



*Office of the Minister
Deputy Government House Leader
MLA, Calgary-North West*

June 6, 2019

Ms. Susan Goldberg
Editorial Director and Editor in Chief
National Geographic
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Washington, D.C. 20036
sgoldberg@ngs.org

Dear Ms. Goldberg,

Alberta's oil sands is truly a remarkable success story, but your readers would unfortunately never know that based on your April 11 article by Stephen Leahy. In fact, Alberta's oil sands is a global leader in responsible energy development. It employs tens of thousands of people across Canada, is a key economic driver of an entire country, and is an essential part of North America's integrated energy system.

But this vital industry is under the attack of well-funded special interest groups that seek to landlock our energy resources. Our government is deeply concerned and frustrated by the false and misleading information that continues to circulate around our energy sector, including that contained in your article. As Minister of Energy for Alberta's newly appointed government, one of my priorities is to correct this kind of misinformation, on all fronts, to ensure people have access to verified facts and reputable research.

National Geographic is a respected publication known around the world for covering issues of global importance. I was disappointed—and frankly, surprised—by the obvious disregard for factual, balanced reporting in your article on Alberta's oil sands.

The original article—which I'm aware was revised several weeks after its initial publication—contained a number of gross inaccuracies, particularly around the scale of Alberta's oil sands operations and its environmental impacts. For example, there are only seven oil sands mining projects operating in Alberta, a far cry from the "175-odd" projects cited in the original article.

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The article also states, incorrectly, that producers are “reluctant to spend the money” to manage tailings and that there is “no end in sight and no solution to clean them up.”

In reality, energy companies are required by law to have plans in place to reclaim sites at the end of a project’s lifecycle. The provincial energy regulator must approve these plans before any project moves forward. In other words, reclamation and environmental stewardship in Alberta’s oil sands is priority for this government—and for industry.

National Geographic readers might want to look into the work of the [Canadian Oil Sands Innovation Alliance](#). Founded in 2012, this industry-funded organization is led by producers who strive to continually improve the environmental performance of the oil sands.

I appreciate that National Geographic corrected some of the original inaccuracies and updated the article to include the perspectives of industry representatives. However, for nearly three weeks your readers were exposed to false and misleading information.

This is unacceptable, and especially so for a publication of National Geographic’s stature.

The updated article still lacks context in several key areas that would better serve readers in understanding the complexities of energy development. For instance, the article implies that communities have little-to-no say when it comes to resource development. This could not be further from the truth.

Over the last 20 years, Alberta has developed an excellent regulatory framework that requires impacted communities to be consulted, supports their economic and social development, and respects Indigenous rights and includes Indigenous perspectives.

Many Indigenous communities and companies in Alberta and across Canada benefit from, support, and participate in the responsible development and transportation of Alberta’s energy products. In fact, earlier this year more than [100 First Nations](#) in Alberta declared their interest in investing in the Trans Mountain expansion project.

The fact is Indigenous communities know that Alberta is a responsible energy producer—something that critics and opponents seem to intentionally ignore. And they see how this project can help them achieve economic independence and prosperity, while still standing up for environmental stewardship.

I am proud of Alberta’s track record of producing some of the world’s cleanest oil. As was correctly pointed out in your updated article, Alberta was the first jurisdiction in North America to introduce a price on carbon for large industrial emitters in 2007.

This money has been invested into leading-edge research on emissions-reducing technology and has helped decrease the average emissions intensity of oil sands production by more than 20 per cent since 2009.

These are some of the facts that your readers should have had access to—the first time around.

I hope that in the future National Geographic will reach out to the Government of Alberta, prior to publication, so that we can point to reliable sources of information which can be independently verified. Doing so will help prevent errors and misinformation from being published and will provide your readers with a more complete and factual picture of Alberta's energy industry.

Finally, I want to bring to your attention an article published by [JWN Energy](#) that outlines, in detail, the many errors shared in Mr. Leahy's article. I hope and trust you will share this with your readers in the interest of balanced and accurate reporting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sonya Savage". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sonya Savage
Minister