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Before oil sands mining can begin, companies must clear trees and plants from a site and remove the "overburden" — the topsoil, muskeg, sand, clay and gravel — that sits on top the oil sands deposit. Once mining begins, large trucks may remove up to 720,000 tonnes of material a day and after many years can create a pit that is over 80 metres deep. Typically oil sands mining requires the use of land for several decades.

Alberta's laws require that oil sands companies reclaim and remediate land disturbed from mining so it can be productive again. The reclamation process occurs throughout the life of the mining project, and the final certification occurs when the land is no longer in use and has been fully reclaimed. By law, companies must post security equivalent to the cost of reclamation.

Alberta's boreal forest (381,000 km<sup>2</sup>)  
oil sands deposits (142,200 km<sup>2</sup>)  
oil sands surface mineable area (4,800 km<sup>2</sup>)  
oil sands mineable area disturbed to date (663 km<sup>2</sup>)



**Reclamation:** The process of converting disturbed land to a state capable of supporting the same kinds of land uses as before the disturbance. The process commonly includes:

- Reshaping land to a natural appearance and function
- Re-establish topsoil/subsoil
- Planting native grasses, ground cover plants, and trees.

**Remediation:** The process of removing, reducing or neutralizing contaminants in soil, sediments or water to prevent or minimize any adverse effects on the environment currently or in the future.

Progressive reclamation is the continuous and timely reclamation of disturbed lands following mining activities. Progressive reclamation can reduce the active footprint (amount of disturbed land) associated with oil sands mining and reduce the amount of land requiring reclamation at the end of mining operations.

The Alberta government is pushing oil sands mining operations to reclaim disturbed land at a faster rate than was accepted in the past through progressive reclamation policies.

