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## **Lower Athabasca Plan: Significant Progress, but Wildlife Await Land Disturbance Plan Inside Oil Sands Area**

The Lower Athabasca regional plan for northeast Alberta released today is a significant step forward in managing cumulative development effects, but regrettably misses many important and promised pieces for wildlife.

Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) congratulates the Alberta government for establishing air and water management frameworks and significant new Wildland Parks outside the large Oil Sands Area. AWA looks forward to working with the Redford government towards completion of promised land management pieces inside the Oil Sands Area to address overwhelming multiple pressures on wildlife there.

“The Lower Athabasca regional plan is an important step forward from the status quo and we hope it is swiftly implemented,” says AWA conservation specialist Carolyn Campbell. “New Wildland Parks covering 13% at the far east and north of the region represent real progress in Alberta’s protected areas network, and we are pleased that industrial forestry has been removed from Dillon. However, the trade-offs chosen do not address intensive industrial impacts on the fragile boreal forest for wildlife within the Oil Sands Area. We are hopeful that the Redford government is moving to deliver these pieces.”

Despite clear public consultation feedback calling for a stronger environmental emphasis, the plan is significantly weaker than the government-appointed cross-sector Regional Advisory Council’s recommendations in these important areas:

- though a step forward from the status quo, the almost 20% range protection for threatened woodland caribou does not secure a future for this iconic species in the large Oil Sands Area – we hope this is only the first step and that more commitments will be made
- no promised wetland policy to avoid and minimize loss of boreal peat wetlands that are central to ecosystem functions and that will be very difficult to replace
- no promised biodiversity framework or land disturbance limits to fulfill Alberta’s international biodiversity commitments; without these, the mixed-use public lands zone (60% of the region) and a significant portion of the provincially-owned Air Weapons Range remains a sacrifice zone for unsustainable levels of boreal forest fragmentation.

We cannot treat the LARP as being near to fulfilling its intended role without these promised pieces. AWA looks forward to working with the Redford government to closing these important gaps in cumulative effects management of Alberta’s oil sands region.

**For more information:**

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