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Fort McKay Environment Services Ltd.



*A Profile of the Extended Community of
Fort McKay, Alberta*

December 1995

**A PROFILE OF THE EXTENDED COMMUNITY
OF FT. MCKAY, ALBERTA**

Completed For:

SUNCOR INC. OIL SANDS GROUP

and

SYNCRUDE CANADA LTD.

Prepared By:

FORT MCKAY ENVIRONMENT SERVICES LTD.

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A PROFILE OF THE EXTENDED COMMUNITY OF FT. MCKAY, ALBERTA

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ft. McKay is one of the older communities in the province of Alberta. Geographically, it lies about sixty kilometres north of the city of Ft. McMurray, which in turn is about 480 km northeast of Edmonton, the provincial capital. The community of Ft. McKay is, in fact, part of a more extended area which has long been the home location for Chipewyan, Cree, and Metis peoples.

The hamlet of Ft. McKay is an unusual entity, in that the hamlet itself includes land that legally is held by the Government of Canada on behalf of the Ft. McKay Indian Band, other land that is part of the Municipality of Wood Buffalo, land that is deeded and titled to private individuals or corporations, and still other land held by the Provincial Crown, and leased by the Little Red River Metis Association.

Ft. McKay is situated within the area where oil sands deposits are sufficiently close to the surface to be economically extracted by surface mining procedures. The initial mines, developed by Suncor Inc. and Syncrude Canada Ltd., are in advanced development stages, requiring that new mine sites be considered for the future production of synthetic crude oil. The corporate name of Suncor Inc. was created in 1979; prior to that time, the organization's name was Great Canadian Oil Sands Ltd. (G.C.O.S.).

This community profile constitutes one of the background studies being prepared to provide information to aid in the decision-making process relevant to the proposed new mines and their potential impacts on the community and the surrounding environment.

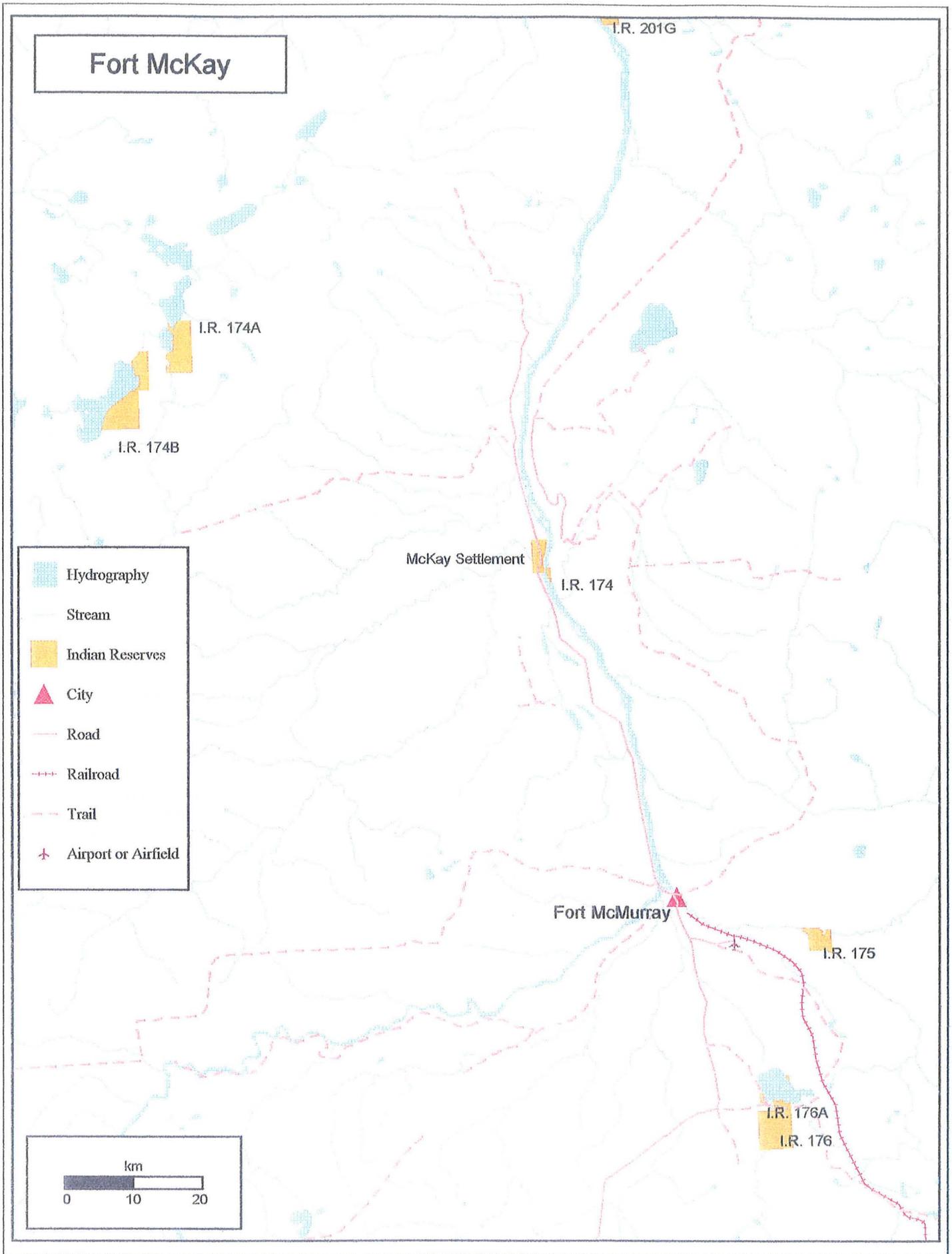


Figure 1. Regional Map

2.0 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This profile report provides a snapshot of the extended community of Ft. McKay, reflecting community data current and available at the time of production (December 1995).

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are identified below:

- to provide a portrait of the community and its current conditions
- to identify broad demographic data
- to document current economic factors, including the local business environment
- to identify available services and service delivery
- to document the opinions and priorities of community members, with the focus upon future development and associated impacts.

2.2 METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted over a period of six weeks, during which time several sources of information were accessed, and activities completed.

A literature review was conducted, and included several studies that had been completed for the Ft. McKay Tribal Council¹ and the Ft. McKay First Nations², and a report produced by Mark Trend Research Ltd.³; additional literature was reviewed and is included in the bibliography. These documents provided significant relevant background information, including extensive documentation of community members' opinions regarding predominant or prevailing issues.

¹Fort McKay Tribal Administration. "From Where We Stand". Fort McKay, Alberta. May, 1983.

²Fort McKay First Nations. "There is still Survival Out There." Fort McKay, Alberta. October, 1994.

³Mark Trend Research Inc. "Fort McKay Community Planning Initiative." Edmonton, Alberta. June, 1993.

A series of discussions was held with Ft. McKay Community Administration personnel. Information regarding the population (age, gender, heritage), businesses, employment, social organizations, and community infrastructure was obtained through this personal discussion process.

Specific data were obtained from Suncor Inc. and Syncrude Canada Ltd., and individual business or other appropriate resource persons.

Individual interviews were held with each member of the community to develop a Traditional Ecological Knowledge database; information and opinions expressed during those interviews has been analyzed and are included in this report where appropriate. These interviews were facilitated and standardized through use of a questionnaire developed for this use by Golder Associates, a consulting group contracted for such projects by Suncor Inc.

A draft report was prepared and submitted for review by the community members, Council members, the Chief and members of the Fort McKay Group of Companies' managers.

3.0 SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY

The extended community of Ft. McKay has been an area of traditional habitation for several thousand years, according to the sources quoted in "From Where We Stand"⁴. The majority of the residents are of Aboriginal background, and include those of Cree, Chipewyan, and Metis origin. The hamlet itself includes lands that are privately owned in Fee Simple by the Band Corporation, land that is federally Crown owned, and other land that is provincially Crown owned. The extended community includes both the hamlet, the Ft. McKay Indian Reserve, which was established in 1915 under the agreement of Treaty No. 8, and land that has been used traditionally and upon which traplines are still being held.

Historically and traditionally, the people of Ft. McKay have survived and flourished through appropriate utilization and sharing of the region's resources. Traditionally, the resources of the entire ecosystem within which the present community is situated were available to the people. The traditional partnership that the people developed with the environment, including the water bodies, river systems, and the valleys within which they flow, as well as the land, the air, and the inhabitants of those elements, are special to the Ft. McKay people. That relationship forms the foundation of the people's complete physical, spiritual, and cultural existence.

The region has, historically, produced both animal and plant food resources. The islands and shoreline riparian areas have constituted highly supportive environments for food resources. The uplands also have produced moose, deer, bear and caribou, as well as upland game birds such as ptarmigan and grouse. All these wildlife forms, together with a variety of plants, have been (and continue to be) used by the inhabitants of Ft. McKay for food, clothing, medicines, spiritual and shelter requirements.

The inhabitants of the area used a number of traditional camping sites, which were occupied during various periods of the year. These camps were set up in close proximity to sustenance resources which were, and still are, harvested annually where possible. Hence, some of these camp sites including the location of the "main camp" of Ft. McKay, have over the years, taken on a relatively more important and more permanent status than was true during the era when all inhabitants lived a more mobile hunting and gathering lifestyle.

A number of the Elders interviewed in November 1995 as part of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge data base, stated that these camps provided a major focal point for social and cultural activities as well. It was there that children were taught traditional skills, cultural practices, social values, and spiritual concepts. They were taught how to catch and preserve fish. They were taught how to hunt, trap, and preserve the hides of the animals that were taken, as well how to use these hides that had been obtained. They were taught how to identify the region's plants

⁴"Fort McKay Tribal Administration. "From Where We Stand". Fort McKay, Alberta. May, 1983.

and berries, as well as how and for what purposes to use those plants. The seasonal camps played a major role in the lives of the region's inhabitants.

The people of the community historically spent a good deal of time travelling throughout the region, then returning to the main meeting area (the current Ft. McKay community location).

The European fur trade, commonly recognized as the first of the "institutions" that came to the area, was responsible for significant impacts upon the inhabitants, their lifestyle and the area's resources.

In 1898 the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) conducted a land survey of the general Ft. McKay community. It was again surveyed by the Department of the Interior in 1911, by a Mr. Robertson, a government surveyor. His report reflects the attitude commonly held by institutionalized Euro-Canadian society, at the time, towards the Aboriginal population. The following quotation is from a letter written by Mr. Robertson to his superiors in 1915:

"...The inclusion of the two old Indian houses in the Hudson's Bay lot by the HBC surveyor in 1898, I consider a most high handed and unnecessary proceeding...."

"In laying out this settlement and taking declarations from squatters, the right of these Indians appeared to have been disregarded by the surveyor for the Department of the Interior. Nor am I able to find in his report... any mention of conditions there. Even an old Indian graveyard is included in Lot No.4 on which Elzear Robillard made declaration."⁵

Further impacts resulted as the fur trade waned and the Hudson Bay Co. was sold to the new Dominion of Canada, and then as the Dominion's governing bodies expanded their realm of jurisdiction, made decisions and imposed regulations. The Christian church missionaries entered the region in the mid-1850's, and became responsible for delivery of educational, health, and religious service to the residents.

By the middle of the 20th century, when Family Allowances were instituted and tied to the children's school attendance, legislation was written which insisted that:

- a) to collect family child allowance, a permanent residence and address must be maintained in the community; and
- b) children under 16 were required by law to attend school.

⁵"From Where We Stand". Fort McKay Tribal Administration. Fort McKay, Alberta. May 1983.

The impact of this legislation was that it became mandatory for certain members of each Ft. McKay family to remain close to their main location for most of the year. The resulting restriction on their freedom to travel significantly impacted their ability to pursue their traditional activities of hunting, trapping, and the gathering of wild vegetation. The community's cultural and economic base was dramatically changed.

Close to the end of the 19th century, the North West Mounted Police arrived, followed by settlers, entrepreneurs, and business people. By the end of the 20th century's first quarter, the oil sands deposits were under close scrutiny; commercially viable development of the deposits was initiated in 1967 by Suncor Inc.

Oil sands development has resulted in both positive and negative impacts upon the community. An example of negative cultural impacts that have occurred within the past forty years, relate to the availability of traditional campsites. At least two of the more important permanent campsites have been eliminated. One of these two sites was located at Tar Island on the Athabasca River and is now beneath the Suncor Inc. tailings pond. The other site was located where the Syncrude Mine and Plant now stand. During the summer and fall, individual families, or groups of families camped at these two sites to catch and dry fish taken from the Athabasca River. The fish formed a significant source of winter-time food for the families and their dogs. Moose were also hunted in the area, and were used to produce dried meat, tanned hides, and glue. These two locations were also known for their berries, and herbs such as mint. The latter product was picked by the fifty-pound flour sackful, and dried for use as tea during the winter.⁶

The past thirty years have seen the development and industrialization of the Greater McMurray Oil Sands. The effects generated by the exploration, commercialization, mining, extraction, transportation of, and general economic spin off from the conversion of oil sands to synthetic crude have been felt on a continent wide scale. The oil sands contain an estimated 720 billion barrels of synthetic crude oil found within the bitumen. Combined with conventional oil reserves, Alberta is believed to contain reserves in excess of those in the Middle East.⁷

Few residents of the Ft. McKay community now live according to the traditional style. The reasons for this change are many and complex; not the least of those reasons, however, are the physical and chemical impacts of development upon the land, the water, and the air.

⁶Boucher, Alice. Personal Communication, during interviews with the elders, November 1995.

⁷Alberta Environment Protection. "Draft Fort McMurray-Athabasca Oil Sands Subregional Integrated Resource Plan." Edmonton, Alberta. October 1995. p. 3.

4.0 LOCAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

The extended community of Ft. McKay continues to experience a dramatic period of economic transition. The process of change, unless well-managed and guided, places significant strains upon those experiencing it. The people of the Ft. McKay community are in the midst of transition, and are in the process of moving from their former traditional economy, to one that is closely tied to the developments within the region. This transition is one that is, essentially, being thrust upon the community; while the population is not necessarily opposed to the changing economic base, the people do require a measure of influence and control on the impacts which those changes produce and on the rate of change involved.

The following sections describe both the traditional and the non-traditional economies, their components and factors, and some of the impacts that result from these two very different economic bases.

4.1 TRADITIONAL ECONOMY

The "traditional economy" is defined as one in which community members rely primarily on the land and its resources for their sustenance. Food is acquired through hunting, snaring, netting or trapping of animals and fish; wild fruits and vegetables are gathered, and are supplemented or supported with home garden vegetable produce. Currency is obtained by selling furs, and is used to purchase items that cannot be obtained through more traditional means of trading or bartering.

The traditional economy has been referred to by Ft. McKay elders as a "bush economy", one that is based on cooperation and trading and in which little currency was used, either because it was not available or because there was no need for it.

The following information has been prepared through use of data obtained during interviews with various members of the community, including the Elders. The information provided for this community profile clearly describes the traditional economic foundation of the peoples' lifestyle, which is integrally woven into their culture, relationships, and spiritual beliefs.

The traditional economy is based on cooperation and trading; it is commonly referred to as a "subsistence" lifestyle although greater understanding clearly shows that economic activities are an integral component of the traditionalists' holistic view of the world and their own place within that reality.

Traditionally, the families of the Ft. McKay area moved between the main camp of Ft. McKay and such areas as Namur and Moose (Gardiner) Lake, or Tar Island and the current location of the Syncrude mine site, where they camped in small, multiple family groups for weeks or months, depending upon the supply of fish or game. The people caught and dried fish, a primary food source for themselves and their dogs particularly during the winter months. Other group

members hunted moose for immediate use as fresh meat, and for later use as dried meat. Plants were collected for food, medicinal and related purposes. The Elders consistently indicated that specific plants were available, and were harvested in large quantities. For example, mint was picked in "fifty pound flour sack" quantities, to be dried for later use as tea. This process of food gathering and preserving took place throughout the spring and summer months.

In the late fall, the family groups moved to their respective wintering areas. Some families stayed at Ft. McKay, while others passed through Ft. McKay on the way to their wintering areas. These groups often encountered game, particularly moose, during their journey. After the game was killed, the people camped at that spot until the hides had been tanned and the meat dried. Then they continued on to the wintering area, where they stayed until their return to Ft. McKay.

As river-based transportation became commercialized and mechanized, it was common practice for some of the men to travel to Ft. McMurray following the seasonal end of trapping. There they spent the summer season hauling and loading freight for Northern Transportation Company Ltd. (NTCL). Working for N.T.C.L. was one of the few forms of employment in the region where wages were paid in cash. In the fall, at the end of the shipping season, the men returned home to join their families. The currency obtained through the summer's employment was used to purchase dry goods such as flour, sugar, salt and other staple commodities that could not be obtained through more traditional means.

It may be noted that this transportation-based employment may well have been an extension of the transportation and guiding work which the Cree and Chipewyan peoples had undertaken for the traders, beginning in the mid-18th century.

Reunited with their families in the fall, they again headed out for the fall fishing grounds at Tar Island, or at Namur or Moose (Gardiner) Lake.

An economic value analysis of the traditional economy and its impact on the community and on individual families, has not been completed. That the traditional economy worked is proven by the fact that numerous people supported themselves and their families in that way for many generations and over many centuries.

4.2 CURRENT ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT BASE

The community of Ft. McKay continues to seek adaptations to the industrialized economy that has been imposed upon it, and which contributes to the lifestyle transition process of the residents.

Almost all work (and workers) in the Ft. McKay area operate from an entrepreneurial perspective. That is, work is generally seasonal, and most workers are either contracted or do part time work, very much in the fashion of a small corporation. Hence, the concept of task or goal oriented work (much like consulting) is quite familiar to the people of the Ft. McKay community.

4.2.1 The Fort McKay Group of Companies

A clear indicator of the ongoing adjustment is the presence of the businesses which make up the Fort McKay Group of Companies. These companies were established to capitalize on the business and employment opportunities created by the needs and requirements of Suncor Inc. and Syncrude Canada Ltd. These two major companies have made significant investments in oil sands mining, extraction and upgrading in the Ft. McMurray/Ft. McKay area. Together they are responsible for the production of 309,000 bbls⁸ of synthetic crude per day, extracted from the oil sands deposits immediately south of the Ft. McKay community.

The Fort McKay Group of Companies consists of five individually incorporated organizations:

- Fort McKay Transportation Ltd.
- Fort McKay Developments Ltd.
- Fort McKay General Stores Ltd.
- Fort McKay General Contracting Ltd.
- Fort McKay Environment Services Ltd.

The Fort McKay Group of Companies employ approximately eighty people on a year-round basis. The employment figures increases considerably during the summer months, due to seasonal activities. For example, the companies employed 125 people during July 1995. Ninety-two (74%) of this total were Aboriginal people. Forty-eight of the 92 Aboriginals (52%) were residents of Ft. McKay. In 1994, 224 of the 265 employed by the Fort McKay Group of Companies are Aboriginal, and 78 persons in this group were Ft. McKay residents.⁹

The community is entering a more technically based facet of business development, particularly through the activities of Fort McKay General Contracting and Fort McKay Environment Services Ltd.

Both of these companies are adding technical capabilities to their operating base. These service capabilities will be augmented and upgraded through both education and on-the-job- training of community members in areas such as engineering, forestry, forest technology, fisheries, agricultural sciences, and wildlife management.

⁸Personal communication with Suncor Inc. and Syncrude Canada Ltd. indicated that 75,000 bbls synthetic crude per day are produced by the former company, while 234,000 bbls per day are produced by Syncrude's plant.

⁹Fort McKay Administration, personal communication, September 14, 1995.

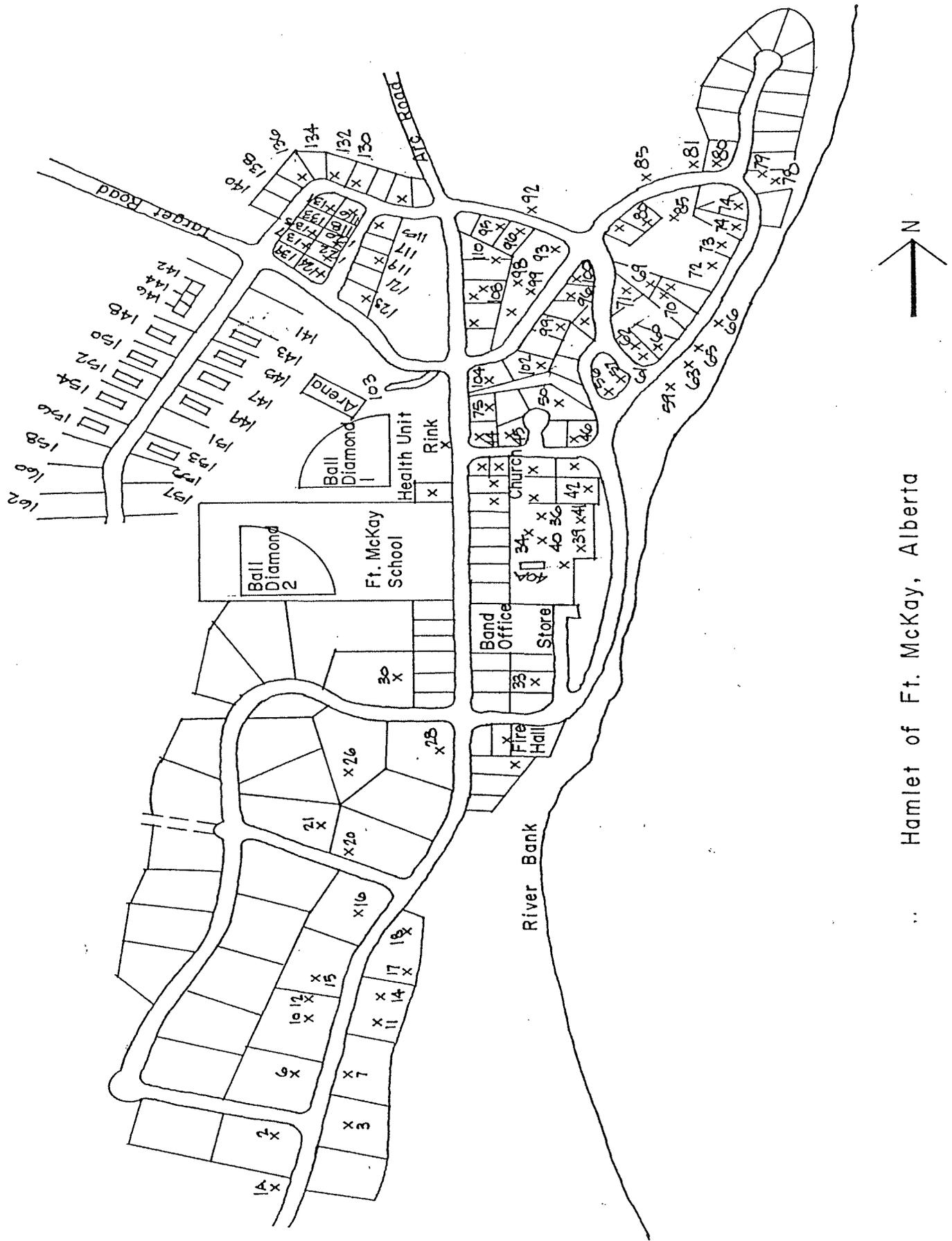


Figure 2: Hamlet of Ft. McKay

Hamlet of Ft. McKay, Alberta

4.2.2 The Oil Sands Companies

In addition to those employed indirectly on oil sands-related activities, through the Fort McKay Group of Companies, additional indirect employment is provided by business operations in the city of Ft. McMurray.

A number of community members are employed directly by the plants. Syncrude Canada Ltd. employs thirteen male and five female Treaty persons from Ft. McKay, as well as two males of Metis origin. Suncor Inc. employs one Treaty female from Ft. McKay. These staff members are on permanent, full-time employment status, according to the Ft. McKay Community Administration.

4.2.3 Local Businesses

A variety of local businesses and companies operate out of the extended community of Ft. McKay.

The following list portrays the variety of businesses operated within the community:

- Thunderbird Enterprises
 - a company providing medical support services such as non-emergency transport, delivery of prescriptions, and home care
 - company operated by Clara Wilson and Sandra Boucher
- E³ Environmental Electronic Electrical Services Inc.
- Neegan Development Corporation
 - a heavy machinery contracting company, whose major shareholder is a member of the Ft. Chipewyan band

4.3 **ECONOMIC CLIMATE**

The community is rapidly developing a bank of both skill and competence. It is already becoming competitive as the company managers' experience increases and matures, and they in turn guide the development of their employees.

5.0 AN INVENTORY OF LOCAL EMPLOYMENT SKILLS

The people living in the extended community of Ft. McKay possess a wide range of skills which are valuable and marketable within the environmental and economic context of the region.

The peoples' skills and capabilities include many which are especially suited to the requirements of the region, as well as those which are marketable in a more global context.

The following listing provides an indication of the range and depth of knowledge and skills that are found in the community; this list is not intended to be all-inclusive, but does portray the flexibility, adaptability, and the range of skills within this extended community.

Vehicle operating skills:

- ski-doos
- quads and other All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV's)
- landscaping and yard maintenance equipment (i.e. small tractors, power mowers, weed eaters)
- automobiles
- pickups and larger trucks
- tractor-trailer units
- boats

Heavy equipment operating and repair skills:

- caterpillar tractors and bulldozers
- earth moving equipment
- road maintenance and paving equipment (i.e. graders, rollers, pavers, sheep's foot)
- backhoes, post pounders
- power saw, sawmill and heavy logging equipment
- construction equipment

Office equipment operating skills:

- typewriter
- computer (word processing, accounting)
- facsimile equipment
- telephones
- photocopiers

Office administration skills:

- secretarial and clerical
- bookkeeping
- payroll and general administration
- correspondence preparation

Project management and administration:

- report writing
- project management
- data collection, compilation, and preliminary analysis
- proposal preparation

Trades skills:

- carpentry
- plumbing
- stone and brick work
- metal fabrication
- electrical
- mechanical (auto, heavy equipment, small engine)
- drafting

Educational and training skills:

- teaching
- instructing
- assistance to educators and educational institutions

Health and social skills:

- nursing paraprofessional
- social services paraprofessional
- counselling services

Professional and technical skills:

- engineering and engineering technology
- renewable resource management

Cultural and Artistic skills:

- traditional arts, such as beadwork
- traditional clothing and moccasins
- traditional music
- traditional dancing
- story-telling

Traditional knowledge skills:

- hunting (hunter training)
- trapping
- fishing
- woodsmanship - survival training
- survival
- identification of plants and animals
- shelter making
- wildlife tracking and identification

Law enforcement skills:

- security guards
- safety officers
- Fish and Wildlife officers
- Forest Rangers
- R.C.M.P.

Although the community population is less than five hundred, the aggregate of skills and knowledge found in this extended community encompasses and reflects the two worlds within which the people live. The existence of this wide range of skills, both traditional and technical, portrays the flexibility and adaptability of Ft. McKay community residents in addressing the challenges which they must face.

6.0 POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

The population of the extended community of Ft. McKay shows that 332 persons are resident in the area.

The majority of the people (317) are of Aboriginal origin; 15 persons are non-Aboriginal.

Eighty percent (80%) of the population lives within the hamlet of Ft. McKay, while 66 persons (20%) live outside the hamlet's boundaries.

Five of the traplines registered within the boundaries of the extended community are operated by permanent residents; that population is included in the region's census.

The following table depicts the adult/child and gender distribution of the community's population:

Table 1. Population, Extended Community of Ft. McKay

	Elders	Adults			Under 18
	Over 60	45 to 60	31 to 45	18 to 30	
Males	5	19	30	40	74
Females	14	13	43	44	50
Total	19	32	73	84	124

7.0 FORMAL EDUCATION WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

The formal educational status of Ft. McKay residents is similar to that of other communities where the lifestyle has required intimate knowledge of the environment through experience, rather than of technical or written knowledge gained in a classroom.

Until the mission schools were established in the mid-1850's, in the region that we now call "Alberta", there were neither opportunities for, or need of, formal educational institutions.

Following the introduction of family allowances, access to formal teaching and learning became more readily available. The hamlet of Ft. McKay now has its own school, where there are five classrooms, one computer room, a gymnasium, and several small offices. The school provides services for just under one hundred students in grades one to nine. High school students attend school in Ft. McMurray. The Ft. McKay school is operated by the Northlands School Division.

The academic level of community residents varies considerably, with the more senior people consistently shown to have lesser formal education than do the younger residents. Although the Elders are wise in their traditional ways, only three out of the thirty-two Elders interviewed are fully literate.

It is to a large extent assumed, for the purposes of this study, that all of the adolescent and adult citizens have a base level of comprehension, reading and writing capability.

The formal level of primary school education achieved by the adult (18 to 55 years of age) community residents is shown below:

Grade 6:	1
Grade 7:	1
Grade 8:	2
Grade 9:	12
Grade 10:	29
Grade 11:	16
Grade 12:	17

A small number of Ft. McKay residents have completed secondary school courses of study. At the present time, five individuals are enrolled in either university, college, or trade school courses:

- 1 working toward a Bachelor of Social Work; the individual is enrolled at the University of Alberta
- 1 person is enrolled in the first year of a Bachelor of Business Administration program

- 1 person graduated (1995) with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Alberta
- 1 person has recently completed the Engineering Technologist program at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)
- 1 person is currently enrolled in the Environmental Technologist Diploma program at Keyano College

As can be seen from the preceding information, a variety of formal educational programs are being undertaken.

8.0 EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following employment positions exist in the extended community of Ft. McKay. Included in these opportunities are those of both employment and self-employed positions.

* Traplines and trappers	35 lines, at least 80 trappers.
* Hunters	100
* Fishermen	100
Welding (apprentice)	2
Heavy Equipment Operators	8
Labourer, oil sands plants	9
Teacher-Assistants	3
Politicians/Administrators	5
Secretarial	3
Draftsman (part time)	1
Clerical	3
Drivers	10
General Labour	20 (varies according to seasonal requirements)
Accounting & Payroll	2
Process Operators	2

Employment occupations marked with an asterisk (*) are considered traditional occupations. The people who participate in these activities do so on a seasonal basis; they may or may not work at other occupations during the off-season. The "general labour" positions consist of employment opportunities available through the major corporations; the number of positions varies in response to seasonal and construction conditions.

The following table shows the number of employed people, resident in the extended community of Ft. McKay.

Table 2. Employment by age group, part time and full time

EMPLOYMENT	TREATY	METIS	NON-ABORIGINAL	TOTAL
Full time (18-30 yrs)	28	3	5	36
Part time (18-30 yrs)	7	6	3	16
Full time (30-45 yrs)	24	5	11	40
Part time (30-45 yrs)	2	0	3	5
Full time (46-over)	8	1	0	9
Part time (46-over)	0	1	0	1

9.0 ECONOMIC ISSUES

The two most significant economic issues for the Ft. McKay community are employment, and continuation of the traditional or "bush" economy.

The former issue, employment, directly affects the financial welfare of the people. The oil sands plants are the primary employers, either directly or indirectly, of community members. The latter issue, continuation of the traditional economic base, is impacted upon by regional developments that affect the environment. To carry out traditional activities such as hunting, trapping, fishing, and berry picking requires that the water, soil and air be of good quality and that environmental disturbances not interfere with the animal and plant life or the ability of the people to use these resources.

A number of more obvious issues have been identified in the Ft. McKay Community Planning Initiative produced for the Community by Mark Trend Research Inc. in June of 1993. Some of the more pertinent issues are identified in the following section **10.0 Attitudes and Opinions of the Residents.**

10.0 ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS OF THE RESIDENTS

The following quotations have been taken directly from the document entitled "Ft. McKay Community Planning Initiative"¹⁰

From a Community strength perspective:

"No single feature stands out in the minds of Ft. McKay residents as a community strength. . .The most often mentioned positive feature or strength of the community was the Drop-in Centre, followed by the paved highway, upgrading of the school, and a 'close' community feeling."

From a Community weakness perspective:

". . .Alcoholism and drug abuse, followed by unemployment are seen as the community's greatest weaknesses, or negative features. Nearly two thirds of the respondents mentioned the first two items, while more than a quarter mentioned unemployment."

Most Important issues facing Ft. McKay today:

"More than one third cited unemployment, followed by the need for more activities in the community, and better schooling and education."

Attitudes to development and industry:

"About 20% of the respondents feel that the overall effect has been positive, 30% feel that it has been negative, and about 30% feel that there have been both positive and negative effects. About 18% feel that there have been no effects one way or another."

The community interviews for the Traditional Knowledge project, held during the latter part of 1995, produced similar results as those documented by Mark Trend Research. However, while many of the respondents stated that the effects were positive, these same people indicated that they had so little influence on what was happening, or going to happen around them, they were placed in the position of being obliged to learn how to take advantage of these new projects, and businesses, or continue to lose out on their traditional life styles.

"Employment for residents is clearly seen as the most beneficial effect of oil industry activity in the area, mentioned by 81% of the respondents. Another 26% mentioned funding for the community from the oil industry as beneficial."

"Conversely, the impact of oil industry activities on the environment is seen as the most negative impact. Seven out of 10 residents mentioned 'pollution' in general

¹⁰Mark Trend Research Inc. "Fort McKay Community Planning Initiative". Edmonton, Alberta. June, 1993.

as a bad effect of oil industry activity, while 32% specifically mentioned the destruction of wildlife habitat. Fifteen percent (15%) mentioned river pollution, and 8% mentioned air pollution, while 11% mentioned general environmental impact."

It may be noted that, according to the information provided through the recently completed Traditional Knowledge interviews, the comparative numbers shown above appear to be much higher. One hundred percent (100%) of the Elders, and most of the other respondents, indicated that "The Athabasca River is ruined. You can't eat the fish and you can't drink the water". It should be stated that these respondents were not prepared to cast 100% of the blame on the oil industry. They included the cities and towns upstream on the river for their disposal of raw sewage, nutrients and pesticide waste from agricultural operations upstream, and pulp mill effluent as at least equal contributors to the cumulative destruction of the river.

Support of Syncrude and Suncor Expansion:

Support among the Ft. McKay residents, for the Syncrude Canada Ltd. and Suncor Inc. expansions, is variable. The people recognize the fiscal reality of the situation, and the need for employment (particularly since they can no longer carry on their lives in a traditional manner). On the other hand, they also recognize the negative impact that such expansions may have on the environment. It is essential, in the eyes of the people, that control over their own environment must be vested with them.

Community opinions on Forestry expansion:

"A significant majority of Ft. McKay residents (78%) feel the overall effect of forestry industry activity in the area has been negative. Just 2% feel the overall has been positive, while 13% believe there has been no significant effect either way."

"Asked what has been 'good' about having logging companies working in the area, 96% of the respondents could not offer any positive effect. When asked for 'Bad' effects, 77% mentioned concerns related to road safety and traffic, 65% mentioned environmental concerns, and 25% mentioned destruction of traplines specifically."

"Consistent with those perceptions, 94% of Ft. McKay residents do not support any expansion of logging industry activity in the region. In turn, 78% of those respondents say there are no conditions under which they would support expansion."

Community opinions on Local improvements:

"Considered in order of importance, were first; improvements to water and sewer service (97%). This was followed by better natural gas service (94%), paved streets (82%), lighted streets (77%), and concrete sidewalks (44%)."

Community opinion regarding better facilities:

"An activity centre for youth and children ranked the highest (93%), followed by a senior citizens home for the Elders(87%), an arena (82%), a day care centre (69%), campgrounds and picnic areas (58%), and a swimming pool (57%)."

Community opinions on local services:

"Fire services considered to be very important by 96% of the respondents, followed closely by ambulance services (93%), home care services for the elders (93%), community health services (91%), police services (6%), and security services (42%)."

It may be noted that many of these services are already operational in the community, and have been for some time, i.e. the Fire service. To increase the capability of such a service would require cooperation from the industries and other levels of government in the area, particularly regarding financial support. Funding will be required not only to carry the service to the community, but to maintain the level of training and technical skill required to operate such a service with appropriately trained personnel.

Community opinions on Education and Training:

"The people indicated that a high school ranked as very important (89%), followed by job-specific training programs (85%), vocational or technical courses (79%), university or college courses (54%), and general interest courses (51%)."

"If such . . . facilities or services were available in the community, nearly half (47%) said they would personally take advantage of job-specific training, followed by high school (42%), university or college courses and vocational or technical courses (32% each), and general interest courses (21%)."

Community opinions on other items:

Access Road to Moose (Gardiner) Lakes is considered by 73% of the community respondents to be somewhat to very important. If a road was built to Moose Lakes, the largest percentage of Ft. McKay residents (44%) expect to visit the area frequently, while about 26% would visit sometime. About 8% of the respondents would prefer to move to Moose Lakes, while 11% would like to live there part time.

Community Opinions Regarding Future Developments:

"Two thirds of the respondents felt that Ft. McKay should try to grow in the future, while 35% believe it should try to remain a small, close-knit community."

"The [more growth] group cited more and better business opportunities and increased employment, etc. The [remain small] group cited reasons relating to keeping the close community feeling."

"Those favouring future growth mentioned a hotel, tourism in general, more community owned businesses, and a variety of retail outlets, a restaurant or fast food outlet."

11.0 HUMAN SERVICES

Human services, including education, health, policing, fire protection, housing, and emergency response, are an integral component of the community's infrastructure.

The community's human services include:

11.1 FIRE PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE SERVICES

This agency is operated by volunteers, but they are highly qualified and are regarded as the best Emergency Response Team out of all of the communities in the Wood Buffalo Municipal District.

The team consists of 12 members, of which 3 are rescue team leaders, and 9 are fire fighters. Another 5 individuals are non-active members and there is an emergency site management group consisting of 3 more individuals. It is understood that this group can be augmented if necessary by recruits or volunteers from the area should this be necessary.

11.2 SOCIAL AND HEALTH CARE

These services are delivered by:

- 1 Home Care Nurse
- 1 Public Health Nurse
- 1 Community Health Representative (CHR)
- 1 Nechi Native Alcohol counsellor, Drug and Alcohol Program (NNA DAP) worker
- 1 Secretary

11.3 POLICING

This activity is officially carried out by the RCMP. Unofficially, the community leaders and elders exert a significant amount of influence in the maintenance of order in the area. It is interesting to note that both health care and policing rank rather high in importance in the opinions of the community. These two areas must be included in any new negotiations with industry, in general, to ensure that both training and budgets for the improvement of such services are given the appropriate priority.

11.4 HOUSING

Private housing owned by the Ft. McKay Band.

- There are currently 108 houses in the community, of which 7 are vacant

School Housing

- There are currently 2 houses occupied and 3 houses vacant

11.5 COMMERCIAL AND PUBLIC BUILDINGS

- Ft. McKay drop-in centre
- Ft. McKay First Nations Band Office
- Ft. McKay Metis Local Building
- Ft. McKay Church

11.6 ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE AND LOCATED IN THE COMMUNITY

- Ft. McKay Arena Society
- Ft. McKay Recreation Board
- Fort McKay Group of Companies (Board of Directors)
- Ft. McKay First Nations
- Ft. McKay Metis Local
- Ft. McKay Alcoholics Anonymous
- Ft. McKay Youth Justice Committee
- Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous

12.0 INFRASTRUCTURE

12.1 ROADS

Highway 63 into Ft. McKay is now paved. The roads within the Community are well maintained, are coated with all weather gravel and all buildings and houses are accessible.

12.2 WATER SUPPLY, DISTRIBUTION, AND TREATMENT

- Water Boy Neptune Micro flow unit with rated capacity of 3.15 litres/second (l/s)
- fresh water intake is from the Ells River; intake is complete with pumping system rated at 4.01 l/s @ 71.0 m Total Dead Head (TDH) and 100mm raw water supply line to raw water reservoir
- raw water reservoir capacity is 29,160 cubic metres
- two raw water pumps
- two distribution pumps rated at 3.01 l/s @ 36.6 m TDH
- treated water reservoir with a capacity of 750 cu.m.
- fire pump rated at about 86 l/s @ 42.0m TDH
- truck fill system at the water treatment plant

The majority of residences have piped water service through water distribution mains ranging in size from 150 mm to 250 mm in diameter. Mains are mostly "looped" systems complete with hydrants.

12.3 SEWER

The sewage system in the community of Ft. McKay is a gravity system with gravity collection lines, a lift station, and a lagoon treatment system, constructed in 1988.

The treatment system is located just north of Ft. McKay and consists of two anaerobic cells and a twelve month aerobic cell. Effluent is discharged to the Athabasca River nearby. No testing is undertaken of the sewage effluent, prior to dumping.

The two anaerobic cells have a capacity of 225 cubic meters each. The aerobic storage cell has a twelve month storage capacity and holds up to 26,000 cubic meters of partially treated sewage.

The sewage treatment lagoons, particularly the large lagoon, are currently operating at greater-than-recommended capacity. Because of the insufficient storage capability, the lagoon must be emptied twice a year (rather than the specified single yearly dump).

The gravity mains are 20 centimetres in diameter with 10 centimetres service connections from houses and buildings to the mains. Flow from the connectors and gravity mains is directed to a lift station and, from there, pumped through a 10 centimetre forced main to the lagoon system north of the hamlet.

Storm drainage for the Ft. McKay Settlement is accomplished almost entirely by road side surface ditches and culverts which lead the excess run off to the Athabasca River which provides eastern border of the hamlet itself.

12.4 ELECTRICAL, GAS, AND TELEPHONE UTILITIES

The majority of the residences and community buildings in Ft. McKay are provided with electricity, gas and telephone. These services are provided by Alberta Power Ltd, Northwestern Utilities Ltd., and AGT Ltd. respectively.

12.5 DISCUSSION

The majority of the Ft. McKay First Nations people have full running water, indoor plumbing, and sewage services. Few member of the other primary group, the Metis Nation, have access to running water, indoor plumbing or sewage services. This situation is considered undesirable, and is a major issue in the community due to its impact on the health and well-being of the community and its members.

The water treatment plant is now operating at capacity or greater than capacity. To expand the community's residential or industrial base, the water supply and sewage treatment facilities will require substantial upgrading and expansion.

13.0 SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Social organizations in the community of Ft. McKay include but may not be limited to the following:

- Ft. McKay Arena Society
- Ft. McKay Youth Justice Committee
- Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous

Other organizations that have a social facet but have been set up for business or spiritual reasons are:

- The Ft. McKay Drop In Centre
- Ft. McKay Church
- Ft. McKay Metis Local
- The Fort McKay Group of Companies

14.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, COMMUNITY PROFILE

The preceding sections provide a basic profile of the extended community of Ft. McKay. In addition to the factual data provided, additional factors have had significant impacts upon the community, and must be considered for effective future planning.

- The massive influx of people into the Ft. McMurray/Ft. McKay area during the past thirty years has placed increasing pressure on the renewable resources traditionally utilized by the people of Ft. McKay. Some of these resources such as the water and the fish in the Athabasca River are, in eyes of the community, either undrinkable or inedible, and therefore, unusable.
- The population associated with the general work force of the oil sand mining and extraction industry is likely to continue to increase because the mines are expanding and new mines are being planned.
- The economic conditions associated with this influx of people will continue to have a strongly disruptive influence on the members of the Ft. McKay community. To neutralize or mitigate these disturbances, programs such as Employee Assistance Programs must be initiated immediately.
- The sale of Alberta's forests and the massive harvesting programs which now extend into and over the oil sands leases are also responsible for major and permanent population increases.

While it is understood that the two oil sands plants cannot be held accountable for the activities of the forest industry, the cumulative effects of these industries do react synergistically.

- According to Ft. McKay Community Administration, the current population is 332. A profile of the community completed in 1983, predicted that in 1995, the population would have reached 375. The advent of several new mining projects in the oil sands area, along with a massive increase in the exploitation of the area's forests have had both a positive and a negative influence on the status of the population of the community.
- Another major influence on the people of Ft. McKay came about through the upgrading of the road from Ft. McMurray to Ft. McKay. The paving of this road in 1993 has been both a boon, and a detriment to the community in that, while it has allowed for better access to hospitals, dental care and provisioning of the

community because of the ease of travel to the larger centre of Ft. McMurray, it has also increased the exposure of the people in the community to a wider market of jobs, and benefits (perceived or otherwise) of the outside world. It is therefore no surprise that the expected increase in population has not materialized.

IT IS RECOMMENDED that oil sands industry companies and the forest industry companies combine their efforts and work with the Native communities to minimize or eliminate these cumulative effects. More importantly, efforts must be made to eliminate or change the practices which are the most disruptive, and replace those activities with others that produce the same beneficial result, but without the negative impacts.

- The increases in population, the increases in surficial disturbance, and the removal of vegetative cover in the general study area, have already had a dramatic effect on the production of renewable resources in the area. These actions have negatively influenced the air and water quality, and the aesthetics that make up the qualitative aspect of the environment in and on the area regarded by these people as their traditional lands.
- The preceding items, taken into account by the legislative authorities, have resulted in changes to government policy, legislation and regulations. These changes have affected the annual traditional harvesting of these renewable natural resources and the maintenance of environmental quality. While the intentions of the government were likely good, the results from the perspective of the people of this community have not met expectations.

NOTE: The Fish and Wildlife Policy for Alberta¹¹ is an exceptionally comprehensive policy document. It has been quoted¹². According to that document, the Minister of the department is accountable for its implementation. The policy states that the Minister is bound to provide a status report on the Fish and Wildlife Resources in the Province at the request of his colleagues.

IT IS RECOMMENDED that the Government implement this policy immediately, to ensure that overall quality of fish and wildlife habitat be preserved for current and future generations.

¹¹Alberta. Natural Resources. The Fish and Wildlife Policy for Alberta. Edmonton, Alberta. October 1982.

¹²Alberta Environment Protection. "Draft Fort McMurray-Athabasca Oil Sands Subregional Integrated Resource Plan". Edmonton, Alberta. October 1995, pp. 3 - 12.

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