



INDIGENOUS INDICATOR PRIORITIZATION: KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION PLAN

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2025

Indigenous Indicator Prioritization

The Indigenous Indicator Prioritization Project (IIP) is designed to more clearly identify Indigenous concerns and questions, and to determine if the OSMP core monitoring is collecting data that can address Indigenous community concerns of oil sands impacts in the region and to further develop and clarify Indigenous key questions. In year one, we have addressed three key components:

- 1) Report 1: Key Questions: outlining results of community engagement and the development of Indigenous key questions, principles and conceptual models for participating communities,
- 2) Report 2: Gap Analysis: an analysis of potential gaps in core monitoring that should be addressed to answer these questions, and
- 3) Report 3: Knowledge Translation Plan: outlining how Indigenous decision makers and data users can be involved in and be informed by the OSMP.

It is a multi-community, multi-year effort including Indigenous participants in the Wood Buffalo Indigenous Sub Caucus (WBISC):

- Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation
- Chipewyan Prairie First Nation
- Fort Chipewyan Métis Community
- Fort McKay First Nation
- Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935
- McKay Métis Nation
- Mikisew Cree First Nation
- Fort McMurray #468 First Nation
- Conklin Métis
- Owl River Métis
- Chard Métis Nation
- Willow Lake Métis Nation
- Lakeland Métis Nation¹

It is very important to note that this project only included twelve (now thirteen) Indigenous communities, all in the Wood Buffalo Region. As such, these results should not be considered to be representative of all communities in the OSMP. More work is required to understand the concerns of all communities participating in the OSMP.

These three reports inform phase I of the IIP project. In future years, we will continue to develop Indigenous approaches to monitoring indicators and locations, limits of change, and to prioritize monitoring for the OSMP core monitoring.

¹ Lakeland Métis Nation joined the WBISC in February of 2025.

Knowledge Translation

Indigenous community members frequently express the sentiment that monitoring is not management – and monitoring is only useful insofar as it influences the management of oil sands impacts and supports the protection of their rights, culture, and landscape. Though communities have been asked to define their key questions and interests for the Oil Sands Monitoring Program (OSMP), there has not been a systematic approach to understanding the information needs of communities as decision-makers and ensuring that monitoring meets these needs.

While the OSMP has a stated goal of supporting decision making of industry, governments and Indigenous communities², there has been little effort to build processes that support this ongoing exchange of information sharing and support. Without this support, the OSMP monitoring efforts may miss the mark in focusing on monitoring that can effectively track change in a timely manner and trigger management action when required. The risk is then that some decision makers lose trust in the monitoring outputs (Cook et al., 2013). For monitoring outcomes to inform decision making, the information must be “salient (relevant and timely), credible (authoritative, believable and trusted), and legitimate (developed via a process that considers the values and perspectives of all actors)” (Cook et al., 2013). This is a particularly pressing issue for Indigenous communities in the Athabasca Oil Sands region where cumulative development has been ongoing for over 60 years, nearly three generations of the people.

Decades of large-scale development in the Alberta oil sands have resulted in various impacts on the landscape that contribute to social, cultural, and rights-based impacts (Westman & Joly, 2019) in addition to the state and condition of the biophysical environment that supports them. Indigenous communities have in many cases been assured by the Crown, Government of Alberta (GoA) and industry proponents that their concerns will be mitigated, in part, by environmental monitoring and that the conclusions made in environmental impact assessments (EIA) will be met. From the communities’ perspective, this means that monitoring must be timely and directly relevant to their concerns. Further, the monitoring program must trigger management action to be taken when oil sands impacts are observed. This would support the ability of members to make informed decisions about their landscape, resources, and to empower land management decisions with confidence.

Indigenous communities have been very active in defining, implementing and leading community-based monitoring (CBM) programs to answer their specific questions within the OSMP. However, they have not been as engaged in ensuring that the OSMP core monitoring addresses community concerns. To address community concerns and questions, the

² Operational Framework Agreement, Vision: “An integrated monitoring, evaluation and reporting system inclusive of and responsive to Indigenous Communities, that includes the acquisition and reporting of regional and sub-regional data on baseline environmental conditions, tracking any environmental impacts, and the assessment of cumulative environmental effects from oil sands development to inform management, policy and regulatory action and respects potential impacts to section 35 Rights.” Section 2.1, pg 4. (Dube et al., 2018)

OSMP core monitoring programs must collect and report on data and information on the receiving environment that assesses changes to relevant receptors. These changes must be tracked in a timely manner both spatially and temporally relevant to Indigenous use. This Knowledge Translation Plan (KTP) focuses on mechanisms to improve Indigenous input and direction of the OSMP *core* monitoring programs and improving information-sharing from the OSMP with the communities (e.g., data, results, maps, etc.) Although many community questions are being successfully addressed by CBM programs, it is critical that the broader OSMP core programs also focus on relevant receptors in areas important to Indigenous communities; the risk of having competing monitoring is that conflicting results may muddy attempts to understand the system and impair ability to proactively manage change. This KTP provides a framework for which Indigenous communities of the Wood Buffalo Indigenous Sub-caucus (WBISC) can integrate Indigenous knowledge (IK) and address community questions, through OSMP core monitoring.

Knowledge Translation Plan

This plan outlines the components of a knowledge translation plan to empower Indigenous communities in WBISC and community members to make informed decisions on their ability to practice their rights with confidence based on the state and condition of the biophysical resources upon which they depend. The plan is a living document and requires refinement and approval from participating communities. The strategies outlined in this plan reflect input from one and a half years of engagement with the WBISC, as well as input provided via community engagement with the participating communities in the Project (See Report 1: Key Questions, for details). This plan and these strategies will require support from the OSMP and we have provided suggestions below.

Indigenous communities continue to stress that monitoring must be linked to management action, otherwise the value of monitoring is diminished. Further, monitoring programs that are not linked to management action can ultimately cause harm because it provides the ‘impression’ of addressing Indigenous concerns without really doing so. For example, monitoring is meant to address impacts from oil sands development, but if monitoring efforts are not designed to trigger management action when impacts are observed, then Community concerns with respect to oil sands impacts are not being addressed despite the extensive efforts put into the OSMP. (Please see Report 1, Key Questions, Section 6 on IIP Principles).

Monitoring generates knowledge, however, without careful development of a plan to use that knowledge, environmental management stagnates, and potential impacts remain unmitigated. Despite twelve years of oil sands monitoring in the region and roughly \$600 billion spent, the authors can only point to one management change as a direct result of environmental monitoring.³ Knowledge translation is key to bridging the gap between monitoring and action (Reed et al., 2014). Done well, knowledge translation is not simply a haphazard exercise in providing data or research outputs to the public. It is a process of

³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/rat-poison-oil-sands-poisoning-alberta-animals-1.3877803>

identifying objectives, knowledge end users, strategies to fulfill the knowledge needs to end users, and mechanisms to determine whether the plan is effective. Research has shown that there are five essential principles for meaningful knowledge translation:

1. *Careful design of knowledge exchange in the research [and monitoring] process*
2. *Systematic representation of users and relevant stakeholders*
3. *Reflection on how knowledge is generated and shared throughout and beyond project lifespans*
4. *Enable adjustments with how dialogue is engaged with stakeholders*
5. *Ensure knowledge is generated for utilization in tangible actions for positive impacts as soon as possible.*

- (Reed et al., 2014)

The OSMP was intended to address these principles, but 12 years into the Program, most of the core monitoring is still lacking integration of IK to inform sampling design, indicators and metrics. Further, stakeholders continue to disagree on how to characterize ‘impacts’ based on the monitoring results and there is no framework in place to trigger management action because of the OSMP. To achieve these principles, baselines must be established and agreed on by the stakeholders, and triggers/thresholds must be established to indicated ‘impacts’. A framework then needs to be established to link the triggers to management action. The WBISC communities want to ensure that the monitoring is actionable and informative, and that their perspectives, IK and priorities are included in OSMP core monitoring. This KTP outlines the goals, objectives, and methods for a) meaningfully engaging the WBISC communities in OSMP core monitoring, b) meeting their information needs, c) assessing the effectiveness of this knowledge translation approach, and d) developing a framework within OSMP to ensure that monitoring results are linked with management/mitigation actions when change and ‘impacts’ are observed.

Objectives

The Indigenous Indicator Prioritization (IIP) Project (funded by the OSMP) engaged WBISC communities in 2024-2025 to develop key principles for IIP that could inform the OSMP and ensure that the OSMP is appropriately addressing Community concerns and needs. These IIP principles include:

- Everything is connected
- Monitoring must lead to action
- We must monitor the end points that Indigenous people are concerned about
- Monitoring is sacred

These IIP Principles are detailed in the Key Questions Report, Section 6. Communities outlined their objectives for involvement in oil sands monitoring in a workshop in October of

2024 where the Communities identified their intent for participating in OSMP and their goals for using the data arising from the program. The objectives of this KTP support IIP Principles 2 and 4. The execution of this KTP within the OSMP will achieve the following objectives:

1. Ensure that IK Methodologies are considered fully and equally to Western Science: empower and provide capacity to Indigenous stakeholders' IK to systematically inform and be incorporated into the OSMP core monitoring programs, beyond the CBM programs. Communities would like to participate in, guide, and have their knowledge, experiences and concerns reflected throughout the OSMP.
2. Empower Policy/Management Action to Address Impacts: the right monitoring data can empower Indigenous communities' government and industry relations departments to advocate for policy or management changes when impacts to the receiving environment including culturally relevant receptors, are detected. This empowers communities to make decisions regarding the resultant impacts to their health and well-being, culture, and practice of their Constitutionally protected rights. Monitoring that does not provide the right data not only fails to support communities in their land stewardship activities but also works against communities by providing the appearance of addressing their concerns. Data must be useful, targeted to answer communities' questions, timely, and have the power to detect change at a scale relevant to Indigenous use and rights.
3. Enable Informed Decision-Making for Indigenous Communities: empowering Indigenous communities to make decisions about the ability of the receiving environment to support their culture and way of life. Community members' concerns and key questions are often expressed in terms of important receptors that support cultural and rights-based activities. Without inclusion of Community-identified receptors and linkages between and among those receptors and cultural and rights-based activities, Community concerns and key questions will remain unanswered.

Knowledge End Users

The first step in developing a KTP is to identify the knowledge end users who will be using the knowledge generated by OSMP. In this plan we focus on the needs of Indigenous communities. However, the whole OSMP should have a KTP that also identifies data users within industry and government. This is part of the missing piece of OSMP, where there is need for more timely and effective information/data-sharing as well as a framework to trigger management actions that may be required when change is documented (see Report 1: Key Questions.)

The knowledge end users identified by the WBISC Communities are:

1. Community members: Community members may access data, knowledge or outputs from monitoring to inform their decisions around safety or availability of

resources, the suitability of the surrounding environment for supporting rights-based activities, or even to determine whether other community members are experiencing the same challenges on the landscape. These are the end land users that are on the land, experiencing the pressures from the oil sands development over the years. The objective for this group of end users is to ‘enable informed choice: empowering community members to make decisions about their confidence in the health and safety of the receiving environment including relevant receptors to support their culture and way of life.’

2. Community government and industry relations: Communities have departments whose role is to interact with government or industry on behalf of their Nation or community. These departments are often responsible for responding to requests for consultation in response to regulatory applications, responding to government requests for engagement on policy development, responding to environmental incidents, or advocating for their communities’ needs and land stewardship obligations. This end user group is responsible for moving monitoring from data collection to action. The objective for this group of end users is to ‘empower policy/management change: empowering departments to advocate for policy or management changes when impacts to rights, health, resources and culture are detected.’
3. Community leadership: Like the community government and industry relations departments, community leadership is a key knowledge end user who is responsible for moving monitoring from data collection to action. Community leadership is interested in environmental effects and the potential or real impacts to their membership. The objective for this group of end users is like that of the community government and industry relations end user group but at a higher political level: ‘empower policy/management change: to call for policy or management actions on behalf of their membership when impacts to rights, health, resources and culture are detected.’
4. OSMP: Communities would like to participate in, guide, and have their knowledge, experiences and concerns reflected in the OSMP core monitoring programs. As a knowledge end-user, the objective for the OSMP is to ‘Ensure that IK methodologies are considered fully and equally to western science.’

Knowledge Translation Strategies

To achieve objective 1 - Ensure that IK Methodologies are considered fully and equally to Western Science

The OSMP program is driven by answering key questions. The Indigenous communities of the WBISC developed updated key questions (see Report 1, Key Questions). Although the core TACs have Indigenous co-chairs and representatives at the table, these committees tend to focus primarily on western science, and any work related to Indigenous concerns is often directed towards the ICBMAC and the CBM workplans. Further, there is disagreement

among stakeholders at the TAC and governance levels as to what extent IK and social science should be included in the core programs. As a result, most of the IK-informed monitoring in the OSMP currently is being done through CBMs. The core programs, for the most part, lack guidance on the key questions that even these western science approaches should answer to inform communities. There has been progress in integrating Indigenous perspectives and approaches in monitoring fish health; what is needed is to have this success inform the rest of the program. The OSMP TACs are already fairly overstretched with work and need a framework for how to effectively engage with ICBMAC, WBISC and other participating Indigenous communities to ensure the core program work is regularly informed by IK.

To address these programmatic issues of CBM integration with core programs and the lack of IK informing the core program work, these strategies can be implemented by WBISC:

1. Develop guidance documents for the OSMP on how IK can regularly inform the core monitoring and CBM workplans to ensure better integration and to ensure that community key questions are being addressed. This guidance document will include a glossary of terms, guiding principles, and suggested approach to how community key questions can inform OSMP core program design, sampling locations and frequency, indicators and metrics, baseline, and triggers and thresholds that require investigation of cause and management action;
2. Retain social science support for communities to bring community experience into the program, including Indigenous community liaison or social science support on all TACs
3. Provide ongoing support for communities to engage their members on OSM issues and key monitoring questions, then host ongoing or yearly community workshops or review processes to maintain community key questions guidance;
4. Establish a video series where community elders, youth, land users and leadership talk about their experience on the land, their concerns and observations of change and impacts.

To ensure that the annual community workshops are informed by the broader community members, there must be capacity provided to the communities for annual in-community engagement, where communities follow their own engagement protocols. This would include capacity for communities to:

1. Engage community members to update and refine concerns and key questions. (see Engagement Guide, Appendix A)
2. Review any relevant community documents (e.g., Statement of Concern, Cultural Impact Assessment, etc.) that may inform the refinement of community key questions and observation of change.

3. Participate in the annual workshop to update and refine Indigenous key questions and the IK guidance document(s).

In addition to this, the OSMP needs to internally develop better integration across core programs and CBMs and develop more effective data-sharing across programs (and with the public) to ensure that the core and CBM programs are integrated and complimentary, and not duplicative. The OSMP governance must also provide clear direction to TACs on the process of better integration of Indigenous key questions and IK into the core programs. Further, the OSMP must develop a KTP for the overall program, that includes this WBISC KTP herein.

To achieve objective 2 - Empower Policy/Management Action to Address Impacts:

1. Briefs on key questions directed to communities' industry/government relations organizations,
2. Briefs on status of indicators against Indigenous limits of change to inform the need for management action.
3. Ongoing engagement with community representatives to ensure that there's alignment between technical positions at the OSM program and the positions the communities take during the regulatory process. For example, ensuring that technical representatives establish meaningful communication channels with communities so they can remain aware of communities' requests for specific types of monitoring, can ensure that the program implements these requirements and once implemented validated against predictions provided in regulatory environmental assessments.

To Achieve Objective 3: Enable Informed Decision-Making for Indigenous Communities:

1. Community engagement as outlined by communities. Options include: yearly presentations at planned community wide workshops, Culture Camps, Youth Camps, schools etc.
2. Online/in office dashboard reporting against Limits of Change,
3. Online/in office dashboard reporting against progress of establishing program indicators and endpoints that speak to key community questions and include relevant indigenous knowledge to that end.
4. Social media communications including dashboard reporting.
5. Involve community members in monitoring. This includes culture and fish camps, but also training for youth, regular community focus groups to document important changes and impacts to community members, hiring in-community technical support if needed, small group meetings, including community members in field work, analysis and distribution of findings.

6. Rebuild intergenerational exchange: small groups and field activities should include youth, adults and elders.
7. Communications with the proper language: use plain language in presentations and handouts, provide Dene/Cree translation as much as possible.
8. Large scale summits or gatherings to present results and exchange information with other communities.

Knowledge Translation Impact and Evaluation

Impact of this KTP should be measured at the level of all three knowledge users: community leadership, community government and industry relations organizations, and community members. As we learn what works best to fill information gaps for the communities, we can amend the plan and improve our processes. Note that some of these, such as inclusion in regulatory proceedings or reporting, are lagging indicators, whereas surveys and traffic data are more immediate.

Key performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of the KTP:

1. Survey of users: are OSM data and communications helping community members make decisions on the land? Are they helping leadership and government/industry relations departments make decisions? Is reporting increasing awareness in the community? Is reporting creating concern, or improving confidence?
2. Citations in regulatory proceedings, papers, communications: are communities able to use OSM results and reporting in communications with industry or the government? In regulatory filings?
3. Use of OSMP online tools: Measurement of traffic of any online tools.
4. Use indicators/practice change indicators: During surveys, determine if community members are changing land use based on reporting.
5. Systems change (policy/regulatory change): changes in policy or regulations based on community use of data.

INDIGENOUS INDICATOR PRIORITIZATION: KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION PLAN

Vision	Audiences	Objectives	KT Strategy	Performance Indicators
<i>Everything is connected,</i> <i>Monitoring is linked to action,</i> <i>Monitoring focuses on what Indigenous people are concerned about,</i> <i>Monitoring is sacred</i>	OSM Program	Ensuring that Indigenous methodologies (stories, knowledge) is considered fully and equally to western science.	1. Video series from elders/land users 2. Formal position papers/publications 3. Liaise with ICBMAC 4. Social Science Community of practice	1. Program change: Indicators and thresholds useful to communities
	Community IRC Organizations	Policy/Management change: empower IRCs to advocate* for policy or management changes when impacts to rights, health, resources, culture are detected;	1. Briefings to communities' IRCs on status of indicators and activities 2. Ongoing engagement with technical representatives 3. Presentations at Treaty Days, youth/culture camps, etc	1. Staff surveys 2. Use of data in regulatory/policy submissions 3. Influence in regulatory decisions 4. Leadership Feedback
	Community Leadership	Policy/Management change: empower IRCs to advocate* for policy or management changes when impacts to rights, health, resources, culture are detected;	1. Intergenerational small group, on-land sessions, 2. Online/in office dashboard - indicators and progress 3. Plain language/Cree/Dene communications 4. Community of Practice and yearly summit 5. Indigenous metrics and limits of change 6. School engagement	1. Community member surveys 2. Use of online tools 3. Increased confidence in resources
	Community Members/ Land Users	Enabling informed choice: empower community members to make decisions on their resources, i.e. safety of country foods;		
Assumptions: Programmatic support for workplans, including community engagement. Ability to maintain capacity for execution. Availability of compliance data and OSM data. Receptivity of TACs.			Contextual factors: Several ongoing programs, including successful CBM programs that answer some questions.	

Knowledge Translation Implementation

These activities are required to implement WBISC KTP:

Activities

1. Annual community meetings
 - a. WBISC workshops:
 - i. Thus far as part of the IIP Project, these included the community engagement sessions done by each community and the 2025 summit to establish key questions. Going forward, a second summit in 2026 should focus on execution of the KTP, including building community capacity for CBM applications, mechanisms for moving concerns from community to TACs, and establishment of Indigenous limits of change.
 - b. Establishment of communication tools between OSMP and communities:
 - i. Several communities recommended social media tools for ongoing communication. This could include:
 1. Recording videos of elders, youth, land users and leadership and establishing an online portal for sharing these.
 2. Vignettes from community CBMs
 3. Plain language communications from core monitoring
 4. Dashboard-type reporting against Indigenous limits of change
 - ii. Annual briefings to community government and industry departments/organizations showing monitoring results
 - iii. Annual presentations in community – Culture/Youth Camps, or schools.
 - iv. Having OSM leadership and/or TAC leads participate in on-the land sessions at interested community locations.
 - c. Annual user survey done by the OSMP to assess uptake of information and satisfaction with the program.
 - d. Establishment of Community of Practice:
 - i. A community of practice would be people with common interests come together to share, develop and advance a knowledge base. The WBISC functions as a community of practice for community representatives who interact with OSM. However, we could establish another community of practice of community members who are regularly on the land and conduct

monitoring in their traditional territories. To start, a two-day summit involving community members who could present on their monitoring and concerns, and interact with TAC reps and hear about their work to address community concerns, would be a first step in establishing an Indigenous community of practice.

Resources Needed

- e. Community engagement support: The successful implementation of this knowledge translation approach requires consistent support from the Program Office, or Indigenous Caucus, or WBISC. This should include one or two permanent positions, preferably staffed by community members.
- f. Community champions: We hope that ongoing engagement of community members will lead to the development of community champions who can bridge communities, WBISC, and the OSMP. These individuals could be land users, community rangers or interested members.
- g. Community of practice (WBISC): A community of practice is defined as ‘a social learning process whereby a group of people with common interest come together to share, develop and advance a knowledge base. This informal social setting serves as a forum for the sharing of tacit knowledge.’ (The Hospital for Sick Children, 2008, 2013). Communities frequently expressed support for gatherings of members from different communities to build connections and mutual support for land stewardship and monitoring. A yearly community of practice meeting would support WBISC representatives and community members in maintaining momentum and further developing key questions and tools to improve communities’ participation in the program.
- h. Analytical tools and support: While the OSM core monitoring program provides a great deal of data, the analysis and interpretation of these data for knowledge end users is lacking. The analytical plans for core monitoring will develop analytical approaches to summarize and interpret data in a manner that is meaningful to community members.
- i. OSMP champions (TAC representatives): Indigenous representatives on the OSM governance can use their learnings about community key questions and concerns to ensure that the OSMP core monitoring addresses these needs.

Knowledge Translation Project Partners

The coordination and cooperation of people throughout the OSM is essential for success. These are the suggested roles for project partners:

Partner	Role
OSM Program Office	1. Capacity support 2. Coordination and administrative support where needed 3. Programmatic communications to communities, including in-community engagement, coordinating and executing summit
OSM ICBMAC	4. Support for CBM development and integration with OSM core programs 5. Development of programmatic approach to areas of monitoring of key importance to communities: i.e. contaminants, camera traps, fish
WBISC	6. Community of practice for community government and industry relations organizations 7. Development of strategies for interaction with the OSM 8. Development and ongoing support for community key questions 9. Development of guidance documents for the OSM, focused on integrating IK into the core programs and linking environmental components that are monitored in OSM to cultural components and activities
OSM Program TAC Co-Chairs and representatives	10. Ensuring that core monitoring answers community key questions, and if this is not possible, communicating that back to WBISC so that it can be addressed in CBMs 11. Ensuring that IK is meaningfully integrated into the core programs design, methodology, baseline characterization, indicators and metrics and thresholds/triggers 12. Develop baselines and thresholds/triggers 13. Develop a plan that links to assessing change and impacts, and when and how to trigger management action
Community members, leadership and IRC	14. Communicate concerns and needs to WBISC, OSM Program and TAC leads

INDIGENOUS INDICATOR PRIORITIZATION: KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION PLAN

	15. Involvement in monitoring, reporting and communications where communities want to 16. Guide WBISC representatives
Administrative support/Secretariat⁴	17. Provide administrative support for WBISC 18. Execute communications and maintain reporting tools 19. Engage with communities in community yearly

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⁴ Note that this position is not fully funded or staffed. It requires developing a job description and list of competencies, and the identification of a community who can hold the position.