

Land Use Framework

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan

Implementation Progress Report for 2017, 2018 and
2019

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Land-use Framework Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Implementation Progress Report for 2017, 2018 and 2019

Land Use Secretariat, Government of Alberta

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Progress	5
Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Strategies	8
Provincial Outcome: Healthy economy supported by our land and natural resources	8
Provincial Outcome: Healthy ecosystems and environment	17
Provincial Outcome: People-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities	23
Cross Reference Table	29

Introduction

The Land-use Framework, introduced in 2008, provides a blueprint for land-use management and decision-making to address mounting pressures on Alberta's land and resources. It also establishes a vision of Albertans working together to respect and care for the land as a foundation for our environmental, economic and social well-being.

Since that time, many advances have been made including the establishment of the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and the adoption of an integrated and coordinated approach to resource management. This approach encourages cumulative effects management of natural assets, taking into account the growing impacts of development on the land over several years. It relies on legislation, regulations and on Land-use Framework regional plans developed for each of seven regions within the province to provide direction. To date, two regional plans – the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan for northeastern Alberta and the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan for southern Alberta – have become regulations.

Regional plans are developed with input and feedback from Albertans. They establish a long-term vision for the region, set the desired economic, environmental and social outcomes and objectives for the region using a cumulative effects management approach, and align provincial policy at the regional level to balance Alberta's outcomes. Further, regional plans specifically describe the strategies, actions, approaches and tools required to achieve these desired ends and they contain regulatory provisions to enable achievement of these strategies and actions for the region over the next few years. They are enforceable by law and binding on everyone as identified in the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act*. This provides guidance and clarity for land users and land-use decision-makers.

This Land-use Framework Lower Athabasca Region Plan Implementation Progress Report for 2017, 2018 and 2019 meets the legislative requirements described in the *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* and the regulatory requirements embedded in the plan. It also fulfills a public commitment to regularly monitor and answer the question “was progress made toward achieving desired regional objectives expressed within the approved regional plans?” This report is dedicated to offering information regarding the work accomplished or the barriers encountered from 2017 to 2019 for the plan. Progress reports generated since the plan was approved will be used to inform 5-year evaluations and 10-year reviews. Copies of this and earlier reports are available on-line at www.landuse.alberta.ca, on the Open Government portal at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications> or by contacting the Land Use Secretariat at LUF@gov.ab.ca or 780.644.7972.

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Progress

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan came into effect in September 2012, and was the first land-use plan approved by Cabinet. It presents the desired economic, social and environmental outcomes for northeastern Alberta and a detailed plan to achieve these results. For example, in order to achieve a healthier environment and ecosystems, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan sets environmental management triggers and limits for air and surface water quality, and provides for six new conservation areas with the aim of conserving two million hectares or 22 per cent of the region in northeastern Alberta.

The plan also encourages economic diversification, addresses infrastructure challenges around Fort McMurray, commits to continued consultation with Indigenous peoples, offers more certainty to industry, and provides for nine new provincial recreation areas to address growing demand for recreational and tourism opportunities. Finally, it commits to the development of a biodiversity management framework, a tailings management framework and a surface water quantity management framework to guide the actions and decisions of land and natural resource managers for many years to come.

This report highlights the status of all the strategic commitments made in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan. Although timelines for some strategies in the regional plans were delayed, they continue to be important to government.

At the end of 2019, most of the 35 strategies outlined in Table 2 of the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan were completed, remained on track, or are ongoing; however, the following seven strategies have completion dates that are extended:

- sub-regional plan using a strategic environmental assessment approach for the south Athabasca oil sands area;
- Lakeland Country Destination Development Strategy and Tourism Opportunity Plan;
- tourism development nodes;
- develop a biodiversity management framework;
- develop a landscape management plan for public lands in the Green Area;
- complete and implement the Groundwater Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca Region; and
- develop the regional parks plan for the Lower Athabasca region.

This report presents summary tables followed by a detailed look at the strategies for the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Progress Summary

STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES	LEAD MINISTRY	STATUS		
		2017	2018	2019
Provincial Outcome: Healthy economy supported by our land and resources				
LARP Outcome 1: The economic potential of the oil sands resource is optimized.				
1. Alberta Provincial Energy Strategy	Energy	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
2. Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands	Energy	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
3. Improved regulatory process	Energy, Environment and Parks	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
4. Sub-regional plan using a strategic environmental assessment approach for the south Athabasca oil sands area	Environment and Parks	Due 2013; Extended to 2021-2025	Due 2013; Extended to 2021-2025	Due 2013; Extended to 2021-2025
5. Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta	Indigenous Relations	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
LARP Outcome 2: The region's economy is diversified.				
6. Prevent future shortfalls in timber supply	Agriculture and Forestry	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
7. Wildfire management planning initiatives	Agriculture and Forestry	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
8. Alberta Forest Products Roadmap to 2020	Agriculture and Forestry	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
9. Lakeland Country Destination Development Strategy and Tourism Opportunity Plan	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	Due 2015; Extended to 2019	Due 2015; Extended to 2019	Due 2015; Extended to 2020
10. Enhance and expand the supply of tourism products and infrastructure	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
11. Tourism development nodes	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	Due 2015; Extended to 2019	Due 2015; Extended to 2019	Due 2015; Extended to 2020
12. Tourism opportunity assessments for Quarry of the Ancestors, Bitumont and Fort Chipewyan	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	Completed	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015
13. Scenic byways network	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	Completed	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015
14. Clarity in rules for physical access to energy, mineral and coal resources	Environment and Parks, Energy	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
15. Promote new investment in energy, mineral and coal resource development	Energy	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
Provincial Outcome: Healthy ecosystems and environment				
LARP Outcome 3: Landscapes are managed to maintain ecosystem function and biodiversity.				
16. Create new conservation areas on provincial Crown land	Environment and Parks	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
17. Manage existing conserved lands	Environment and Parks	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
18. Develop a biodiversity management framework	Environment and Parks	Due 2013; Extended to 2020	Due 2013; Extended to 2021	Due 2013; Extended to 2022
19. Develop a landscape management plan for public lands in the Green Area	Environment and Parks	Due 2013; Extended to 2021-2025	Due 2013; Extended to 2021-2025	Due 2013; Extended to 2021-2025

20.	Complete a tailings management framework for the mineable Athabasca Oil Sands	Environment and Parks	Completed	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015
21.	Implement a progressive reclamation strategy	Environment and Parks	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

LARP Outcome 4: Air and water are managed to support human and ecosystem needs.

22.	Implement the Air Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca Region	Environment and Parks	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
23.	Implement the Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River	Environment and Parks	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
24.	Complete and implement the Groundwater Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca Region	Environment and Parks	Due 2014; Extended to 2020	Due 2014; Extended to 2021	Due 2014; Extended to 2021
25.	Complete an updated Surface Water Quantity Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River	Environment and Parks	Completed	Completed in 2015	Completed in 2015

Provincial Outcome: People-friendly communities with ample recreational and cultural opportunities

LARP Outcome 5: Infrastructure development supports economic and population growth.

26.	Use CRISP to augment and facilitate planning where oil sands development causes growth pressures	Energy	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
27.	Ensure opportunities for future routes and siting for pipeline gateways, transmission corridors and utility and electrical transmission corridors are maintained	Energy, Transportation	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
28.	Critical economic linkage to markets	Transportation, Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

LARP Outcome 6: The quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for recreation and active living.

29.	Designate new provincial recreation areas to address growing demand for recreational opportunities	Environment and Parks	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable
30.	Create public land areas for recreation and tourism that contain unique features or settings	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, Environment and Parks	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable	As soon as practicable
31.	Develop the regional parks plan for the Lower Athabasca	Environment and Parks	Due 2013; Extended to 2019	Due 2013; Extended to 2021	Due 2013; Extended to 2021
32.	Develop the Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan	Environment and Parks	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
33.	Collect regional data including completion of recreation and tourism inventory, a scenic resource assessment inventory and a regional recreational demand and satisfaction survey	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

LARP Outcome 7: Inclusion of aboriginal peoples in land-use planning.

34.	Continue to consult with aboriginal peoples in a meaningful way when government decisions may adversely affect the continued exercise of their constitutionally protected rights	Environment and Parks, Energy, Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, Indigenous Relations	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
35.	Invite First Nations expressing an interest in the Richardson Backcountry to be involved in a sub-regional initiative called the First Nations-Richardson Backcountry Stewardship Initiative (Richardson Initiative)	Environment and Parks, Energy, Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women, Indigenous Relations	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Strategies

Provincial Outcome: Healthy Economy Supported by Our Land and Natural Resources

LARP Outcome 1: The economic potential of the oil sands resource is optimized

1. Continue work through the Alberta Provincial Energy Strategy

Alberta Energy - implementation is ongoing

Description:

Alberta's Provincial Energy Strategy charted the course of Alberta's energy future. Responsible development of Alberta's energy resources remains a priority for the government.

Progress:

Government's priorities for advancing responsible development of the province's energy resources in 2019 focused on advocating for pipelines and market access, defending Alberta's reputation as a responsible energy producer and improving the province's regulatory environment. Specific actions included taking action on emissions, improving the liability management system and initiating a review of the Alberta Energy Regulator.

Prior actions supporting responsible energy resource development in the reporting period occurred under the banner of the Canadian Energy Strategy – an interprovincial framework for collaboration on shared energy-related priorities that went into effect in July 2015. Areas of focus included the means by which provinces and territories collaborate to deliver energy to people, support innovation, address climate change, improve energy efficiency, and reduce the use of diesel-generated electricity in off-grid communities. Alberta's work on implementation of the Canadian Energy Strategy was put on hold in 2018 in favour of examining new options to advance responsible development of the province's energy resources and subsequently pursuing the 2019 actions.

Additional details about the actions highlighted in this strategy are described in other sections of this report.

2. Continue work on Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands

Alberta Energy – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands was a 20-year strategic plan for innovative, responsible and collaborative development of Alberta's oil sands. This strategic plan was developed to address current and future growth in the oil sands. It was intended to achieve the triple bottom line outcomes of optimized economic growth, reduced environmental footprint, and increased quality of life for Albertans today and into the future.

Progress:

Responsible Actions no longer actively guides provincial policy and program delivery, though its strategic objectives: optimal oil sands development and improved environment performance, continue to be relevant. A priority area of the original strategy that remains so today is emissions management. The Technology Innovation and Emissions Reduction Regulation was finalized in 2019, and will come into effect on January 1, 2020. It has been subsequently granted equivalence to the federal Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act by the Government of Canada. This

regulation supports industrial facilities in finding innovative ways to reduce emissions and invest in clean technology to stay competitive while avoiding potentially costly overlapping federal regulations.

The province also led a multi-stakeholder effort to design methane regulations that will achieve a 45 per cent reduction in emissions by 2025. The regulations are being implemented through updates to Alberta Energy Regulator Directive 017: Measurement Requirements for Oil and Gas Operations, Directive 060: Upstream Petroleum Industry Flaring, Incinerating, and Venting, and other instruments. These regulations apply to upstream oil, gas and bitumen wells, facilities, gas plants, pipeline installations, storage facilities, and tank terminals. This includes production and injection wells, batteries, and central processing facilities within thermal in-situ oil sands schemes. A formal agreement with the federal government to avoid duplication of rules is expected in 2020.

Prior to TIER, oil sands emissions were managed under the now obsolete Climate Leadership Plan. The dual planks of emissions management under that plan, which took effect in 2015, were an output-based \$30 per tonne carbon emission price for oil sands facilities and a maximum annual greenhouse gas emissions limit of 100 megatonnes for the oil sands industry, with provisions for co-generation and new upgrading capacity.

Throughout 2017, the Government of Alberta worked with the Oil Sands Advisory Group on implementation of the 100 megatonne emission limit and consulted with key stakeholders and the public. Initial implementation actions focused on encouraging emissions reductions and developing actions in the event that emissions begin to approach the limit. This work, which included policy options for the Oil Sands Emission Limit Regulation ended in late 2018, as Government decided to replace the Climate Leadership Plan with TIER.

3. Continue work on an improved regulatory process

Alberta Energy and Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Building a robust and efficient regulatory system is critical to supporting continued growth and environmental management in the region and province. Effective regulation of energy and mineral development requires a balanced and integrated approach that takes into consideration the range of constantly evolving social, economic and environmental factors. This requires ongoing effort and collaboration among Government, regulators, industry and other stakeholders.

Progress:

In response to recommendations made by the 2015 Royalty Review Advisory Panel, changes and improvements were made to the Oil Sands Royalty Regulation. In particular, Alberta Energy acted upon a key recommendation for enhanced transparency of oil sands royalties through the publication of a website that reports royalties and other oil sands data on an individual project basis (<https://www.alberta.ca/royalty-oil-sands-project-data.aspx>). The website was first published in late 2017 and additional data will be published annually.

The Alberta Energy Regulator continues to assess risk exposure and provide more transparency to the public about development activities. The Alberta Energy Regulator has also published updated application processing timelines as part of its work to improve efficiency and increase Alberta's competitiveness.

Government has also taken action in the regulatory environment by tasking the Natural Gas Advisory Panel with providing advice and recommendations on short-, medium-, and long-term actions that could take to be taken to ensure Alberta is receiving maximum value for its natural gas resources. The panel provided a report to the Minister of Energy in October 2018, which outlined numerous regulatory recommendations. Actions have been taken on all 11 of the Panel's recommendations by government departments and agencies. Outcomes are focused on creating more transparency and streamlining regulatory timelines and processes.

The establishment of the *Red Tape Reduction Implementation Act (2019)* has provided over-arching policy direction to the Government of Alberta to reduce costs and the regulatory burden for businesses.

The Regulatory Enhancement Initiative was launched in 2018 to improve application timelines, ensure modern and effective regulations and continue to transform how the Regulator operates. As of the end of 2019, 26 projects have been completed under this initiative. Highlights of 2019 work include:

- Enhancements to Directive 081 - Water Disposal Limits and Reporting to encourage thermal in situ oil sands operators to use alternative water sources.
- Enhancements to modernize Directive 054: Performance Reporting and Surveillance of In Situ Oil Sands Schemes. As in-situ technologies have evolved and understanding of the sector has grown, in situ resource development has become a routine and low risk activity. These changes to Directive 054 made management of in situ performance and risk less burdensome on operators.
- Implementation of the Integrated Decision Approach. This approach is based on the concept of “one application, one review, one decision” and is applicable across the life cycle of energy development. It supports efforts to enhance regulation and oversight of energy resource development and increases the effectiveness of decisions by focusing on what matters the most to Albertans. The approach also offers more transparency, allowing Albertans to see the whole picture of a proposed energy project. Highlights include:
 - moving public lands and well licensing applications into the OneStop platform;
 - implementing applications for approvals, approval amendments and Code of Practice notices under the *Water Act*
 - implementing public lands data sharing between the Alberta Energy Regulator and Government; and
 - implementing a risk informed decision-making process for the majority of applications, submissions, and notifications received by the Regulator.

Alberta Environment and Parks continues to work on a Regulatory Assurance Framework, to provide an effective and efficient regulatory assurance system that fosters environmental sustainability. The goals of the framework include an integrated approval process, enhanced stakeholder awareness, sustainable programs and continuous innovation.

The province continued to make improvements to the Liability Management Framework for upstream oil and gas. Improvements will be announced in 2020 and will address liability management challenges across the full lifecycle of oil and gas development. The new framework will ensure that the economic environment exists for industry to address liabilities without discouraging new investment.

Finally, the Government of Alberta initiated a review of the Alberta Energy Regulator to identify enhancements to its mandate, operations and governance, and to ensure that Alberta remains a predictable place to invest and a world leader in responsible resource development. A series of workshops with stakeholders and communities, as well as public engagement occurred in the fall.

4. Sub-regional plan using a strategic environmental assessment approach for the South Athabasca oil sands area

Alberta Environment and Parks - due 2013, Extended to 2021-2025

Description:

Development of a sub-regional plan using a strategic environmental assessment approach for the South Athabasca Oil Sands area will contribute to the management of cumulative effects and support efficiencies in the regulatory review process for in situ oil sands operations. The South Athabasca Oil Sands Regional Strategic Assessment examines the potential cumulative effects of three energy development scenarios in an area between Fort McMurray and Lac La Biche that will likely see significant development of bitumen resources over several decades.

Progress:

A draft of the South Athabasca Oil Sands Regional Strategic Assessment was completed in 2015. Updates are continuing. The regional strategic assessment is a rigorous and science-based approach that integrates social, economic and environmental considerations and provides information necessary for planning processes. The approaches used in this assessment will inform relevant sub-regional planning.

Sub-regional planning initiatives taking place in the region include caribou sub-regional task forces. A task force for the Cold Lake planning area was announced in August 2019 with a mandate to provide recommendations on land use planning, including caribou recovery actions. These task force recommendations will inform the development of this sub-regional plan and will include social, economic and environmental considerations.

5. Continue work on Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta

Alberta Indigenous Relations – implementation is ongoing**Description:**

Connecting the Dots: Aboriginal Workforce and Economic Development in Alberta report was submitted by a Member of Legislative Assembly Committee highlighting 30 recommendations to increase participation of aboriginal peoples in Alberta's workforce and economy. Due to new government mandates and priorities, the recommendations are no longer being worked on; however, the principles described in the report remain important to the Government of Alberta and Indigenous peoples.

Progress:

Indigenous Relations continues to promote social and economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples in Alberta through a variety of programs and services available to Indigenous communities and Indigenous-serving organizations, such as the:

- Urban Indigenous Initiatives Program: supports projects that remove barriers and strengthen socio-economic opportunities for Alberta's urban Indigenous people (active for 2018 and 2019);
- Aboriginal Business Investment Fund: helps Indigenous community-owned businesses capitalize on business development opportunities to improve socio-economic outcomes (active for 2017 and 2018);
- Aboriginal Economic Partnerships Program: supports Indigenous community owned businesses/organizations to identify and plan for economic opportunities (active for 2017 and 2018); and
- Employment Partnerships Program: supports initiatives that help Indigenous communities and Indigenous-serving organizations connect their members to employment (active for 2017, 2018 and 2019).

In October 2019, government passed the *Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation Act* and established the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corporation with the mandate to facilitate investment by Indigenous groups in natural resource (energy, mining, forestry) projects and related infrastructure, including providing loan/loan guarantees, purchasing shares or other forms of equity, and entering into joint ventures or partnerships.

LARP Outcome 2: The region's economy is diversified

6. Continue to prevent future shortfalls in timber supply

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry – implementation is ongoing**Description:**

The Alberta forest sector faces a number of growing challenges caused by natural factors such as insects, disease, wildfire, and climate change; and non-natural factors such as international trade agreements and diminishing productive forested public lands as a result of competing development projects and use.

Progress:

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry continues to implement of the Alberta Forest Genetic Resource Management and Conservation Standards (2016) to support the Mountain Pine Beetle Management Program.

7. Continue work on wildfire management planning initiatives

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The amount of wildfire risk in Alberta is increasing due to population growth pressures, rapid development in the wildland/urban interface, and industrial activity on the landscape. In 2013, the Government of Alberta developed a Wildfire Management Planning Standard as a guideline for wildfire risk management in Alberta. These standards and plans are intended to guide wildfire prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery within a forest area for a five year period. Wildfire management strategies are aligned with regional outcomes.

Progress:

The Fort McMurray Wildfire Management Plan was approved in 2017, and work continues on the strategies and actions.

The strategies in the Lac La Biche Wildfire Management Plan were re-evaluated in 2017, and additional strategies were developed to address wildfire risk. Work continues on these strategies and actions.

These strategies and actions were put in place to reduce wildfire risk to identified values in each Forest Area, which support regional outcomes within the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan.

8. Continue work on the Alberta Forest Products Roadmap to 2020

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Collaboration between the Government of Alberta and the forest industry sector focuses on an approach to make Alberta's forest sector the most successful in North America based on economic competitiveness and environmental performance. Strategies are aimed at achieving growth, progress and long-term viability in Alberta's forest products industry, enhancing contributions to rural communities and the province at large, and moving toward green solutions to address environmental and economic challenges.

Progress:

Collaborations between the Government of Alberta and the forest industry sector focused on:

- an approach to make Alberta's forest sector the most successful in North America based on economic competitiveness and environmental performance.
- policies aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions and encouraging investment in the forest industry by the use of wood in the design and construction of infrastructure-delivered projects
- increasing shipments of secondary products to domestic and international markets
- exploring opportunities to diversify the sector through new markets and products.

A focus of work has been to strengthen business relationships with buyers in the Asian-Pacific Markets, development of advanced wood products markets, and advocating for a favourable Canada-U.S. Softwood Lumber Agreement.

9. Lakeland Country Destination Development Strategy and Tourism Opportunity Plan

Economic Development Trade and Tourism – due 2015; Extended to 2020

Description:

Lakeland Country will be developed as an iconic provincial tourism destination in order to diversify the regional and local economy, increase tourism and recreational opportunities, provide an attractive destination for domestic and international visitors, support hunting, fish and trapping, protect and maintain private property rights, honor existing statutory consents and tenure on public lands, and provide for continued issuance of new ones.

Progress:

As part of the 2016 funding agreement provided to the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, the Conseil hosted site visits from the Économusée Network in Quebec to assess the feasibility of creating new bilingual cultural and ag-tourism attractions in Alberta's northeast. The Conseil opened Alberta's first Economusée south of Vermilion on September 18, 2018.

The Government of Alberta provided support for Lac La Biche County to undertake a Visitor Friendly Assessment to develop an action plan for the region to improve its overall ambiance, wayfinding and signage, quality of service, public services, and visitor information. The project was completed in 2018, and supports are now being provided to implement the action plan.

Also in Lac La Biche County, the development of a Tourism Strategy began in 2018, with the goal of developing short and long-term objectives for tourism development by Lac La Biche County, local businesses, and supporting communities.

A Northeast Task Force comprised of regional industry and stakeholder representatives was initiated in 2019 to identify broad recommendations and considerations, including tourism and outdoor recreation, in the development of a Cold Lake Sub-regional Plan and associated Caribou Range Plan to be completed in 2020. This plan could comprise outcomes that otherwise may have been incorporated in the Lakeland Country Destination Development Strategy and Tourism Opportunity Plan.

The development of a 10-Year Tourism Strategy also began in 2019, and will consider how best to support the development of new destinations in Alberta. This work will also consider if the development of destination management and development plans aligns with Government priorities.

10. Continue to enhance and expand the supply of tourism products and infrastructure

Economic Development Trade and Tourism – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The tourism industry has great potential to diversify Alberta's economy. It is a multi-billion dollar industry that supports over 19,000 tourism businesses and employs more than 127,000 people, either directly or indirectly. Tourism revenue is a key economic driver for the province and contributes to the well-being of all Albertans.

Progress:

A Tourism Asset Inventory and Northern Lights Viewing Attraction Investment Opportunity was completed for the Rural Municipality of Wood Buffalo including a Tourism Product Development Plan. These tourism plans set the short and long-term vision for tourism product development and lays out specific action items to develop each of these products into market ready experiences.

Through a grant from Economic Development Trade and Tourism, the Conseil de Développement Économique de L'Alberta developed a virtual guide and immersive bilingual podcast experience that has fostered tourism year-round and added to cultural tourism offerings available within Alberta.

11. Tourism Development Nodes

Economic Development Trade and Tourism – due 2015; Extended to 2020

Description:

Tourism development nodes identify areas on public, municipal or private land that comprise a cluster of natural features, built features, scenery and settings that can provide unique opportunities for recreation and tourism development. An established node is a commitment by provincial and municipal agencies to ensure that tourism development is the predominant use and focus for the area.

Progress:

In 2016, Alberta Culture and Tourism developed a cross ministry working group to address the challenges and barriers facing the implementation of tourism development nodes. This working group was co-led by Alberta Environment and Parks, and was put on hold due to government reorganization in 2019.

The identification of tourism nodes is currently being reviewed by the new ministry of Economic Development Trade and Tourism. Alternative mechanisms to plan, identify and manage high value and priority lands for tourism development are being discussed.

In 2019, Government of Alberta tourism functions were moved to the newly created Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. Work also commenced on the development of a 10-Year-Tourism Strategy. As part of this work, a review of the programs, services, and functions of the department versus Travel Alberta was initiated, which will set the direction for changes in tourism priorities and how destination development will be undertaken in the future.

12. Tourism opportunity assessments for Quarry of the Ancestors, Bitumount and Fort Chipewyan

Economic Development Trade and Tourism – completed in 2016

Description:

Tourism opportunity assessments identify potential Indigenous tourism development and investment opportunities including guided tours, educational programs, attractions, exhibits or interpretive sites. This creates a distinctive travel experience and showcases the region's unique scenic resources.

Progress:

Tourism opportunity assessments for Quarry of the Ancestors and Bitumount were completed in 2015, while the Fort Chipewyan tourism opportunity assessment was completed in 2016. Assessments considered background reviews, destination analysis, market research, lifecycle evaluations, community engagement input, and situational reports. Based on these assessments, there are no further plans to develop the Quarry of the Ancestors or Bitumount sites for tourism purposes. The results of the Fort Chipewyan tourism opportunity assessment were submitted to the Fort Chipewyan Tourism Committee for action.

13. Scenic Byways Network

Economic Development Trade and Tourism – completed in 2015, implementation is ongoing

Description:

Economic Development Trade and Tourism is working with municipal governments and other partners to identify, establish and promote scenic byways which include routes, trails and waterways in and around areas with high quality attractions for recreation and tourism. Creation of distinctive travel experiences will showcase the region's unique scenic resources and cultural landscapes.

Progress:

In 2014, routes, trails and waterways of the Lower Athabasca region were identified. Live the Athabasca, a recreation and tourism concept plan for the Lower Athabasca River was also completed. Over the next 10 years, work will continue with local communities to address tourism development around scenic byways of the Lower Athabasca region. A recreation and tourism concept plan for the Lower Athabasca River from Fort McMurray to the Northwest Territories was completed in 2017. Live the Athabasca - Arctic Water Route is the second phase of a strategy that celebrates the natural and cultural heritage of the lower Athabasca and upper Slave Rivers. The project focused on creating a signature boreal and Canadian Shield river experience along Trans Canada Trail's The Great Trail Arctic Water Route.

14. Continue to clarify rules for physical access to energy, mineral and coal resources

Alberta Environment and Parks and Alberta Energy – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Alberta Energy and Alberta Environment and Parks provide environmental stewardship direction and regulate access (during exploration, development and extraction), allocation and use of natural resources through planning, policy and policy assurance programs. Clear rules for physical access to energy and mineral resources are necessary for the province to attract investment and benefit from resource development.

Progress:

The Alberta Energy Regulator continues implementation of the Integrated Compliance Assurance Program, released in February 2016. The framework commits to continuous development of requirements that are clear, effective, and enforceable.

The Alberta Energy Regulator continues to work with the Government of Alberta to clarify rules for access to resources and regulatory approval processes. For example, the Alberta Energy Regulator continues implementation of the Integrated Compliance Assurance Program, released in February 2016, which commits to continuous development of requirements that are clear, effective, and enforceable. In addition, as of the end of 2019, the Regulator had completed 26 projects under the Regulatory Efficiency Initiative, many of which are associated with land use and access issues. Examples include:

- Improving the Statements of Concern process;
- Streamlining the process for AER / Aboriginal Consultation Office routine applications; and
- Addressing inactive oil and gas infrastructure through Area Based Closure work.

In December 2018, the Alberta Energy Regulator released updated Directive 060: Upstream Petroleum Industry Flaring, Incinerating, and Venting and Directive 017: Measure Requirements for Oil and Gas Operations to include new methane reduction requirements. The new requirements address the primary sources of methane emissions from

Alberta's oil and gas industry: fugitive emissions and venting, which includes emissions from compressors, pneumatic devices, and glycol dehydrators. The requirements focus on measuring, monitoring, and reporting of methane emissions. The new requirements apply to AER-regulated entities including upstream oil, gas and bitumen wells, facilities, gas plants, pipeline installations, storage facilities, and tank terminals. This includes production and injection wells, batteries, and central processing facilities within thermal in-situ oil sands schemes.

Work is progressing to complete an access management plan that will support ecological integrity and the exercise of Treaty rights and traditional land uses while enabling well managed development of resources in the Moose Lake 10km zone adjacent to Fort McKay First Nation's Moose Lake reserves. This planning area is located approximately 100km northwest of Fort McMurray.

Caribou sub-regional task forces, including one for the Cold Lake planning area, were announced in August 2019 with a mandate to provide recommendations on land use planning, including caribou recovery actions. The first task forces are expected to submit their recommendations reports to government in 2020.

15. Continue to promote new investment in energy, mineral and coal resource development

Alberta Energy – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Alberta Energy continues to improve strategic, integrated systems and approaches to ensure responsible resource development and diversification in order to strengthen overall environmental, economic and social outcomes for the benefit of Albertans.

Progress:

Maintaining Alberta as an attractive destination for energy and mineral investment remains a strategic priority involving the promotion of Alberta's interests nationally and internationally and putting in place effective policies and programs provincially.

Pipelines:

- The Government continued to advance market access throughout the reporting period through its support for the Trans Mountain Expansion, Keystone XL, and Enbridge Line 3 pipeline projects. In 2017, a contract was signed to ship 50,000 barrels per day of crude oil on the Keystone XL pipeline for 20 years in a show of support for the project, which will help get Alberta resources to market. The Enbridge Line 3 Replacement Project is awaiting approvals from Minnesota before it can proceed. In the meantime, Government continues to support this project through strategic U.S. engagement. The Government also executed timely permitting for construction of the Trans Mountain Expansion Project in 2019.

Policy and Regulation:

- In order to better match anticipated production with capacity and to protect the value of Alberta's energy resources, the Government of Alberta put in place a temporary limit on industry-wide oil production that took effect in January 2019.
- To increase investor confidence and assure investors making long-term oil and gas investments in Alberta that the rules will not change, the Government of Alberta passed the *Royalty Guarantee Act*, effective July 2019. The Act guarantees that the royalty structure in place when a well is drilled remains in place for at least 10 years. The Act also guarantees that, for a period of at least 10 years, the current royalty structure will remain in place to provide flexibility for government and industry to adjust to market changes and technology

advancements, including the ability to make regular required adjustments, such as setting monthly par prices and providing incentives, when appropriate.

- The government proclaimed the *Preserving Canada's Economic Prosperity Act*, effective May 2018, enabling Alberta to restrict the export of natural gas, crude oil and refined fuels across its borders to ensure maximum value of these resources for Albertans and to help manage the lack of pipeline capacity.
- Government's internal Natural Gas Strategic Framework identifies five priority areas to reinvigorate the natural gas sector in Alberta and attract investment to the province: a Vision; Optimization of the Western Canadian pipeline network; Improve the business environment in Alberta; Develop new and expand existing markets; and Support the development of Canadian LNG.

Incentive Programs:

- Government continues implementation of numerous incentive programs created in response to the recommendations of the 2016 Royalty Review Advisory Panel and 2017 Energy Diversification Advisory Committee.
- Applications for the second round of the Petrochemicals Diversification Program closed on October 1, 2018 and two projects were approved to receive royalty credits once they are in operation.

Advocacy:

- The Government of Alberta engaged investors, insurers, and other financial stakeholders, with the goal of strengthening and promoting Alberta's position as a responsible energy producer. The goal was attracting investment to the energy sector by showcasing the province's excellent environmental, social, and governance (ESG) credentials, particularly as they relate to oil sands development. Key engagements included a series of meetings in November 2019 between the Premier's Office and global insurance companies in Toronto, as well as the Premier's mission to London in December 2019, which included meetings with HSBC, the Canadian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England and UN Special Envoy for Climate Action and Finance.
- In fall 2019, the Government of Alberta established the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Working Group, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders from across government, industry, finance, and academia to advise government on ESG priorities, create and maintain investment momentum, and ensure strategic alignment of policy and messaging. The ESG Working Group is supported by the ESG Secretariat, housed in Alberta Energy, which leads the coordination of ESG work across the Government of Alberta.
- The Government of Alberta works with regulators, industry and other stakeholders to continue to advocate for the federal government to streamline the regulatory environment for energy development, improve pipeline access, win back the confidence of investors, restore the competitiveness of the energy sector and create jobs. The Government of Alberta took an active role in coordinating intergovernmental discussions with provinces and territories regarding policies, decisions or legislation affecting oil market access.

Provincial Outcome: Healthy Ecosystems and Environment

LARP Outcome 3: Landscapes are managed to maintain ecosystem function and biodiversity

16. Create new conservation areas on provincial Crown land

Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan established an additional 16 per cent of the region as new conservation areas, bringing the total area of conserved lands from approximately six per cent to 22 per cent, or approximately two million hectares. In order to establish new conservation areas in the Lower Athabasca region, Crown oil sands and metallic and industrial minerals agreements that fell within, or partially within, new conservation areas established under the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan were subject to cancellation in accordance with section 8(1)(c) of the *Mines and Minerals Act*.

Progress:

The remaining Crown oil sands and metallic and industrial mineral agreements falling within, or partially within, the new conservation areas designated in the *Lower Athabasca Regional Plan* were canceled and compensated in 2016. The following Conservation Areas held under the regional plan were designated as Wildland Provincial Parks under the Provincial Parks Act in May 2018:

- Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park expansion,
- Dillon River Wildland Provincial Park,
- Richardson Wildland Provincial Park,
- Birch River Wildland Provincial Park and,
- Kazan Wildland Provincial Park.

There is one remaining Conservation Area awaiting designation under the Provincial Parks Act (Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Park).

17. Continue to manage existing conserved lands

Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Conservation areas are clearly defined areas that have special rules to protect ecosystems and biological diversity. Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Wildland Provincial Parks, Natural Areas, Heritage Rangelands, and Conservation Area Public Land Use Zones are examples of the different types of conservation areas. Each of these has different ecological objectives and different land use rules associated with it. These rules dictate what kinds of activities, including recreation, development and industry, are prohibited in the area and which ones are permitted.

Progress:

Schedule F in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan identified permitted activities for existing and new conservation areas in the region. The remaining conservation area (Gipsy-Gordon Wildland Park) will continue to be managed with that intent under the Regional Plan until it is designated under appropriate legislation.

The draft Lower Athabasca Regional Parks Plan, which is aligned with the Regional Plan, will continue to guide management direction and objectives for the region's parks.

18. Develop a biodiversity management framework

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2013; Extended to 2022

Description:

Biodiversity management frameworks seek to maintain terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity while also achieving environmental, social and economic objectives for the region. Frameworks provide a systematic approach to environmental management.

Progress:

Work continued on completing a Lower Athabasca region Biodiversity Management Framework. The framework proposes a suite of terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity indicators that would be monitored, evaluated and reported against trigger values to help assess whether biodiversity objectives are being achieved. More work will be done to address recommendations advanced through the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Review Panel process regarding Indigenous traditional land use and traditional knowledge, as well as meaningful engagement in the development of a framework that reflects cultural and social values.

In 2019, a technical discussion and update on the Lower Athabasca Region Biodiversity Management Framework was provided at the First Nations Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Working Group and the Métis Lower Athabasca Regional Plan Working Group meetings. Pending further engagement with Indigenous peoples and stakeholders, the framework is anticipated to be completed in 2022.

19. Develop a landscape management plan for public lands in the Green Area

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2013, Extended to 2021-2025

Description:

A Lower Athabasca Region landscape management plan for public land would incorporate strategies and management actions to reduce the extent and duration of human footprint in order to achieve biodiversity outcomes and objectives for the region and support Indigenous peoples' values.

Progress:

Sub-regional planning initiatives taking place in the region will form the basis of landscape management planning as intended with the landscape management plan. This ongoing work includes:

- A Moose Lake access management plan for a 10 km zone adjacent to Fort McKay First Nation's Moose Lake reserve is being developed. Once completed this plan will be incorporated into an amended regional plan.
- Caribou sub-regional task forces, including one for the Cold Lake planning area, were announced in August 2019 with a mandate to provide recommendations on land use planning, including caribou recovery actions. Task force recommendations will inform the development of sub-regional plans.

20. Complete a tailings management framework

Alberta Environment and Parks – complete; implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Tailings Management Framework for the Mineable Athabasca Oil Sands provides direction to manage fluid tailings volumes during and after mine operations in order to reduce liability and environmental risk resulting from the accumulation of fluid tailings on the landscape.

Progress:

Environment and Parks continues to work with industry, Indigenous groups and other stakeholders to advance implementation of the Tailings Management Framework priority initiatives, including Treatment and Release of Mine Water, Integrated Water Management, the Mine Financial Security Program, Water Capped Fluid Tailings (Pit Lakes) and Reclamation.

The Tailings Management Framework enables release of treated mine process-affected water to the environment provided necessary conditions are met. Maintenance of aquatic ecosystem health in the downstream receiving environment will require a robust, considered, and well-informed management approach, designed with the input of multiple affected parties. Alberta Environment and Parks is working with industry, Indigenous groups and other stakeholders to update the regulatory system and support a science-based approach to the management of oil sands mine water that appropriately addresses aquatic ecosystem and human health.

Work on the Mine Financial Security Program related to fluid tailings management is focused on Office of the Auditor General recommendations for the program; completion is anticipated in 2020.

Development of policy direction to support research on oil sands water capped fluid tailings (pit lakes) was temporarily suspended, pending key outputs of the Treat and Release Initiative. The project will provide guidance to oil sands operators and research organizations working to better understand the viability of water capping as a treatment process for fluid tailings. Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Energy and the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) are also working to address policy gaps related to the reclamation of fluid tailings, including work on reclamation criteria and indicators for terrestrial (uplands and wetlands) landscapes.

The AER continued to develop and release industry performance reports that provide data on in-deposit performance about operators' tailings treatment technologies or new technology pilots being conducted. The AER continues to work with oil sands mine operators to assess new technologies for reducing fluid tailings volumes.

21. Continue to implement the progressive reclamation strategy

Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

To increase the pace of reclaiming oil sands mines, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan adopted a progressive reclamation strategy. This strategy includes a suite of initiatives and tools to improve financial security and environmental performance within the oil sands mining sector. It has three key components: an updated reclamation security policy, enhanced reclamation reporting and clarification of the reclamation certification program.

Progress:

Updated Reclamation Security policy: Work continued in 2019 to revise the Mine Financial Security Plan to address Office of the Auditor General recommendations. Work also occurred on demand forfeiture bonds. These projects will continue into 2020.

Enhanced Reclamation Reporting: Updated information on oil sands mine disturbance and reclamation was again received from operators through Alberta Environment and Parks' Reclamation Information System. All oil sands mines have submitted disturbance and reclamation data annually through the Reclamation Information System since 2009.

Reclamation Certification Program: Work was conducted in 2019 to update the draft criteria and indicators framework for reclamation certification of oil sands mines. This included reviewing the framework and all indicators, updating a few completed indicators and further developing some adopted but incomplete indicators for assessment of vegetation diversity and wetlands. Work is identified to further develop the framework and some other incomplete indicators. This project will continue in 2020.

LARP Outcome 4: Air and water are managed to support human and ecosystem needs

22. Continue to implement the Air Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca Region

Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Air Quality Management Framework is designed to proactively manage the cumulative effects of human activity on ambient air quality within the region by setting ambient air quality triggers and limits for nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide.

Progress:

Alberta Environment and Parks continues to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on air quality in the region. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions and progress of management responses relative to the framework. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at open.alberta.ca/publications.

As of 2019, no limits have been exceeded for this framework, however some crossings of proactive triggers have occurred. As part of the management response, a detailed investigation of SO₂ for the Athabasca Oil Sands region is underway to improve understanding of current emissions and to identify potential local and distant sources of ambient SO₂ in the region. This work includes modelling and trend assessment.

23. Continue to implement the Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River

Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River supports monitoring and management of long-term, cumulative changes in ambient surface water quality within the Lower Athabasca River.

Progress:

Alberta Environment and Parks continued to use the framework to manage cumulative effects of human activity on surface water quality in the Lower Athabasca River. Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions and progress of management responses relative to the framework. Reporting is ongoing and can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at <https://open.alberta.ca/publications>.

No limits have been exceeded for this framework to date, however, proactive triggers were crossed for five parameters in 2019 (i.e. barium, cobalt, potassium, selenium and uranium). Trend analyses were completed on these and other water quality parameters that had previous trigger exceedances. The analyses considered the influence of river flow on water quality conditions. Investigations are underway for ten of the framework indicators. Preliminary results have linked trend analysis results to the spatial areas that contribute to water quality condition at sampling stations along the river. This will help identify and prioritize areas that are contributing to changes in water quality for further investigation. A technical report is in preparation that describes this work and identifies any additional analyses that may be needed.

Alberta Environment and Parks has committed to actions related to *the* Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quality Management Framework in the Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site Action Plan (2019).

24. Complete and implement the Groundwater Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca Region

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2014; Extended to 2022

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Groundwater Management Framework helps protect groundwater resources from contamination and over-use in three management areas: North Athabasca Oil Sands; South Athabasca Oil Sands; and Cold Lake – Beaver River areas.

Progress:

Regional groundwater monitoring has been conducted in 2017, 2018 and 2019. This information, in conjunction with the ongoing review of the methodology for developing groundwater management frameworks will be used to update the Lower Athabasca Region Groundwater Management Framework in 2022.

25. Complete an updated Surface Water Quantity Management Framework for the Lower Athabasca River

Alberta Environment and Parks – completed in 2015, implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quantity Management Framework focuses on managing water use by the mineable oil sands sector and seeks to establish an appropriate balance between water needed for environmental protection, community and industry needs. The framework includes weekly management triggers and water withdrawal limits and is built upon a foundation of continuous improvement, employing a series of adaptive management indicators and triggers that enable ongoing testing of assumptions around climate change, upstream water use, and industrial development in the basin.

Progress:

Annual reports provide information on the status of ambient environmental conditions and progress of management responses relative to the framework. The Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quantity Management Framework and annual reports can be found on the Alberta Government open data portal at open.alberta.ca/publications.

Alberta Environment and Parks worked collaboratively with the Alberta Energy Regulator to clarify regulatory details within the *Lower Athabasca Regional Plan* required to fully support implementation of this framework. Water Management Agreements for 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 have been submitted to the Alberta Energy Regulator, Alberta Environment and Parks, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada by oil sands mine operators. These agreements specify water allocations of individual mine operators under various stream flow conditions to ensure that cumulative water withdrawal limits under the framework are not exceeded.

Alberta Environment and Parks has committed to actions related to the Lower Athabasca Region Surface Water Quantity Management Framework in the Wood Buffalo National Park World Heritage Site Action Plan (2019), and will continue to work with Indigenous communities and stakeholders on the Aboriginal navigation component of the framework, and develop a work plan to address ecological knowledge gaps as identified in the framework.

The Athabasca River Conditions and Use website (environment.alberta.ca/apps/OSEM/) supports reporting of weekly management triggers and water withdrawal limits under the framework. Oil sands mine operators submitted water use reports on a weekly basis during 2017-2019.

Provincial Outcome: People-friendly Communities with Ample Recreational and Cultural Opportunities

LARP Outcome 5: Infrastructure development supports economic and population growth

26. Continue to use CRISP to augment and facilitate planning where oil sands development causes growth pressures

Alberta Energy – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Comprehensive Regional Infrastructure Sustainability Plan (CRISP) for the Athabasca Oil Sands Area was a long-term flexible and integrated approach to planning for growth in the Athabasca Oil Sands Area intended to complement similar plans for the Cold Lake and Peace River oil sands areas. These plans were developed based on recommendations in Responsible Actions: A Plan for Alberta's Oil Sands.

Progress:

The decreased pace of oil sands development and evolving government priorities have reduced the focus on CRISP development and implementation. Policy and planning required to manage any growth pressures associated with oil sands development continue to be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

27. Continue to ensure opportunities for future routes and siting for pipeline gateways, transmission corridors, utility and electrical transmission corridors are maintained

Alberta Energy and Alberta Transportation – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Ensuring opportunities for future routes and siting for pipeline gateways, transportation corridors, and utility and electrical transmission corridors helps plan the land base available for development while facilitating population, economic growth and efficient use of the land.

Progress:

The Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) approved the Fort McMurray West 500 kV Transmission Line between the Wabamun and Fort McMurray areas. The transmission line will increase the capacity of the electricity grid and provide more reliability, helping energy flow into and out of the Fort McMurray area. The AUC reviewed the project's proposed routes, seeking to address stakeholder concerns through the regulatory process. When reviewing transmission project proposals, the AUC considers several social, environmental and economic factors. From a land-use perspective, it is common for planners and regulators to leverage existing right-of-ways to minimize land disturbance. The Fort McMurray West 500 kV Transmission Line was put into service in March 2019.

As part of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change, the Government of Alberta initiated the Regional Electricity Cooperation and Strategic Infrastructure Initiative Study for Western Canada, which was released in August 2018. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the most promising electricity infrastructure projects in the Western provinces in order to transition to a sustainable non-emitting electricity generation portfolio.

Some of the options include an intertie connecting the Taltson Hydro System in the Northwest Territories to the Fort McMurray area. Options identified in the study are still being evaluated.

At the strategic level, Canada's Premiers agreed to begin exploring the concept of pan-Canadian economic corridors in an effort to enhance the existing connections between provinces and territories at the 2019 Council of the Federation summer meeting. To that end, Alberta Energy is leading a provincial/territorial working group to foster discussion and develop a report for Premiers. The report is expected to be presented to Premiers for their consideration in fall 2020.

28. Continue work on critical economic linkages to markets

Alberta Transportation and Alberta Economic Development and Trade – implementation is ongoing

Description:

Critical economic linkages to markets include connecting the Mackenzie Delta to Asia-Pacific markets, connecting the Industrial Heartland area to Fort McMurray, and connecting Fort McMurray to the Northwest Territories, to Lac La Biche; to La Loche (in Saskatchewan via Highway 881), and to Red Earth Creek (via Highway 686).

Progress:

A number of planning studies and projects to identify and implement improvements for highway safety, efficiency and the future expansion are underway or complete, such as:

- Highway 881 Planning Study for re-alignment around Gregoire Lake remains underway;
- Highway 881 Corridor Management Planning Study from Lac La Biche to Highway 63 was completed;
- Highway 63 Planning Study for twinning of Highway 63 from south of Mildred Lake to the Athabasca River remains underway;
- Highway 63 Corridor Planning and Access Study in Fort McMurray Urban Development Sub Region (UDSR) remains underway.
- East Clearwater Roadway Cost Benefit Analysis study in underway;
- Highway 63 Urban Development Sub Region corridor and access study is underway.
- Proposed planning study recommending an alignment for extending Highway 813 from Wabasca to proposed Highway 686 is identified;
- Final sections of Highway 63 twinning from Fort McMurray to Highway 55 near Atmore were completed in 2017, and the second stage paving projects on the recently twinned portions of Highway 63 were also completed.

In preparation for construction, the design for improvements to Highway 881 between Lac La Biche and Anzac is currently underway and will include passing lanes, safety rest areas, and intersection improvements.

LARP Outcome 6: The quality of life of residents is enhanced through increased opportunities for recreation and active living

29. Designate new provincial recreation areas to address the growing demand for recreational opportunities

Alberta Environment and Parks – as soon as practicable

Description:

To address growing demand for recreational opportunities in the region and provide a secure land base to support tourism development for both residents and visitors, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan provides for nine new Provincial Recreation Areas.

Progress:

Designation of the new Provincial Recreation Areas under the *Provincial Parks Act* has been delayed. It is anticipated the following areas will be designated under the *Provincial Parks Act*: Andrew Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Christina Crossing Provincial Recreation Area, Clyde Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Cowper Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Gregoire Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Slave River Provincial Recreation Area, Crow Lake Provincial Recreation Area, Goodwin Lake Provincial Recreation Area, and Winefred Lake Provincial Recreation Area.

30. Create public land areas for recreation and tourism that contain unique features or settings

Economic Development Trade and Tourism and Alberta Environment and Parks – as soon as practicable

Description:

New public land areas for recreation and tourism in the region contain unique features, scenery or settings to address the growing demand for recreational opportunities and provide an attractive land base for tourism investment. To optimize the recreation and tourism potential for both residents and visitors, the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan provides for five new public land areas for recreation and tourism development. These are: Lake Athabasca, Richardson, Athabasca River, Clearwater River, and House River.

Progress:

Evolving Government of Alberta priorities in conjunction with refinements to the Public Lands Administration Regulation and sub-regional planning that includes caribou range planning reduced the focus on formally establishing these areas. It is anticipated that, once established these areas could act as areas where tourism development and investment opportunities could be directed.

Work began in 2019 on the development of a 10-Year Tourism Strategy which will consider how best to support the development of new destinations in Alberta, including public land areas for recreation and tourism.

31. Develop the regional parks plan for the Lower Athabasca

Alberta Environment and Parks – due 2013; Extended to 2022

Description:

The Regional Parks Plan provides management direction to achieve the integrated recreation and conservation mandate of the Alberta Provincial Parks Program. The Regional Parks Plan summarizes current recreation and conservation values on a site-by-site basis, provides broad, future-focused management direction of those values, and identifies where further planning is required. It also provides Albertans with better information about the values of each park as well as the challenges faced in managing these values for current and future generations.

Progress:

A draft Regional Parks Plan for the Lower Athabasca Region was developed in 2015. Minor amendments and updates are in progress.

32. Continue to develop the Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan

Alberta Environment and Parks – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan will evaluate existing trails and locate designated, sustainable land-based trails for various motorized and non-motorized trail users, water based trails and routes, and potential associated activity areas. It will link communities, tourism destinations and other park and open space features. The plan's objective is to lay a framework for an enhanced recreation and tourism based trail system that will create opportunities for greater physical activity and enjoyment of the outdoors by all Albertans.

Progress:

Developing the Lower Athabasca Regional Trail System Plan was put on hold in 2017. Considerations for recreational trails will occur during sub-regional planning across the Lower Athabasca region.

33. Continue to collect regional data including completion of recreation and tourism inventory, a scenic resource assessment inventory, and a regional recreational demand and satisfaction survey

Economic Development Trade and Tourism – implementation is ongoing**Description:**

Data in the form of a recreation and tourism resource inventory that is dependent upon the completion of a scenic resource assessment inventory and a regional recreational demand and satisfaction survey is fundamental to informing recreation and tourism planning. This strategy assures the ongoing collection and analysis of relevant data to inform planning and help prioritize product, service and infrastructure development.

Progress:

This information, collectively referred to as the Resource Data System of Inventories was used to complete:

- the development of the Wood Buffalo Region Tourism Asset Inventory Report,
- the Northern Lights Viewing Attraction Investment Opportunity,
- the first phase of a Tourism Strategy for Lac La Biche County, and
- the second phase of a Tourism Strategy for Lac La Biche County

The Tourism Strategy for Lac La Biche County work culminated in the development of a Product Development Plan identifying a broad range of niche products for tourism development in the Lac La Biche region.

LARP Outcome 7: Inclusion of aboriginal peoples in land-use planning

34. Continue to consult with aboriginal peoples in a meaningful way when government decisions may adversely affect the continued exercise of their constitutionally protected rights

Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Energy, Alberta Culture Multiculturalism and Status of Women, Alberta Indigenous Relations, and Alberta Economic Development Trade and Tourism – implementation is ongoing**Description:**

The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan reaffirms Alberta's commitment to honour the constitutionally protected rights of Indigenous peoples and seeks opportunities to engage with Indigenous communities by inviting them to share traditional knowledge to inform land and natural resource planning.

Progress:

The Government of Alberta is committed to partnering with Alberta's Indigenous peoples in pursuit of reconciliation, inclusion, and opportunity. Alberta will continue to work with Indigenous peoples.

Alberta Environment and Parks continues to be committed to working with First Nations and Métis organizations on implementing the *Lower Athabasca Regional Plan* and on:

- developing a Biodiversity Management Framework,
- sub-regional planning that supports caribou recovery,
- developing a Moose Lake 10 km Management Zone Plan,
- cooperative management approaches for managing the Ronald Lake Bison Herd, and
- Wildland Provincial Parks

As part of the Government of Alberta's commitment to enhancing the relationship with Indigenous peoples in the region, discussions continued at the Indigenous Working Groups. Efforts to work with Indigenous peoples remains a continuing priority of Government.

A cooperative management program was initiated in spring of 2018 for the Richardson Wildland Provincial Park, Birch Mountains Wildland Provincial Park, Birch River Wildland Provincial Park, Kazan Wildland Provincial Park, and Dillon River Wildland Provincial Park. Alberta Environment and Parks worked with 23 Indigenous groups to develop a Terms of Reference for Cooperative Management of the five Wildland Parks.

The Government of Alberta created the Kitaskino Nuwenéné Wildland Provincial Park in 2019 following months of collaborative discussions with Indigenous Peoples, industry and other stakeholders. Consultation with Indigenous communities, stakeholders and the public occurred in 2018 and 2019. Previously referred to as the Biodiversity Stewardship Area Wildland Provincial Park during the consultation period, the area's new name, Kitaskino Nuwenéné, is both Cree and Dene meaning "our land." The new Wildland Provincial Park covers an area of 161,880 hectares.

Kitaskino Nuwenéné Wildland Provincial Park supports the exercise of Treaty and harvesting rights for First Nations and approved Metis harvesters, as well as other traditional uses, including cultural activities, for Indigenous Peoples. The area includes many natural values important to Indigenous People's culture and well-being, including the Ronald Lake bison herd - a critical species for many Indigenous Peoples in the region who share a cultural relationship with the herd.

The Alberta Energy Regulator made progress by improving working relationships with the Aboriginal Consultation Office through applied Indigenous awareness training and delivering joint learning initiatives with Indigenous communities.

The Wihtamâtotan – Telling Each Other report was released in May 2019. This report was a joint learning project with Woodland Cree First Nation that explored how Indigenous knowledge can inform the AER's delivery of its mandate with respect to reclamation and remediation. The project was timely as it raised awareness of the end of life obligations and Indigenous interests in pipeline monitoring across jurisdictions. The report can be accessed at aer.ca.

35. Continue to invite First Nations expressing an interest in the Richardson Backcountry to be involved in a sub-regional initiative called the First Nations Richardson Backcountry Stewardship Initiative (Richardson Initiative)

Alberta Environment and Parks, Alberta Energy, Alberta Culture Multiculturalism and Status of Women, Alberta Indigenous Relations, and Alberta Economic Development Trade and Tourism – implementation is ongoing

Description:

The Richardson Initiative was originally set up as a discussion forum for the Government of Alberta and local First Nations who expressed an interest in the Richardson Backcountry. The discussion forum was intended to address specific issues identified in the Richardson Backcountry area, such as impacts to treaty rights, fish and wildlife management, access management, economic and business opportunities, as well as the management of new Wildland Provincial Parks and the Richardson public land area for recreation and tourism.

Progress:

Consideration of the Richardson Backcountry will be included in sub-regional planning. The cooperative management process underway for the Richardson Wildland Provincial Park is intended to help address the concerns originally identified for the Richardson Backcountry Initiative.

Cross Reference Table

Over time, responsibility for leading a particular strategy or developing a particular supporting indicator may have changed as Government of Alberta ministry mandates evolved. The table below lists the titles of lead ministries in effect as of this report, and their titles when the regional plan came into force.

2012	2019
Aboriginal Relations	Indigenous Relations
Agriculture and Rural Development	Agriculture and Forestry
Culture	Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women
Energy	Energy
Enterprise and Advanced Education	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development	Environment and Parks
Human Services	Seniors and Housing
Infrastructure	Infrastructure
Labour	Labour
Municipal Affairs	Municipal Affairs
Tourism, Parks and Recreation	Economic Development, Trade and Tourism (tourism) Environment and Parks (parks and recreation)
Transportation	Transportation
Treasury Board and Finance	Treasury Board and Finance