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## **Slow Down Oil Sands to Save Wetlands, Scientist Says**

As development continues to destroy wetlands crucial to Alberta's water security and climate regulation, a new research paper by a University of Alberta ecologist, Dr. Lee Foote, concludes that the government should negotiate mineable oil sands development limits. The paper cites doubtful reclamation success for the extensive peat wetlands central to that landscape. The Alberta Wilderness Association and Water Matters call on Alberta's political party leaders to commit to meaningful wetland conservation measures including protection of boreal wetlands.

"As election day approaches, Alberta voters need to know their wetlands will be better managed in the future," says Carolyn Campbell, conservation specialist for Alberta Wilderness Association. "Will political parties commit to a science-based approach to protect wetlands essential to the ecosystems and people of Alberta?"

"Our understanding of wetlands in the oil sands region is poor, but we know wetlands add multiple values to Alberta's environment," says Julia Ko, Policy and Program Coordinator of Water Matters. "Wetlands purify, store, and recharge water into the environment, and they provide habitat for wildlife. Ultimately, Albertans have yet to see a strong provincial Wetlands Policy, and good recommendations already exist from the Alberta Water Council; the question is, who will use them?"

Alberta does not have a wetland policy for the boreal forest and Eastern Slopes public lands covering 2/3 of the province. In settled areas, innovative conservation tools are needed to strengthen a 'no net loss' wetland policy to reverse ongoing degradation.

The 2012 paper authored by Dr. Foote states that:

- wetland destruction from bitumen sands mining is far outpacing industry's reclamation ability;
- reclamation success will only possibly occur many centuries after company liabilities finish;
- environmental degradation from oilsands development is provoking mounting social backlash that risks producers' continued operations.

Foote's paper follows a mid-March paper published by Alberta scientists Rooney, Bayley and Schindler that emphasized that peatlands destroyed by tar sands will not be reclaimed. This represents a large unaccounted-for source of carbon emissions.

An Alberta Wetlands Fact Sheet is available [here](#).

For more information contact:

Carolyn Campbell – Alberta Wilderness Association – (403) 921-9519 (cell)

Julia Ko – Water Matters – (403) 538-7785

