

# Wilderness Watch

## Don't Mine McClelland

For those who are unaware, on April 17, 2023, AWA launched our Don't Mine McClelland campaign, with the aim of protecting the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC) from the expansion of Suncor's existing Fort Hills oil sands mine in 2025, which currently sits adjacent to the area.

The launch of our campaign was driven by the release of our newly published report *A Review of Suncor's McClelland Lake Wetland Complex Operational Plan for the Fort Hills Oil Sands Project*. This report summarizes an independent, expert review of Suncor's Operational Plan for the MLWC, and highlights several major concerns with Suncor's proposed mitigation plan for protecting the unmined half of the wetland complex from the impact of mining and related activities. To learn more about the report itself, please visit AWA's website, or you can read our summary of the report which was included in the previous Spring 2023 issue of the *Wild Lands Advocate*.

AWA submitted an advanced copy of this report to the Alberta Energy Regulator (AER) on March 21, 2023, requesting that the AER reconsider and revoke its approval of Suncor's Operational Plan pursuant to section 42 of the Responsible Energy Development Act (REDA). Under this legislation, AER may, in its sole discretion, reconsider its decision and may confirm, vary, suspend, or revoke the decision. The report was also forwarded to relevant ministers at both the provincial and federal levels of government including Pete Guthrie, Alberta minister of energy, Sonya Savage, the Alberta minister of environment and protected areas, Steven Guilbeault, federal minister of environment and climate change, as well as Jonathan Wilkinson, Canada's minister of natural resources.

After we published our report, we were pleased to see that the issue of Suncor's

mine expansion into the MLWC made it into headlines on prominent news media outlets across the country. Reporters like Bob Weber with the *Canadian Press*, (where the stories showed up in CBC, CTV, and *The Globe and Mail* to name a few), Robert Tuttle with BNN and Bloomberg, and Drew Anderson with *The Narwhal*, picked up the story.

Meantime, we received two responses from the regulator following the submission of our report. The first reply was received on April 12, 2023, stating that the AER had received and reviewed our report, but without acknowledging any of the concerns expressed within our report regarding Suncor's plan. This letter did state, however, that our request for reconsideration would be processed through the AER's reconsideration process. The second correspondence we received was on April 18, 2023, from the AER's regulatory appeals coordinator, which provided an outline of the AER's reconsideration process and how AWA should move forward with our submissions to this process. We were told in the letter that the reconsideration process has two phases. The first, the letter states, "is whether the AER should exercise its discretion to proceed to reconsider this authorization." If the AER does decide to reconsider its approval for Suncor's expansion, the letter says it would prompt the second phase of the process. That involves "submissions from each party on the authorization of the MLWC Operational Plan and whether it should be confirmed, varied, suspended or revoked."

After receiving this information from the AER, AWA engaged the services of our colleagues at EcoJustice to help refine our submission into the AER's reconsideration process, which was due to be submitted on May 9, 2023. EcoJustice helped us draft a strong letter that would accompany the resubmission of our report, to optimize our impact and influence as part of this process.

This letter states — in part — that new information in our report indicates that Suncor's Operational Plan does not satisfy the condition that it guarantees the protection of the unmined portion of the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex. This submission package was delivered to the AER by email on May 8, 2023, and is available on AWA's website for those interested in reading the submission in greater detail. We eagerly await the AER's feedback on our submission. AWA has also been busy sharing information about this issue across our newsletter and social media channels. We have set up a letter-writing form on our new Don't Mine McClelland webpage for concerned citizens to express their dissatisfaction or opinion to Laurie Pushor, AER's president and CEO. We have also released a short video clip on AWA's YouTube channel that talks about the ecological importance of the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex and the threats to its sustainability posed by Suncor's flawed Operational Plan. We greatly appreciate the huge amount of support we have received and continue to receive for our efforts to protect the important and stunning McClelland Lake Wetland Complex from being destroyed. Please stay tuned for more details as our efforts continue.

- By Phillip Meintzer