



Release Date: March 26, 2009

## **Suncor Should Protect Fort Hills' McClelland Wetland complex**

Alberta Wilderness Association and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Northern Alberta chapter are calling on the management and shareholders of Suncor and Petro-Canada to address a major environmental risk associated with the Fort Hills project, as part of their proposed merger.

"There's a tremendous opportunity for the new Suncor to demonstrate a responsible approach to one of the ecological treasures of the lower Athabasca region," says Carolyn Campbell, Conservation Specialist with Alberta Wilderness Association. "Setting aside this outstanding and unique watershed from surface mining would be a wonderful launch of the new Suncor and an enduring legacy for future generations," says Catherine Shier, CPAWS Northern Alberta Executive Director.

The ecologically rich and spectacular McClelland Lake Wetland Complex is threatened by the Fort Hills oilsands mining project. Once set aside for protection, the watershed was hastily re-classified in 2002 to allow surface mining in its upper half, including half of the delicate patterned fen. This decision occurred despite a lack of evidence both then and now that strip mining the upper half of a peatland watershed over a multi-decade mine's life is consistent with maintaining the ecological integrity of the fen and lake. "This reckless approach to our ecological gems belongs in our history pages. There's an unacceptably high risk of failure, with the McClelland wetlands as the victim," says Campbell.

McClelland Lake is the largest body of water between Fort McMurray and Lake Athabasca, and the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex comprises 12 different wetland types. It is home to many rare plants and more than 100 species of birds, and is believed to be a staging area for the endangered whooping crane. This world-class ecosystem is 90 km north of Fort McMurray.

Alberta Wilderness Association and CPAWS Northern Alberta are two of the oldest wilderness conservation organizations in Alberta.

For more information:

Carolyn Campbell, Alberta Wilderness Association: (403) 283-2025

Catherine Shier, CPAWS Northern Alberta: (780) 432-0967

