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Athabasca River Basin

This section focuses on the biophysical environment of the Athabasca River basin—land, water, climate—and how living things interact with their environment. The physical environment and the living things within it form the dynamic, interlinked system that is the Athabasca River basin.

In addition to describing fundamental elements of river science, this section describes the Athabasca River basin in terms of:

- [Geography](#)
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The Athabasca River basin is a vital resource for the plants, animals and people of northern Alberta. From its source at the Columbia glacier in Jasper National Park, the Athabasca River runs north past the towns of Jasper, Hinton, Whitecourt, Athabasca and Fort McMurray, eventually flowing into Lake Athabasca near Fort Chipewyan and forming part of the MacKenzie River system, which eventually flows into the Arctic Ocean.

In addition to providing vital ecosystem services as one of the major rivers of the area, the Athabasca River serves as the backbone of human development in Northern Alberta. The aboriginal peoples of the region have for centuries used it as a major transportation route, and it contributed significantly to the fur trade and the early days of the Hudson Bay Company. The lower Athabasca River now plays a critical role in the development of the oil sands industry and the communities that rely on this industry.



Source: Hatfield Consultants 2008
(click to enlarge)

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