

December 20, 2005

Government establishes group to guide consultation for oil sands environment and development policy

Edmonton... A stakeholder consultation group that includes representatives from environmental organizations, First Nations, industry and government is being asked to revise plans for consulting on policy principles for Alberta's mineable oil sands area.

"I've heard the desire of Albertans to discuss how we develop this valuable provincial resource in a way that protects and sustains the environment," said Environment Minister Guy Boutilier. "Stakeholders are also expecting us to move forward in a more open and collaborative manner."

Working with the Cumulative Environmental Management Association and other stakeholders, the steering group will review and recommend how consultation on policy principles for the oil sands area should proceed. As part of this process, workshops planned for January and the Internet consultation to gather feedback on the draft Mineable Oil Sands Strategy will be cancelled.

"Incredible development is going on and is forecast for this area. With some \$80 billion worth of projects already announced, this area is key to the energy security of Alberta and Canada," said Energy Minister Greg Melchin. "There is a need to review our policy principles, but how we engage with Albertans to develop them is equally important."

"Working in partnership with key stakeholders is the best way to find solutions and ensure the public has confidence that development is sustainable," said Sustainable Resource Development Minister David Coumts.

The group is to deliver a final report to government by March 31, 2006. That report will help determine how consultation on policy development for this area moves forward.

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Backgrounder attached.

Media enquiries may be directed to:

Robert Moyles
Communications
Alberta Environment
(780) 427-6267
robert.moyles@gov.ab.ca

Glenn Guenther
Communications
Alberta Sustainable
Resource
Development
(780) 427-8636
glenn.guenther@gov.ab.ca

Cathy Housdorff
Communications
Alberta Energy
(780) 427-1083
cathy.housdorff@gov.ab.ca

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

Background

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Terms of Reference - Oil Sands Consultation Group

Background

The oil sands area is key to Alberta and Canada's energy security, with \$80 billion worth of projects already announced.

All of the mineable oil sands rights are under lease and approximately 11 per cent of the area is under active development. This is anticipated to increase to ~25 per cent by 2015 and ~58 per cent by 2035. Production is estimated to increase from a current one million barrels a day to three to five million barrels a day by 2015. Of the Mineable Oil Sands Strategy area, 19 per cent is currently covered by surface agreements related to oil sands development based on existing approvals. This area is expected to increase to about 31 per cent based on scheduled hearings related to mining development.

The Ministers of Energy, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development have identified the need to develop revised plans for consulting on policy principles for Alberta's oil sands area. The ministers have directed the group to make recommendations to ensure Albertans have confidence in the consultation process for the oil sands area.

Purpose

The purpose of the committee is to:

1. Develop revised plans for consulting on the policy principles for Alberta's oil sands area in relation to oil sands development and environmental management.
2. Work with the Cumulative Effects Management Association and other stakeholders, to review and recommend how consultation on the management principles for the oil sands area should proceed.

Committee Structure

The group will be composed of:

Chair - One member of the Legislative Assembly

Committee Members

- One First Nations representative from the Athabasca Tribal Council.
- One environmental non-government organization representative.
- One oil sands industry representative.
- One member of the public at large.

Timing

The committee will report on their progress to the Ministers of Energy, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development by March 1, 2006. A final report with recommendations will be provided to each Minister by March 31, 2006.

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