natural Resource Management Planning**

- Resource and access management plans
- Forest Management Agreements
- Watershed Management Plans
- Range management plans

**Specific Approvals for Activities**

Private Lands

Public Lands





## 1.2.2 Key Components for Phase One of the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan

The Land-use Framework requires regional plans to define a broad plan for land and resource use on both public and private lands. Further, regional plans are to determine appropriate land and resource management for specific landscapes.

This visioning document outlines four key components:

- vision, outcomes and objectives to provide key directions;
- land-use classifications;
- management frameworks; and
- proposed sub-regions.

### 1.2.2.1 Key Directions

A series of broad regional outcomes are identified, based on the terms of reference which support the desired province-wide outcomes in the Land-use Framework. For each outcome, a number of objectives are established, along with strategies for achieving each objective.

These outcomes and objectives reflect a balancing of economic, environmental and social considerations, and are explained in more detail later in this document.


### 1.2.2.2 Land-use Classifications

The existing Green and White Area land-use designations were created in 1948 and no longer meet the needs of a modern, technologically advanced society participating in a global economy. In particular, the expansion of human settlement into the Green Area necessitates a new set of more detailed land classifications that are better suited to present and future development realities.

Resource development in the Lower Athabasca Region will remain a key economic driver for Alberta, and the land base should be managed accordingly. This requires distinguishing between different areas of land and clearly stating the management intent for these different areas.

Five land-use classifications are designated for the Lower Athabasca Region: agriculture, conservation, mixed-use resource, population centres, and recreation and tourism. There are also three overlays that are for use in specific parts of the classifications: Lakeland Country, multi-use corridors and river corridors. These overlays have been proposed recognizing that additional planning and enhanced management strategies are required.

Management frameworks offer a system for understanding priority values and how those values are affected by land-use decisions. This drives all decision-makers to work together to maintain priority regional values. This approach further challenges Albertans to be innovative in achieving economic, environmental and social outcomes. Management



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frameworks allow cumulative impacts to be assessed, understood and acted upon in a way that optimizes the mitigation of impacts to the environment. Several management frameworks for the Lower Athabasca Region are either under development or have been already completed, and their guidance will form a significant portion of the management of land, air, water and biodiversity in the region. The creation of these frameworks, as well as any created in the future, requires:

- appropriate consultation with stakeholders;
- utilization of aboriginal traditional knowledge, and involvement of aboriginal knowledge holders early on in the process;
- effective and timely communication during development that supports transparency once the framework is in place;
- creation of clearly defined thresholds and precautionary triggers. The thresholds and their triggers need to be established in a way that allows proactive actions;
- appropriate congruency with national standards (for example, Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment);
- recognition of, and planning for, the impacts of climate change and variability on air quality;
- clarity in terms of consequences for non-compliance with the management framework;
- creation of clearly defined compliance protocols;
- continual monitoring and evaluation of the frameworks to determine their effectiveness; and
- inclusion of assessments of human and environmental health, establishment of baselines and any current impacts.

#### 1.2.2.3 Sub-regional Planning

Sub-regional planning is a logical scale to address issues pertaining to airshed, watershed and access management. These issues will be addressed in more detail through subsequent sub-regional plans, as per the directions set out in the LARP.

### **1.3 NEXT STEPS**

Input and feedback received on the vision document will inform a draft Lower Athabasca Regional Plan that the Government of Alberta will develop. Based on input and feedback received through consultations on the draft LARP, the plan will be refined and finalized. The final Lower Athabasca Regional Plan will then be submitted to Cabinet for approval.



### **1.3.1 Implementation**

The *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* makes regional plans binding on:

- all provincial government departments and decision-making boards and agencies;
- municipalities and local government authorities;
- industry, including companies with mineral rights leases and forestry management agreements, as well as agricultural operations; and
- all Albertans.

The LUS will support the implementation of the regional plan, including overall coordination and reporting. This will include: co-ordination of compliance activities through Alberta government ministries according to their mandates; assignment of responsibility and monitoring of progress for individual plan components; and a formal review process described below. The LUS is also responsible for co-ordinating any additional management actions required to ensure the vision, outcomes, objectives and strategies of the plan remain aligned with changing economic, environmental and social pressures.

### **1.3.2 Review, Monitoring and Reporting**

The review, monitoring and reporting process is an important component of successful land-use planning. To assess whether the desired outcomes are being achieved, the LARP will include procedures to review, monitor and report on the indicators, targets and thresholds that will be established in the plan. This process will be developed in collaboration with aboriginal peoples, if they wish to participate and utilize their traditional knowledge. The process will be transparent and will include frequent reporting of results to the general public.

By law, each regional plan must be reviewed every five years and resubmitted to Cabinet every 10 years. This review process can be initiated earlier if deemed necessary.



## 2.0 Lower Athabasca Regional Plan

### 2.1 Vision Statement

A proposed vision statement describes the desired future for the region:

The Lower Athabasca Region is an exceptional mosaic of peoples, communities, forests, rivers, wetlands, lakes and grasslands that are cared for and respected. It is a vibrant, dynamic region that is a major driver of the Canadian economy supported by strong, healthy, prosperous and safe communities. Sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes are balanced through the use of aboriginal, traditional and community knowledge, sound science, innovative thinking, and accommodation of rights and interests of all Albertans.

### 2.2 Outcomes, Objectives and Strategies

#### **Land-use Framework Outcome 1:**

#### **Healthy Economy Support by our Land and Resources**

Many economic benefits are realized through our land and resources. The land and its renewable and non-renewable resources must provide quality of life for Albertans now and in the future.

#### **Outcome 1: The Economy of the Region Grows and Diversifies**

The Lower Athabasca Region has a robust economy, thanks to contributions from the energy, forestry, agriculture, recreation and tourism, and other industries. The energy sector in particular has expanded Alberta's economy dramatically. Revenues generated from that industry have created tremendous opportunities for the region and across Alberta in recent years, including contributions to infrastructure construction. The overall valuation of the oil sands is enormous and with good investment by the government and industry, can sustain the economy for generations.

Continued economic growth must reflect Albertans' desires to grow responsibly. This means sustaining the vibrancy of the region's transportation system, ecosystems and communities. Growth also means unlocking the full potential of the region's competitive advantages. This will allow current residents, including members of aboriginal communities and newcomers, to thrive in the local economy whether they are working in the diversified energy sector or establishing new enterprises.

Objective 1.1: The economic potential of the oil sands is optimized.

#### *Strategies*

- a. Establish critical economic linkages, such as transportation, with the Alberta Industrial Heartland and the Strathcona industrial areas.
- b. Develop value-added secondary industries by implementing a value-add strategy within four years from the date the LARP is approved.
- c. Develop an information sharing/knowledge network within the region.




- d. Stimulate the development of targeted technology to address issues and opportunities facing bitumen development according to priorities established by the Government of Alberta following a balanced assessment of the issues.
- e. Stimulate the development and delivery of alternative (e.g., synthetic gas, biomass) and renewable (e.g., wind, solar) energy sources to move directionally towards clean energy sources.
- f. Explore and capitalize on synergies available through integration of energy sources (e.g., geothermal, hydropower, and potentially nuclear) in the development of oil sands.
- g. Revise regulatory processes to be competitive in the development of oil sands and other key industries.
- h. Promote awareness of energy issues, the benefits from oil sands development in the region, and its linkages to the local, provincial and national economy.

Objective 1.2: The economic contribution of forestry is optimized.

*Strategies*

- a. Prevent or minimize timber supply shortfalls by encouraging the following directions:
  - minimizing the industrial footprint on the landscape via company-to-company partnerships, reclamation of disturbances and access management;
  - adopting integrated land management practices between the forestry and energy sectors;
  - using improved timber utilization standards;
  - allowing and encouraging plantations on both public and private lands;
  - creating policy that stimulates genetic improvement and enhanced forest management of coniferous and deciduous trees;
  - reviewing existing tenure agreements to identify potential efficiencies in the distribution of timber;
  - utilizing productive forest lands in mineable oil sands areas; and
  - reviewing mine dump locations and reclamation end uses to reduce impacts on the forest industry.
- b. Stimulate the development of new fibre-based industries and value-added forest products.
- c. To be competitive, reduce the impacts on the forest industry from natural disturbances such as wildfire, insects and disease through fire suppression, fire hazard reduction programs (i.e., FireSmart) and aggressive control of infestations.



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Objective 1.3: The region's tourism potential is realized.

*Strategies*

- a. Establish tourism destination plans for Quarry of the Ancestors, Fort Chipewyan and Lakeland Country as iconic destinations.
- b. Stimulate private sector development of recreation areas with long-term leases.
- c. Develop environmentally sustainable tourist facilities and accommodations based on the region's natural landscape and character.
- d. Partner with the private sector to develop a tourism industry with opportunities based on the Lower Athabasca Region's industries, culture and heritage.
- e. Develop comprehensive recreation and tourism plans, including cultural/historical tourism plans, for the region.

Objective 1.4: The economic potential of agriculture is optimized.

*Strategies*

- a. Identify, designate and protect high quality primary production lands.
- b. Support local direct marketing agriculture by requesting that local governments identify and set aside community garden allotments.
- c. Encourage market gardens.
- d. Ensure rangelands are considered in the integrated land management process.
- e. Promote wider use of existing and develop new sustainable technologies and practices to improve agricultural production while protecting soil and water quality.
- f. Create a policy for greenhouse development and synergy with waste heat in the region.
- g. Ensure land expansion policies reflect the economic viability of agricultural operations.

Objective 1.5: The economy is diversified.

*Strategies*

- a. Support primary and value-added development in agriculture, forestry, tourism and energy resources.
- b. Identify and protect high quality aggregate and mineral resources.
- c. Support and optimize the local oil sands service and supply sector.
- d. Promote the local growth of environmental industries as a key diversification opportunity.



- e. Recognize the impact of costs of living and high energy sector wages on other businesses, and develop strategies that will encourage people and businesses to locate within the region.
- f. Improve access to education and utilize innovative ideas and technology.
- g. Encourage expertise sharing to assist in capacity building for municipalities, elected officials and municipal staff.
- h. Encourage development of alternative energy sources.


Objective 1.6: Increased participation of aboriginal peoples in the regional economy.

*Strategies*

- a. Assess and address the education and training needs of aboriginal peoples.
- b. Assess and address the degree of alignment between current industry practices and aboriginal needs and aspirations.
- c. Promote and build aboriginal business capacity. Develop forms of employment and contracting opportunities that fit with the needs and aspirations of aboriginal peoples.
- d. Promote and conduct cross-cultural learning opportunities between businesses and aboriginal peoples.
- e. Create roles for aboriginal elders in training and educational delivery.
- f. Work with aboriginal peoples to develop aboriginal centres of excellence pertaining to traditional knowledge, stewardship practices, aboriginal cooperative management opportunities, roles and responsibilities in environmental monitoring, integration with western science, etc.
- g. Provide capacity support to aboriginal peoples to develop and establish partnerships, impact benefit agreements and joint ventures with the industry.
- h. Collaborate with aboriginal peoples to address compensation matters and concerns relating to the infringement of treaty rights and other constitutionally protected rights.

**Outcome 2: Infrastructure and Community Development Needs are Anticipated, Planned and Provided Effectively and Efficiently**

It is critical that the supply of land, infrastructure and services matches the pace of economic and population growth. The opportunity is at hand to plan for roads, utilities, social civic facilities and other types of infrastructure to support the future expansion of communities and to sustain economic development.



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Objective 2.1: Communities are sustainable, liveable and use sound land-use planning principles.

*Strategies*

- a. Encourage local municipal development plans to include considerations for transit, efficient land uses, social and physical infrastructure, quality of life, walkability and active transportation, crime prevention, winter city design and community connectedness.
- b. Create a new process to assess the infrastructure, social and economic implications of major projects and the growth they create in a manner that parallels the application approval process and that:
  - occurs through the provincial government and relevant municipal governments;
  - determines the adequacy of current government business plans, identifies and recommends changes to business plans;
  - strengthens the capacity of government boards (e.g., Energy Resources Conservation Board), agencies and departments to support the social and economic assessments of major projects;
  - enables the public to contribute to the assessment process, understand the assessment results and recommendations and provide comments;
  - results in clear accountabilities for government and industry with tracking and reporting on stewardship of approved mitigation.
- c. Ensure necessary infrastructure for services (including health, not-for-profit agencies, cultural amenities and education) is appropriately, efficiently and economically provided by creating an assessment tool for use by the Government of Alberta.
- d. Create a transportation strategic plan that properly assesses the traffic impact of growth and has principles regarding commute times and heavy loads, which reflect the region's unique traffic patterns rather than provincial standards. Consider options (such as creation of a high speed commuter rail link) that account for environmental and economic impacts.
- e. Encourage co-location and/or shared use of compatible public service infrastructure, such as education facilities, parks and civic uses.
- f. Work with and support aboriginal peoples who develop sustainable social and economic development plans, consistent with traditional stewardship principles.
- g. Encourage local governments to develop recreation master plans to support provision and expansion of municipal parks and open spaces.
- h. As part of their approval, require work camps to incorporate active transportation design principles.





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Objective 2.2: Infrastructure is provided to support population growth and economic development.

*Strategies*

- a. Identify the physical infrastructure needs associated with economic development, including the different levels of need. Ensure these needs are updated appropriately and linked to Alberta's capital planning process through completion of Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plans (CRISP) in the region; these should be completed in an inclusive way with local governments. Enhance use of existing information databases such as GeoDiscover Alberta.
- b. Support the development of any new transportation linkages that are required.
- c. Require timely updates and alignment of provincial and municipal plans and funding as economic development is enabled/approved.
- d. Ensure coordination between local infrastructure requirements and regional infrastructure planning and that municipalities have the necessary financial resources/support to meet the capital and operating requirements of growth.
- e. Establish innovative partnerships with industry, the federal government, and municipalities to facilitate timely investment in major infrastructure (e.g., twinning of highway 63, commuter rail link, Anzac bypass, Fort McMurray bypass).
- f. Consider the special/unique circumstances of aboriginal peoples in planning and funding allocations for physical and social infrastructure.
- g. Plan for and develop a high capacity and robust electricity transmission system that supports growth in the oil sands industry and communities.
- h. Determine the amount of developable land to be released by the province and the subsequent number of market and affordable housing units required for projected population growth in the region, and arrange for the land to be released in a timely manner.
- i. Bring innovation to major transportation system planning, including expanding rail and air transport to meet future needs.
- j. Ensure infrastructure in the Cold Lake area (including Canadian Forces Base Cold Lake and Cold Lake Air Weapons Range) is sufficient.
- k. Develop relevant skills and educational programming to allow local people to find employment within the Lower Athabasca Region.
- l. Attract and retain skilled teachers and instructors to support the regional economy.



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Objective 2.3: Shadow populations within communities and work camps are managed effectively.

*Strategies*

- a. Recognize the shadow population in planning and allocating funding for physical and social infrastructure, affordable housing and recreational opportunities.
- b. Effectively plan for the size and location of work camps.
- c. Collaborate with the oil sands industry to plan and implement programs necessary to address the impacts of a transitory workforce on local communities.

Objective 2.4: Emergency preparedness is effective

*Strategies*

- a. Encourage local governments to implement a municipal addressing and signage program to improve emergency response.
- b. Assess the current movement of dangerous goods through Fort McMurray, including evacuation routes. Provide safer alternatives for movement of dangerous goods throughout the region.
- c. Ensure that the issue of wildfire prevention is included in emergency measures plans.
- d. To make travel on local highways safer, coordinate and implement traffic safety efforts and policies across jurisdictions.

Objective 2.5: Communities are safe.

*Strategies*

- a. Promote partnerships to develop regional and local programs that focus on law enforcement, traffic safety and prevention and treatment initiatives, to reduce crime at the community level.
- b. Support community and aboriginal elders to better interact with police and community services to create safer communities.
- c. Require Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) strategies in planning, development, and maintenance of communities, settlements and work camps.



### **Outcome 3: Economic Growth is Achieved Through Integrity and Respect for Management Systems**

The federal and provincial governments, local communities and stakeholders are all responsible for managing, monitoring and evaluating environmental conditions. Education is an important component in promoting responsible actions, rediscovering local history and features, creating a balanced debate on the growth of oil sands and building skills.

Objective 3.1: The environment's natural processes and natural resources are understood, respected and cared for.


#### *Strategies*

- a. Ensure that the process to assess the environmental implications of major projects:
  - strengthens the capacity of government boards (e.g., Energy Resources Conservation Board), agencies and departments to support the environmental assessments of major projects;
  - enables the public to contribute to the assessment process, understand the assessment results and recommendations and provide comments;
  - results in clear accountabilities for government and industry for mitigation; and
  - includes a means of tracking and reporting on stewardship of approved mitigation.
- b. Enhance existing natural heritage appreciation programs to present the region's unique natural diversity and land management practices.
- c. Support development of education programs to present the region's unique cultural and aboriginal history.
- d. Develop and present education programs to present the region's unique industrial development history and technologies.
- e. Inform and educate recreational users about responsibly managed recreational opportunities and regulations.
- f. Promote the actions taken by industry and business to minimize environmental impacts.

Objective 3.2: Land, air, water and biodiversity are monitored and reported.

#### *Strategies*

- a. Work with aboriginal peoples to identify stewardship responsibilities and accountability, utilize aboriginal knowledge of historical changes and roles for aboriginal peoples in air, land, biodiversity and watershed monitoring, performance measures and reporting.

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- b. Work with local communities to develop stewardship responsibilities, accountability and roles for local communities in air, land, biodiversity and watershed monitoring and reporting.
  - c. Work with aboriginal peoples to utilize aboriginal knowledge of historical changes in water quality and quantity, air quality, land and biodiversity to establish firm baselines for measurement in the region.
  - d. Complete an assessment of all existing monitoring and reporting programs and streamline/supplement as required. Create consistency for standards, methodologies, inclusion of aboriginal ecological indicators, transparency and public access.
  - e. Assess the effectiveness and efficiency of a community-based monitoring program.

Objective 3.3: Multi-stakeholder groups contribute meaningfully to the overall responsible development of the region.

#### *Strategies*

- a. Strengthen the effectiveness of multi-stakeholder groups and associations and aboriginal peoples.
- b. Strengthen government leadership and participation in multi-stakeholder groups and associations.
- c. Review and recommend, where appropriate, revisions to protocols and mandates of existing multi-stakeholder organizations to support the implementation and monitoring of management frameworks.

#### **Land-use Framework Outcome II: Healthy Ecosystems and Environment**

Alberta land uses should be managed to ensure healthy ecosystems. Albertans accept the responsibility to steward our land, air, water and biodiversity so that they can be passed on to the next generation in as good or better condition.

#### **Outcome 4: Land Uses are Responsible and Sustainable to Conserve Ecosystems and Biodiversity**

The foundation of the culture and economy of the Lower Athabasca Region is the land itself. The Lower Athabasca Region contains diverse landforms, vegetation, species and resources. Maintaining this biodiversity is essential for supporting human, plant and animal life. Maintaining the health and abundance of wildlife is also important to aboriginal peoples and communities, and the exercise of their rights. It is therefore an essential environmental objective to maintain ecological systems and processes by conserving land in the region, and where necessary, actively manage land use.



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Objective 4.1: Landscapes are managed to maintain and enhance ecological integrity and human health.


*Strategies*

- a. Establish conservation areas to maintain and enhance ecological integrity and human health.
- b. Require and enforce Integrated Land Management strategies for industry to maintain and improve landscape connectivity and reduce the industrial footprint.
- c. Ensure that no more than 15 per cent of the Lower Athabasca Region's land base in the mixed-use resource area will be disturbed for oil sands extraction footprint at any one time.
- d. Implement Alberta's new wetland policy once it is developed.
- e. Establish designated areas for controlled recreational land uses such as intensive motorized vehicle areas, as well as trail networks for backcountry motorized uses.
- f. Restrict the use of motorized vehicles on linear footprints through regulation and enforcement.
- g. Develop and maintain an agricultural best practices repository to support the agriculture community in making the best stewardship choices available.
- h. Develop and implement land-use offsets for industrial development.
- i. Use aboriginal traditional knowledge to enhance understanding of cumulative effects and develop appropriate mitigation/minimization strategies.

Objective 4.2: Disturbed land is reclaimed in a timely, progressive and aggressive manner.

*Strategies*

- a. Initiate a collaborative process to scope and conduct a cumulative impact assessment of land disturbance in the region to be used as a base case by future assessments for modeling and rationalizing the deployment of resources for ongoing monitoring. This is to be completed within two years of the date the LARP is approved.
- b. Develop an integrated reclamation land management plan in the entire mixed-use resource area (including tailings ponds, seismic and cut lines); prioritizing the mineable area, within five years from the date the LARP is approved. This plan must set achievable, improved goals for timely implementation and enforcement.
- c. Inventory reclamation site end-uses to support, develop and consider a variety of end-use opportunities, including recreation and tourism, forestry, local community uses or traditional uses.

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- d. Along with industry, work with aboriginal peoples and multi-stakeholder organizations to co-ordinate reclamation activities to support traditional land use on reclaimed areas.
  - e. Establish as a priority the research of methods for successfully reclaiming land for traditional use.
  - f. Address policy issues to enable the development of high-intensity motorized recreation areas on mined (i.e., bitumen) areas.

Objective 4.3: Regional biodiversity and ecosystem function is conserved and enhanced.

*Strategies*

- a. Develop and implement a biodiversity management framework by January 2012 to protect the ecological integrity of all land classifications
- b. Create management plans for conservation areas and multi-use areas which utilize traditional aboriginal knowledge and involve aboriginal knowledge holders.
- c. Manage mixed-use resource lands to increase their capacity to support movement of native species and communities and the ecological integrity of adjacent conservation areas, provincial parks and protected areas.
- d. Ensure that agricultural stewardship is integrated into biodiversity planning/management.
- e. Over time, connect conservation areas to improve their resilience to changing environmental conditions.
- f. Implement incentives (e.g., improved best practices, market-based approaches, etc.) to provide or maintain ecological goods and services within all land uses.
- g. Require the use of natural disturbance model approaches for appropriate land uses (e.g. mixed-use resource, conservation, tourism and recreation).
- h. Develop and implement an invasive species management framework for Alberta.
- i. Consider and provide for the role of traditional burning/regeneration processes in maintaining ecosystem values and biodiversity.
- j. Develop a traditional knowledge base of the variety and intensity of the impacts of individual and cumulative industrial activities on biodiversity and ecosystem functions through time.
- k. Pursue innovative partnerships and approaches to engage/educate residents in conservation and stewardship efforts (e.g., the Richardson Backcountry).
- l. Enhance current research on and monitoring of fish and wildlife populations to support their viability.



- m. Establish a program to eliminate hanging culverts to reintegrate natural surface water flow.
- n. Recover species designated as endangered or threatened under the *Alberta Wildlife Act*.
- o. With industry as a partner, commit to ongoing research of ecosystems and biodiversity to enhance, assess and update knowledge on a regular basis.
- p. Develop education programs and partnerships to manage conservation areas.

### **Outcome 5: The Integrity of Air and Water are Managed Through Responsible Stewardship**

The air we breathe and the water we drink lie at the very core of human existence. Therefore, the LARP must ensure that impacts to the airshed and watersheds are managed in a responsible manner while enhancing economic value in the region.

Objective 5.1: Air quality is managed to enhance and maintain ecological integrity and human health.


#### *Strategies*

- a. Establish NO<sub>x</sub> and SO<sub>2</sub> management plans, within six months of the date the LARP is approved, to maintain good air quality within the region. The management plans must include triggers, thresholds and critical loads, compliance regulations and incentives, and must integrate existing air management initiatives specific to each respective airshed.
- b. Establish a CO<sub>2</sub> management plan within the region that aligns with provincial regulations and strategies pertaining to greenhouse gases. The management plan must include triggers, thresholds and critical loads, compliance regulations, incentives, and integrate existing air management initiatives.
- c. Mandate the participation of municipalities and industries in regional airsheds

Objective 5.2: Water quality and quantity is managed to enhance and maintain ecological integrity and human health.

#### *Strategies*

- a. Implement management frameworks for the three groundwater zones and surface water quality upon approval of the LARP. The management plans must include triggers, thresholds, compliance regulations and incentives and be organized and specific to each respective watershed basin.
- b. Work with watershed planning and advisory councils (WPACs) to assess the conditions of watersheds within the region and develop plans and activities to address watershed issues.

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- c. Mandate the participation of municipalities and industries in regional watershed protection advisory councils.
  - d. Immediately implement the Beaver River Water Management Plan.
  - e. Evaluate the adequacy of in-stream flow needs that are currently in place using established management frameworks for the Athabasca River before further implementation.
  - f. Recognize the downstream water requirements of the Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan.
  - g. Develop and implement a plan for effluent water that is required to be returned back into the watershed.
  - h. Ensure that water management frameworks within the LARP are linked into the Wood Buffalo National Park ecosystem monitoring program.
  - i. Recognize and plan for the impacts of climate change and variability on water quality and quantity.
  - j. Examine changes in water levels of rivers and lakes and develop appropriate management strategies.
  - k. Discourage the use of surface water for in-situ operations.

Objective 5.3: Cooperation and partnerships pertaining to water consumption and air pollution are fostered through the use of incentives.

#### *Strategies*

- a. Enhanced use of existing programs (such as EnviroVista) to encourage environmental stewardship by industry, including the inclusion of specific clauses in industrial approval renewals to require plans to meet the requirements for membership.
- b. Study opportunities to provide incentives to industry to reduce air pollution and water consumption.

#### **Land-use Framework Outcome III: People-friendly Communities With Ample Recreational and Cultural Opportunities**

All citizens of Alberta shall have ready access to parks, forests and other areas to pursue outdoor recreational and cultural interests.

Growth in population through in-migration will give new opportunities for cultures and perspectives to be included into the region's communities.





## **Outcome 6: People-friendly Communities are Created Throughout the Region**

The communities we live in should be safe and healthy even during times of high growth. To contribute to full human development, the promotion of culture, history and a sense of place are important. Our communities are culturally diverse and have long and interesting histories. It is essential that we retain and pass on stories, cultural practices, and local identities and promote active civic engagement and pride.

Objective 6.1: Positive impacts of development on human health are optimized and negative impacts are minimized.


### *Strategies*

- a. Utilize human risk assessment multi-media models in the development of environmental management frameworks.
- b. Gain an understanding of high growth and urbanization on communities in the region through cumulative social and economic impact assessments during project applications. Utilize this information to proactively implement identified social services.

Objective 6.2: Communities have the interaction, involvement and civic engagement to build a bright future.

### *Strategies*

- a. Develop new and enhance existing programs that assist and encourage people to become involved in the community in which they live, work and play, regardless of their time of residency.
- b. Promote a strong and resilient voluntary sector for residents and workers within the region.
- c. Assess educational needs at a sub-regional basis using local knowledge and information.
- d. Strengthen educational opportunities to assist in the diversification of the skills base and to enhance quality of life for residents.
- e. Address pre-education barriers through targeted individual and family support programs.
- f. Partner with voluntary organizations in the provision of locally relevant social, cultural, recreational and other services.
- g. Strengthen social and economic ties with other communities (social linking) within the region.
- h. Preserve, reinforce and promote the values that contribute to the unique character, sense of place and community identity and pride.

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- i. Support partnerships with industry to offer educational opportunities to encourage residents to stay within the community.
  - j. Develop opportunities to strengthen community cohesiveness (social bonding).

Objective 6.3: Cultural diversity is valued.

*Strategies*

- a. Provide support to communities for a wide range of cultural opportunities that foster cross-cultural understanding.
- b. Develop opportunities to work with aboriginal elders and peoples to develop unique cultural-historical learning and language retention opportunities for aboriginal youth in the region.
- c. Develop strong and inclusive educational programs that are sensitive to various cultural perspectives within the region.
- d. Explore partnership opportunities with stakeholders and industry to support cultural and educational programs.
- e. Maintain opportunities for community traditional use activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, country foods and camping.
- f. Develop and implement a place name program that records the aboriginal and historical place names and meanings, and consider converting culturally/historically significant sites/features to those names.
- g. Support Métis communities in the development of traditional use and knowledge studies.

Objective 6.4: Significant historical resources are protected and historical themes are identified and developed.

*Strategies*

- a. Develop and implement a regional plan for conserving, interpreting and protecting historic resources based on Alberta Culture and Community Spirit's Provincial Master Plan, with priority to Ft. Chipewyan, Bitumont, Quarry of the Ancestors, Lac La Biche Mission, and the Clearwater River.
- b. Support aboriginal communities' leadership to develop management procedures to preserve and protect aboriginal peoples' historic and ceremonial sites that are significant to aboriginal peoples so that they can be preserved and protected as appropriate (*Historical Resources Act*, protective notations, etc).
- c. Audit the land disturbance activities on historical sites and revisit compliance to ensure they are protected.



## **Outcome 7: Aboriginal People's Rights, Traditional Uses and Values are Respected and Reflected in Planning**

There are eighteen First Nations and four Métis Settlements within or adjacent to the Lower Athabasca Region. Aboriginal consultation must be an integral part of the planning process for the region to ensure that impacted aboriginal peoples' rights, interests and perspectives are considered in planning.

Objective 7.1: Aboriginal peoples are included in land management planning.


### *Strategies*

- a. Work with aboriginal peoples and elders to develop local learning opportunities for youth regarding cultural values, social responsibility, stewardship roles, etc.
- b. Ensure meaningful consultation with aboriginal peoples.
- c. Work with aboriginal peoples to improve quality of information (especially economic, environmental and social impacts) to inform and co-ordinate current planning processes, infrastructure and services planning.
- d. Provide information and funding assistance to aboriginal peoples to participate in the development of land-use plans.

Objective 7.2: Land-use planning processes balance the constitutionally protected rights of aboriginal peoples and the interests of all Albertans.

### *Strategies*

- a. Work with aboriginal peoples to develop formal roles and responsibilities for aboriginal peoples in land-use planning and environmental assessment/monitoring.
- b. Work with aboriginal peoples to develop engagement strategies for aboriginal peoples in land planning and decision-making.
- c. Assess the state of knowledge of fish and wildlife resources and effectively manage allocations that affect aboriginal peoples' rights.
- d. Work with aboriginal peoples to generate land-use options for mitigation, accommodation and reconciliation of rights (e.g., offsets, joint planning in a development area).
- e. Support the ability of aboriginal peoples to exercise traditional uses of the land.
- f. Encourage aboriginal peoples to share traditional use information for the purposes of land management and planning.
- g. Work with aboriginal peoples in establishing roles pertaining to reclamation and reuse of reclaimed lands for traditional uses.

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- h. Assess the impacts of development and increased regulation on local trapping and treaty activities.

Objective 7.3: Opportunities for traditional uses within the region are maintained and enhanced.

*Strategies*

- a. Support aboriginal communities' ability to exercise traditional uses.
- b. Maintain populations of game species to support aboriginal traditional use and recreational hunting and fishing, including commercial guide outfitting.
- c. Support aboriginal communities to undertake community subsistence/traditional use needs assessment to support land-use decision making.

**Outcome 8: A Variety of Recreation Opportunities are Available**

Residents of and visitors to the Lower Athabasca Region are attracted to the region's land, lakes and other natural features for recreation. Expanded recreation opportunities will play an essential part in promoting the liveability and quality of life of residents while increasing tourism opportunities for visitors.

Objective 8.1: Recreational opportunities meet the preferences of residents and tourists.

*Strategies*

- a. Establish recreation and tourism areas to increase regional recreation and tourism opportunities.
- b. Create a regional recreation and tourism resource inventory and maintain the integrity of significant natural and built features.
- c. Develop a regional provincial parks system plan, within 12 months of the date the LARP is approved, based on the recreation demands within the region, and ensure regular updates to the plan to ensure recreation demands are being met.
- d. Manage public access to recreational water bodies and recreation areas to maintain their integrity and limit their overuse.
- e. Ensure cross-jurisdictional development and renewal of indoor recreation facilities and infrastructure.
- f. Develop all-season trail systems in accordance with Alberta Recreation Corridors and Trails Designation Program guidelines.



- g. Ensure that recreation programs are designed to be inclusive and accessible for people from all socio-economic strata.
- h. Implement regional park inclusion initiatives (e.g., Push to Open, Nature as a Second Language) to ensure the full participation of all Albertans in nature-based recreation.
- i. Develop a Lakeland Country recreation/tourism master plan by January 2013 that includes an implementation strategy.
- j. As a priority, develop Birch Lake as a campground in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to meet immediate needs.
- k. Develop a comprehensive cultural/historical tourism plan for the region.

Objective 8.2: Recreation areas are safe, sustainable and enjoyable.

*Strategies*

- a. Require active management and monitoring for intensive, higher impact and commercial recreation activities.
- b. Increase the application of the Respect the Land Program, and the availability of information about managed recreational opportunities, and measure results.
- c. Provide timely, fair and firm enforcement to improve compliance and mitigate irresponsible recreational behaviours.
- d. Promote local and aboriginal values, management and stewardship programs.
- e. Work to ensure recreation areas are representative of the region's ecosystems.

Objective 8.3: Viewsheds of scenic amenities are maintained.

*Strategies*

- a. Identify and, where possible, maintain the integrity of the region's scenic areas that form an attractive setting for tourism products and important recreation areas.
- b. Prevent or integrate the design of human development and disturbance in important scenic amenity areas in a manner that prevents or mitigates visual impacts.
- c. Encourage and enhance public access to appealing scenic areas, corridors, viewpoints and attractive landscapes.
- d. Consider the development of standards for minimizing light pollution from industrial facilities.



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## 3.0 Land-use Classification System

Note that priorities listed in the following sections are in alphabetical order and do not include any form of precedence between priorities for use.

### 3.1 Land-use Classifications

#### 3.1.1 Agriculture

Agriculture exists mainly on privately-owned lands in the southern portions of the Lower Athabasca Region. Agricultural lands are mainly used for crops, pasture land, market gardens and other uses, with some grazing on public lands.

The intent is to maintain overall agricultural productivity in the most productive agricultural areas, which currently comprise seven per cent of the region, keeping in mind that agricultural lands have additional value for wildlife habitat. Where economically practical, some areas of agricultural land should be utilized for tree plantations. Agricultural lands should be encouraged by stewardship actions such as the Environmental Farm Plan initiative to support wildlife diversity and water quality.

##### Management

As outlined in the Land-use Framework, the Government of Alberta is developing policy that municipalities will be expected to follow in reducing the fragmentation and conversion of agricultural land. In the agricultural areas underlain with oil sands deposits, subsurface development will proceed predominantly through the use of in situ techniques, allowing agricultural uses to continue where compatible.

In the region there is a need for adoption of best management practices (BMPs) across the agricultural industry.

A management framework for the Beaver River will become part of the management of the agricultural land classification.

##### Priorities for Use

Agriculture, including agri-forestry, is the overall long-term priority use. Intensive resource development is an overriding temporary use to ensure resource utilization, provided it is done in a manner to reduce impact on agriculture. Other uses, such as country residential development and recreation and tourism, may be permitted when consistent with provincial and municipal policies.

#### 3.1.2 Conservation

The conservation classification is intended to conserve a regional network for the maintenance of ecological components and processes in representative and high conservation value landscapes. General criteria for establishing conservation areas, as included in the terms of reference, include areas that: have little or no industrial activity; support aboriginal traditional uses; are representative of the



area's biological diversity; and are of significant size. The RAC has identified 14 per cent of the region as recommended conservation areas, to bring the total conservation area in the region up to 20 per cent. As per the terms of reference, an additional 12 per cent of lands in the region are also recommended by RAC as proposed conservation areas.

### Management

Conservation areas will be managed through management plans under a variety of regulatory regimes (e.g., parks, wildlife areas, access management, traditional use, etc.) which will be appropriate to the circumstances of each conservation area and will optimize ecosystem integrity. These areas should, to the extent possible, create a connection between biological and cultural diversity. Management plans will include specifics on caribou management, reclamation to natural cover and access management.

There will be ongoing monitoring to assess biodiversity utilizing the existing monitoring network with enhancements as necessary.

No new tenure will be issued. New facility permits will only be issued on existing tenure. Expired and inactive leases and tenures will be returned to the province and not reissued for tender.

Hunting, fishing and other traditional use activities in conservation areas will be managed consistent with conservation objectives and criteria, provincial regulations, and the province's legal obligations to aboriginal peoples.


Areas of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range fit the criteria for conservation areas. However, negotiations with the federal government would be required to facilitate this management intent.

### Priorities for Use

The priority is to ensure ecosystem integrity and relationships in these areas. Other uses, such as aboriginal and non-aboriginal traditional uses and limited primitive recreation, will be permitted where they will be consistent with overall conservation strategies. Existing uses, such as conventional oil and gas, will be permitted to continue but will terminate when existing mineral tenures expire. In some cases, a multi-use corridor may cross conservation lands where no practical alternative exists, but must be designed to minimize impacts on conservation values.

### **3.1.3 Mixed-use Resource**

Mixed-use resource, with forest cover as the largest surface feature, is an area with significant and geographically shifting economic development activities of intensive energy and forestry. The mixed-use resource classification comprises approximately 60 per cent of the LARP land area.



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About 40 per cent of the Lower Athabasca Region is underlain with commercially viable oil sands deposits, with a small proportion of this area mineable from the surface (approximately 20 per cent) and the majority of the deposits slated for in situ extraction (approximately 80 per cent). The level of oil sands production in 2008 was approximately 1.3 million barrels per day (mbd) of bitumen, with plans to increase. Large areas are also assigned to timber tenure. The forested area has significant ongoing aboriginal treaty rights activity, local trapping/hunting, and recreation and tourism.

### Management

The intent of this designation is to encourage and support economic activities associated with resource development in parts of the forest area while maintaining a large permanent area of forest cover managed in an integrated framework. Efforts will be made to minimize the footprint, to limit linear disturbance and to manage access. Forestry will follow sustainable forest practices. Integrated land management is mandatory. The use of formal area operating agreements is encouraged.

The intent is that development activities and facilities (e.g., plants and work camps) are managed to minimize impacts to rivers, lakes and groundwater. In addition, respecting the integrity of known significant cultural resources and aboriginal traditional use, and ensuring appropriate timely reclamation of the forest are expected. Mining will need to be coordinated with the harvesting of merchantable timber before oil sands development. The area will be progressively reclaimed for other uses (e.g., traditional uses, forestry, recreation, conservation, etc.) as soon as possible upon the completion of oil sands development. Uses after reclamation will be determined through multi-stakeholder input. No more than 15 per cent of the mixed-use resource area will be disturbed for oil sands extraction footprint at any one time.

Special management areas may be created that will place emphasis on enhanced management plans/programs to guide management decisions on disturbance, predator control and access management to protect caribou or for tourism and recreational value.

### Priorities for Use

The long-term priority is harvesting forests and extracting bitumen in appropriate areas while maintaining a significant area of Boreal forest at all times for its ecological values and treaty obligations. Oil sands development is a centerpiece of the province's vision for the area and access to a majority of the non-renewable oil sands resource is required. Work camp population centers, recreation and tourism and grazing are allowed.

### **3.1.4 Population Centres**

There are a variety of population centres of various sizes spread across the Lower Athabasca Region, including a large urban centre, hamlets, Métis settlements, Indian reserves, summer villages and towns. It is not the intent of the regional plan to set specific boundaries for population centres, but to recommend efficiently serviced compact development (i.e., smart





growth), local co-operation for supply of infrastructure and services and some additions to municipal development plans in these centres. Rate of population growth of these centres will be dependent on economic development and labour force needs. Communities should be provided with the financial means to accommodate and support this growth.

The proposed land-use classification map (figure in section 3.4) identifies some permanent population centres. Not all hamlets, villages or summer villages are shown; those noted are identified only to provide context of location.

### Management

The intent is for population centres to follow broad planning policy requirements (e.g., compact development, timely servicing, affordable housing, transit, etc. appropriate to the community), but leave the details of municipal planning to local governments, within the overall regional framework. The emphasis is to be on creating communities that are sustainable and liveable. Communities should be planned and developed to provide both regional and local physical and social infrastructure that is needed to efficiently and effectively support economic and community growth.

Current initiatives, such as comprehensive regional infrastructure sustainability plans underway for the Athabasca and Cold Lake oil sands areas, are exploring options for accommodating population growth. These include expansion of existing municipalities, creation of new municipalities, and enhanced use of existing options such as work camps. The results from these planning processes will become part of the LARP.

Planning will follow the upcoming guidelines on agricultural land fragmentation and density.

### Priorities for Use


Residential, commercial and light industrial development, plus supporting uses (e.g., parks, institutions, etc.) are the priority uses in population centres. Oil and gas development will avoid population centres.

## **3.1.5 Recreation and Tourism**

The creation of new recreation areas and enhancements in addition to those already in existence will increase regional recreation and tourism opportunities, which can contribute to economic development and diversification, and the quality of life in the region. A variety of recreational experiences are planned. Recreation and tourism areas are based on factors such as the desirability of the area, proximity to population centers and ease of access.

### Management

Each area must be managed to its specific requirements in a natural setting while enabling the recreation and tourism infrastructure development necessary to support the products associated with each area. Recreation will be the primary use in this classification, but it must balance ecological values and other uses. Integrated management is mandatory in areas



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where there is co-existence with other uses. Individual area-specific management plans will be created for each designated recreation and tourism area, to address the broad variety of experiences. These will include listings of permitted and non-permitted uses and recreation/tourism resources.

Regional aboriginal peoples should be included in the planning of recreation and tourism opportunities, and should participate in the creation of aboriginal tourism opportunities.

The following recreation and tourism opportunity intents provide general management direction:

- primitive (wilderness) – area that has challenging access, no recreation infrastructure and no evidence of humans;
- semi-primitive (wildland) – area that has less challenging access, limited facilities and on-site management, and minimal evidence of humans;
- semi-primitive mechanized (backcountry) – area that is accessible by motorized vehicles, has facilities and on-site management and a naturally appearing environment;
- roaded natural (front country) – area that is easily accessible by motorized vehicles; has a high degree of infrastructure and a naturally appearing environment with obvious evidence of human modification and use;
- rural – open space that is immediately adjacent to the region’s towns and villages; and
- urban – area comprised of the region’s built up areas and urban open space within.



**Opportunity Intent**

Broad Management Intent	Primitive (Wilderness)	Semi-Primitive (Wildland)	Semi-Primitive Mechanized (Back country)	Roaded Natural (Front country)	Rural	Urban
Recreation/Tourism	Otasan Lake		Slave River Andrew Lake and adjacent lands Gardiner Lake Christina Lake and adjacent lands Winefred, Grist, Kirby Lake Complex	Birch Lake Crow Lake Provincial Park and Ecological Reserve House River Crossing Steepbank Lake Complex Wiau Lake Complex		
Recreation/Tourism and Other Industrial Uses			Lake Athabasca and adjacent lands, Cowper Lake and adjacent lands	La Saline Lake Christina Crossing (La Loche Road)	Athabasca River Ft. McMurray Section (M) Clearwater River to Clearwater Conservation Area Gregoire/Willow Lake and adjacent lands	
Biodiversity Conservation and Recreation/Tourism			Richardson Backcountry - Six Lakes			



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## Priorities for Use

In general, two levels of priority have been established for recreation and tourism areas in the Lower Athabasca Region:

- primary uses – include areas like the Richardson Backcountry, where recreation and tourism is the primary use but balanced with other values such as ecology and traditional use; and
- secondary uses – recreation and tourism will occur in conjunction with primary uses in other classifications such as in a conservation area.

All recreation and tourism areas accommodate traditional use.

## **3.2 Overlays**

### **3.2.1 Lakeland Country Overlay**

Lakeland Country has significant potential as an iconic destination for tourism and recreation. It is a special area characterized by a variety of lakes, rivers, streams and upland areas.

#### Intent

The intent of this overlay is to emphasize and promote the role of tourism and recreation in Lakeland Country and to maintain the features that make it a unique destination. To support such activities, there should be emphasis placed on preservation of the aesthetic and ecological characteristics of Lakeland Country. Recreation and tourism management planning for the overall area is required on a broad basis to maximize this potential in conjunction with the intent of underlying land-use classifications. This management planning should consider and address the concerns of Treaty 6 First Nations about development of Lakeland Country, and the importance of managing land use to protect treaty rights.

The impacts of other land uses in the area (e.g., oil and gas development) should be managed. In order to accomplish these objectives, an overall master plan should be prepared for Lakeland Country. Integrated aboriginal and multi-stakeholder planning should be used to determine long-term use objectives for the Lakeland Country overlay given local and regional considerations.

#### Priorities

Lakeland Country could provide an enhanced range of tourism and recreation developments that can support the growth of the region and meet the growing demand for activities such as all-season resorts and fixed-roof accommodation, water based activities, nature-based activities and eco-tourism, consumptive tourism opportunities (e.g., hunting, fishing) and motorized recreational trail opportunities. The protection of the area's environmental assets is important, as is appropriate and responsible energy and forestry development, aboriginal traditional and community traditional uses and agriculture.



### 3.2.2 Multi-use Corridor Overlay

The Land-use Framework identifies the need to address multi-use corridors within the Lower Athabasca Region. Multi-use corridors may include any combination of roads, railways, power lines, utilities, pipelines and municipal infrastructure. This is a priority since costs of establishing corridors will increase in the future and options for creating and siting corridor alignments will decrease over time. Land efficiencies will be realized through consolidation, allowing the Government of Alberta to implement long-term infrastructure objectives in the province and the Lower Athabasca Region. Conceptual corridors have been identified as follows:

- north-south linking the Industrial Heartland and the Fort McMurray area;
- north-south linking Fort McMurray and the Northwest Territories;
- north-south linking Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche along Highway 881; and
- east-west linking Fort McMurray to La Loche, SK (east) and Red Earth Creek (west) along the conceptual Highway 686.

#### Intent

The intent is to consolidate a number of critical land-use functions within a pre-defined area, thereby reducing the footprint, fragmentation of land, and environmental impact. The design of corridors will meet the infrastructure needs of future economic development and population centres, such as energy resources, forestry, and recreation and tourism. Illustrating conceptual corridors at this time will provide the opportunity to determine them in more detail in co-ordination with municipal planning and other project approvals. A robust multi-stakeholder planning process will be necessary to determine the management intent, safety and security, environmental considerations and allowable uses within the multi-use corridor overlay areas.

There is a need for co-ordination of activities and planning for river crossings between administrators for the multi-use corridors and the river corridor overlays. Access and use in river corridors will also be managed to protect the traditional practices of the region's aboriginal peoples, and aboriginal traditional knowledge will be considered in developing buffers, setbacks and other management tools.

#### Priorities

The corridors will be the dominant surface use within their defined alignment, but must be designed and located to minimize environmental impacts and to integrate with other uses (such as ensuring ease of wildlife crossing, etc.) as permitted by underlying land-use classifications. The priority is to integrate with existing corridors where possible. Where there is no practical alternative, corridors may cross conservation areas, which may result in the need for additional mitigation measures.



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### **3.2.3 River Corridor Overlay**

#### Introduction

River corridors can be generally defined as the area including the actual watercourse, its bed and shore, the adjacent valley slopes and the immediate adjacent upland area. River corridors in the Lower Athabasca Region are important landscape features which typically have a wide variety of economic, environmental and social values. These values are condensed into relatively compact, linear forms which may stretch across multiple land-use classifications. As such, these areas are treated as land-use overlays, modifying the management intent of the underlying land-use classifications.

#### Intent

River and stream corridors are unique areas requiring management approaches that are deliberate and comprehensive in nature. They are intended to maintain the critical long-term functions and characteristics of rivers and streams. Management of river corridors must be co-ordinated with the management of adjacent upland areas as well as potential crossings by potential multi-use corridors. These corridors are complex systems that are difficult to replicate. They are dynamic and changing due to surface and groundwater movement and natural disturbances. Additional planning work will be necessary to determine the management intent and allowable uses within the river corridor overlay areas. Two rivers in the region, the Clearwater and the Christina, also have existing Heritage River designations that provide an additional layer of management that requires attention and protection.

Steps are to be taken to clarify the diverse level of protection and setbacks currently in place. Land uses (including setbacks and corridor management) specific to each major river, tributary and reach should be determined and applied for adjacent uses. The use of best practices in all industry activities within river corridors is required. The potential for additional conservation opportunities in river corridors needs to be considered, especially proximate to Fort McKay.

#### Priorities

The dominant functions of river corridors are to maintain water quality and quantity, maintain natural diversity (including biodiversity, vegetation and landforms), provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife and provide landscape connectivity between conservation areas and other habitat. Equally important are the maintenance of aboriginal traditional uses and cultural resources, the preservation of corridor aesthetics and character, and the provision of recreation and tourism opportunities. The secondary intent is to provide industrial and commercial access to natural resources, when managed in a way that maintains primary intents.



### 3.3 Overall Land Use

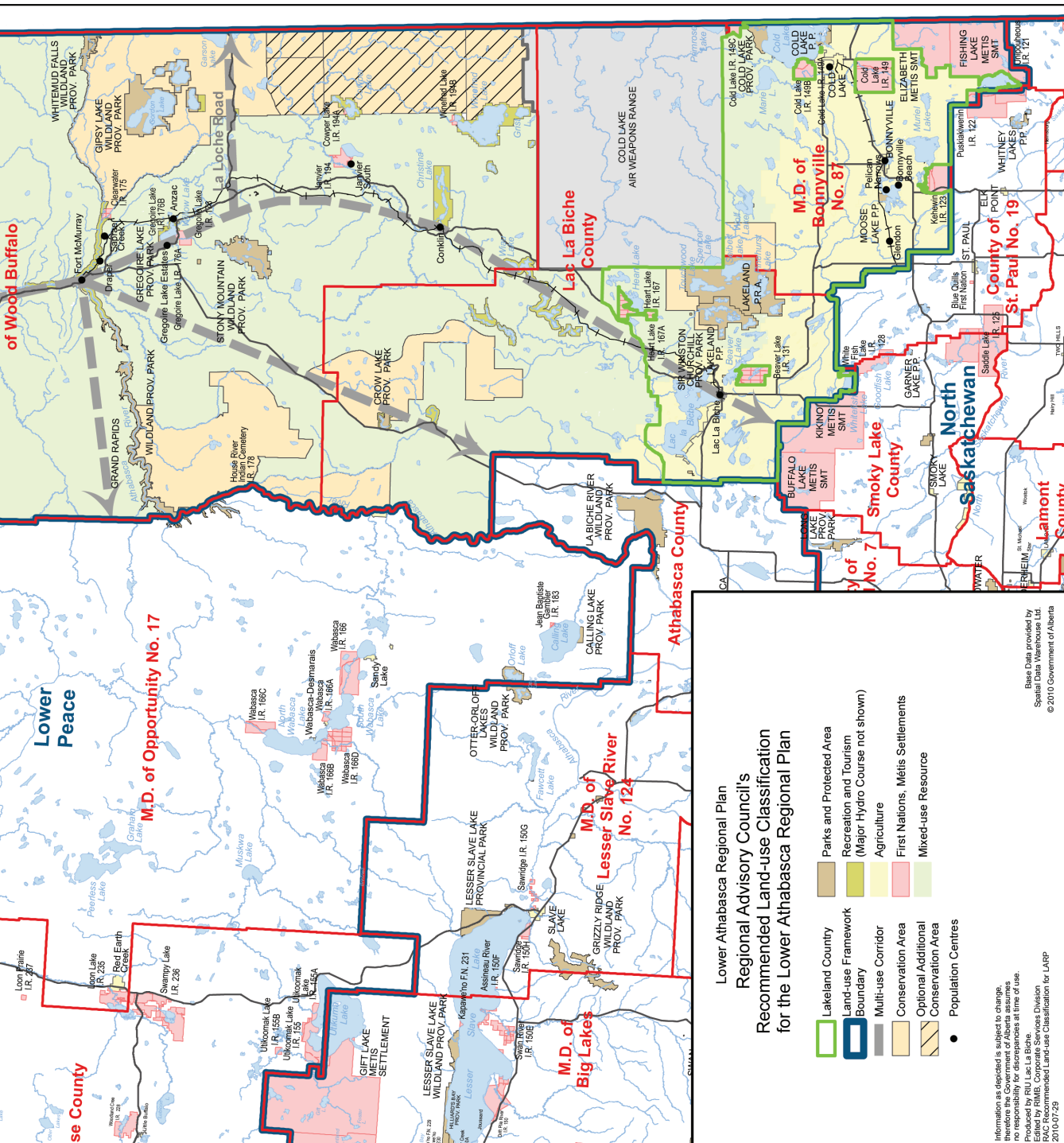
#### Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council's Recommendations on Land-use Classification - Statistics

Lower Athabasca Regional area is approximately 9,321,600 hectares (93,216.60 square kilometres).

Cold Lake Air Weapons Range	6%
First Nation Reserve and Métis Settlements	2%
Lake Athabasca	2%
Agriculture	7%
Conservation	14%
Existing Parks	6%
Mixed-use Resource (with Industrial)*	60%
Recreation and Tourism	3%
LARP Boundary	100%
*Optional Additional Conservation in Mixed-use Resource	12%







**Lower Athabasca Regional Plan  
Regional Advisory Council's  
Recommended Land-use Classification  
for the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan**

- Lakeland Country
- Land-use Framework
- Boundary
- Multi-use Corridor
- Conservation Area
- Optional Additional Conservation Area
- Population Centres
- Parks and Protected Area
- Recreation and Tourism (Major Hydro Course not shown)
- Agriculture
- First Nations, Métis Settlements
- Mixed-use Resource

Information as depicted is subject to change. It is not intended to be used for legal purposes. Produced by RUI, Lac La Biche. Edited by RMB, Corporate Services Division. RAC Recommended Land-use Classification for LARP. 2010/12/25

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## 4.0 Lower Athabasca Regional Advisory Council Members

### **Chair**

Heather Kennedy  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Oil Sands Secretariat, Treasury Board  
Edmonton AB

### **Vice Chair**

Hildy Hanson  
Coordinator, Workforce Training  
Keyano Collage  
Fort McMurray AB

Melissa Blake  
Mayor  
Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo  
Fort McMurray AB

Eric Butterworth  
Manager, Boreal and Territorial Operations  
Western Boreal Forest Program  
Ducks Unlimited Canada  
Edmonton AB

Archie Collins  
Chairman  
Elizabeth Métis Settlement  
Cold Lake AB

R. Lanny Coulson  
Alberta/NWT Region  
Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency  
Edmonton AB

Howard Ewashko  
President  
Northlands Forest Products Ltd.  
Fort McMurray AB

Peter Koning  
Senior Environmental and Regulatory Coordinator - Oil Sands  
ConocoPhillips Canada Resource Corp.  
Cumulative Environmental Management Association  
Calgary AB



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Clarence Makowecki  
Agriculture/Industry  
Independent Consultant  
St. Paul AB

Douglas Parrish  
General Manager of Public Services  
City of Cold Lake  
Cold Lake AB

Rick Pawluk  
Manager, Regulatory Affairs  
Imperial Oil Resources Ltd.  
Calgary AB

Don Pope  
Integration Land Management Specialist  
Alberta Pacific Forest Industries  
Boyle AB

Cecilia Quist  
Deputy Mayor  
Lac La Biche County  
Lac La Biche AB

Glen Semenchuk  
Executive Director  
Cumulative Environmental Management Association  
Fort McMurray AB

Marc G. Stevenson  
Aboriginal Policy and Research Consultant  
Edmonton AB

Dave Theriault  
Chief Operating Officer and Vice President of Operations  
Laricina Energy Ltd.  
Calgary AB

Roy Vermillion  
Chief Executive Officer  
Athabasca Tribal Council  
Fort McMurray AB

