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Financial Meltdown Postpones McClelland Mining Project

Citing a need to reassess mining and extraction costs, Petro-Canada announced November 17, 2008 that it would postpone a decision to proceed with its Fort Hills tar sands mining project until well into 2009. It also advised that the earliest date for producing bitumen from its leases would likely be 2013. The Fort Hills project is 60 percent owned by Petro-Canada and 20 percent by each of UTS Energy and Teck-Cominco.

AWA is particularly concerned with this project as it will destroy the ecological treasure that is the McClelland Lake wetlands complex. Without presenting a proper Environmental Impact Assessment, Fort Hills project proponents received ERCB approval in 2002 to mine the upper half of the McClelland watershed by pledging that a company-led Sustainability Committee would devise a plan to sustain the lower half of the watershed. No evidence has been generated to date by this committee that the complex hydrology of the peatland fens and lake can be maintained while destroying the upper water flow sources to those wetlands.

The original Fort Hills oil sands lease terms required production to begin by 2011 (mining in the McClelland watershed was scheduled for the late 2020s). Petro-Canada has stated that it is already in discussions with the provincial government to renegotiate the lease schedule. This presents an opportune moment for AWA's new awareness campaign for the McClelland wetlands and the threats posed by the Fort Hills project. AWA supporters can help by letting your elected officials know that sacrificing the McClelland wetland complex to oil sands development is unacceptable.

– Carolyn Campbell

