
Press Release



February 4, 2010

CEMA's Recommendations for Water Withdrawal from the Athabasca

Fort McMurray, Alberta – The Cumulative Environmental Management Association (CEMA) announces that a Phase 2 Water Management Framework recommendation for the lower Athabasca River has been completed and forwarded to provincial and federal regulators. The 4.6 million dollar study, researched over 3 years, included participation from Aboriginal groups, oil sands operators, environmental non-profit groups, as well as municipal, provincial and federal governments. The Phase 2 Framework Committee (P2FC) attempted to find an acceptable balance between social, environmental and economic interests regarding water withdrawals from the Athabasca River within the context of the oil sands development.

The key recommendations of the report are plans to manage oil sands mining water withdrawals; including a need to reduce industrial water withdrawals in low flow conditions, occurring during mid-winter, from the lower Athabasca River; and a need for water storage or other mitigation methods to provide water supply during periods when oil sands mining withdrawals are limited. Other key components of the Phase 2 Water Management Framework include:

- A reduction in allowable water withdrawals from the Athabasca River, by the oil sands mining operators, from a currently allowed 8 m³/s to a proposed 4.4 m³/s during low flow conditions.
- An increase in water storage by oil sands mining operators in order to meet the new rules of Phase 2.
- A recommendation that an Industry Water Management Agreement, currently prepared annually by industry, become a formal part of the Water Management Framework.

- Additional monitoring and research activities to support and confirm the recommendations in the Framework.
- A community engagement strategy on the Framework recommendations during 2010.

The Phase 2 Water Management Framework is scheduled to take effect on January 1st 2011. Progressive implementation will be required to accommodate the necessary regulatory processes and engineering/construction activities enabling oil sands mining operators to acquire the storage or other mitigation necessary to meet the requirements of the Phase 2 Framework. As a result, it is recommended that the most restrictive rules will not come into effect until January 1st 2016.

"I would like to thank all Members of the Phase 2 Framework Committee for their hard work and dedication to this very important 'process' of developing new recommendations for water withdrawal from the Athabasca River." stated Glen Semenchuk, CEMA Executive Director. "We hope that these detailed recommendations will assist in the future development of the Alberta Government's Lower Athabasca Regional Plan thus continuing CEMA's role in providing the regulators sound advice on protecting the environment in the region."

CEMA is a nonprofit association based in Fort McMurray, Alberta. CEMA's mandate is to study the cumulative environmental effects of industrial development in the region and produce recommendations guidelines and management frameworks. Since its inception CEMA has produced hundreds of reports and 10 Management Frameworks.

For more information please see the backgrounder, visit www.cemaonline.ca or contact:

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