

December 20, 2010

Alberta kick-starts new world-class monitoring system

Edmonton... A group of independent experts will provide detailed action items on how to best set up, operate, and govern a world-class environmental monitoring, evaluation, and reporting system for Alberta's oil sands. The terms of reference that will guide that work is now complete and publicly available.

"These efforts will lead to a new, robust world-recognized monitoring system that will give assurances the oil sands are being developed under the closest of scrutiny and oversight," said Environment Minister Rob Renner. "The system must meet the environmental challenges we face today, be adaptable enough to respond quickly to change, and anticipate and monitor areas where future cumulative environmental impacts may occur."

A transparent monitoring system with easily accessible and credible data is essential as Alberta continues to transition to a cumulative effects system of environmental management, noted Renner.

The experts will also provide detailed actions on how the environmental system can be expanded to all media in the oil sands region - air, land, water and bio-diversity - and also how the system can extend throughout the entire province.

In addition, the group will give direction for provincial action required to address and implement recommendations that arise from the provincial data review committee currently underway, as well as the federal oil sands advisory panel.

"We are developing a good foundation of information to inform our work. What's needed now is an in-depth action plan and that 's what I expect this panel will deliver," said Renner.

The panel will draw representation from a broad range of professionals including those in scientific, academic, health and epidemiology, economics and other fields.

The independent experts are to be in place by January 2011 and will report back to the Minister of Environment by June 2011. As the first region in Alberta to move towards this new system, the oil sands region will serve as a pilot for the rest of the province.

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Background: Terms of reference for the provincial environmental monitoring panel

Media inquiries may be directed to:

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To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

December 20, 2010

Provincial environmental monitoring panel

Terms of reference

(To see the complete terms of reference, visit <http://environment.alberta.ca/03289.html>.)

Purpose:

The purpose of the panel is to provide recommendations to the Minister of the Environment on the development of a provincial-scale world-class environmental monitoring evaluation and reporting (MER) system.

Primary objective:

1. The panel is to make recommendations on the development of a world-class monitoring evaluation and reporting system for the lower Athabasca River both condition of the river and effects to the river.

Secondary objectives:

1. The panel will make recommendations on how the system can be expanded to all areas in the region.
2. The panel will make recommendations on how the system can be further expanded to the entire province.

Deliverables:

1. Recommendations for the physical monitoring network.
 - Description of the current system for MER for the Lower Athabasca River. How is it done today?
 - Identify how MER planning should be done, who should be involved, and what considerations should be factored in during the planning stage. What needs to get monitored? How?
 - A MER network for the Lower Athabasca River must address the “state of” or condition monitoring as well as monitoring the pressures that affect the river.
 - Gap analysis - what needs to be done to achieve the desired future state?
2. Recommendations on an information portal.
 - Identify a data management system, including where it will be located and who will maintain ownership and control.
 - Describe how results will be reported and the mechanisms required to report.
3. Recommendations of the science authority.
 - Describe how results will be evaluated to increase credibility, scientific authority, and meet international scientific standards.
 - Who is the science authority for the Government of Alberta? What process will they follow?
4. Recommendations on governance and validation.

- Scientifically defensible with third party review and validation of the system.
 - Provide options for governance and funding to deliver the long-term environmental MER in the area. The governance model will need to address the role of the current organizations and stakeholders; and the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan's water management frameworks. How will the improvements be implemented? Who should operate the system?
 - Describe how the MER system will be assured or validated, including assurance of data and information, as well as system oversight.
5. Recommendations on how the pilot system for the Athabasca River can be expanded to a provincial scale for all media.

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