



Suncor oil sands mine expansion will add 60 square kilometers of new tailings in its lifetime, the same size as Manhattan

October 16, 2023

Edmonton, AB/Calgary, AB – New analysis reveals that Suncor’s Fort Hills oil sands mine expansion in northern Alberta will add 60 square kilometers of new tailings ponds on the landscape over the project’s lifetime – an area large enough to cover the island of Manhattan. It is estimated the mine will produce 732 million cubic metres of new tailings fluid over the same period.

The Fort Hills mine has faced pushback from environmental groups, as its expansion will result in the destruction of half of the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex (MLWC), a large wetland that is a refuge for a vast representation of plants and animals, including migratory birds and endangered woodland caribou.

All four major bird flyways in North America converge in Alberta’s boreal region and for many bird species, they must fly over 300 square kilometers of toxic tailings ponds to their breeding grounds in the nearby Wood Buffalo National Park. During their flight, migratory birds may be lured to land in tailings ponds, as they may look like safe bodies of water and anthropogenic light sources can further attract birds to the area, where they can die from exposure to contaminants.

This danger to biodiversity and wildlife will only be amplified with the expansion of the Fort Hills oil sands mine, destroying important habitat for migratory birds in the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex and adding 60 square kilometers of tailings over the rest of the mine’s lifetime.

This analysis comes at a time when the Suncor CEO, Rich Kruger, will appear in front of a Parliamentary Committee to answer questions from Members of Parliament about his recent statements that the company will be moving away from a long-term focus on the energy transition and instead focus on short-term financial opportunities in the oil sands. To this day, there are no proven technologies for tailings ponds reclamation and less than 1% of tailings area in the Alberta oil sands region holds a reclamation certification from the Alberta Energy Regulator.

“If this project moves forward, we will be forced to watch the destruction of a place that took 10,000 years to develop and only a few years to destroy,” says Gillian Chow-Fraser, with CPAWS Northern Alberta. “The company plans to destroy an ancient wetland and fill it with tailings ponds, not only losing important habitat and stored carbon but also replacing it with even more dangerous hazards to communities, wildlife and water.”

“Recent incidents, such as the leak and spill at Imperial’s Kearl mine, show that the tailings situation has reached a crisis point in Alberta,” says Phillip Meintzer, Conservation Specialist with Alberta Wilderness

Association. “New and expanded oil sands mines mean the destruction of more wildlife habitat, while also adding more tailings to the landscape. The risk of environmental catastrophe is already too great.”

The AER is currently in the process of reconsidering their approval decision for the Fort Hills expansion into the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex.

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Map:

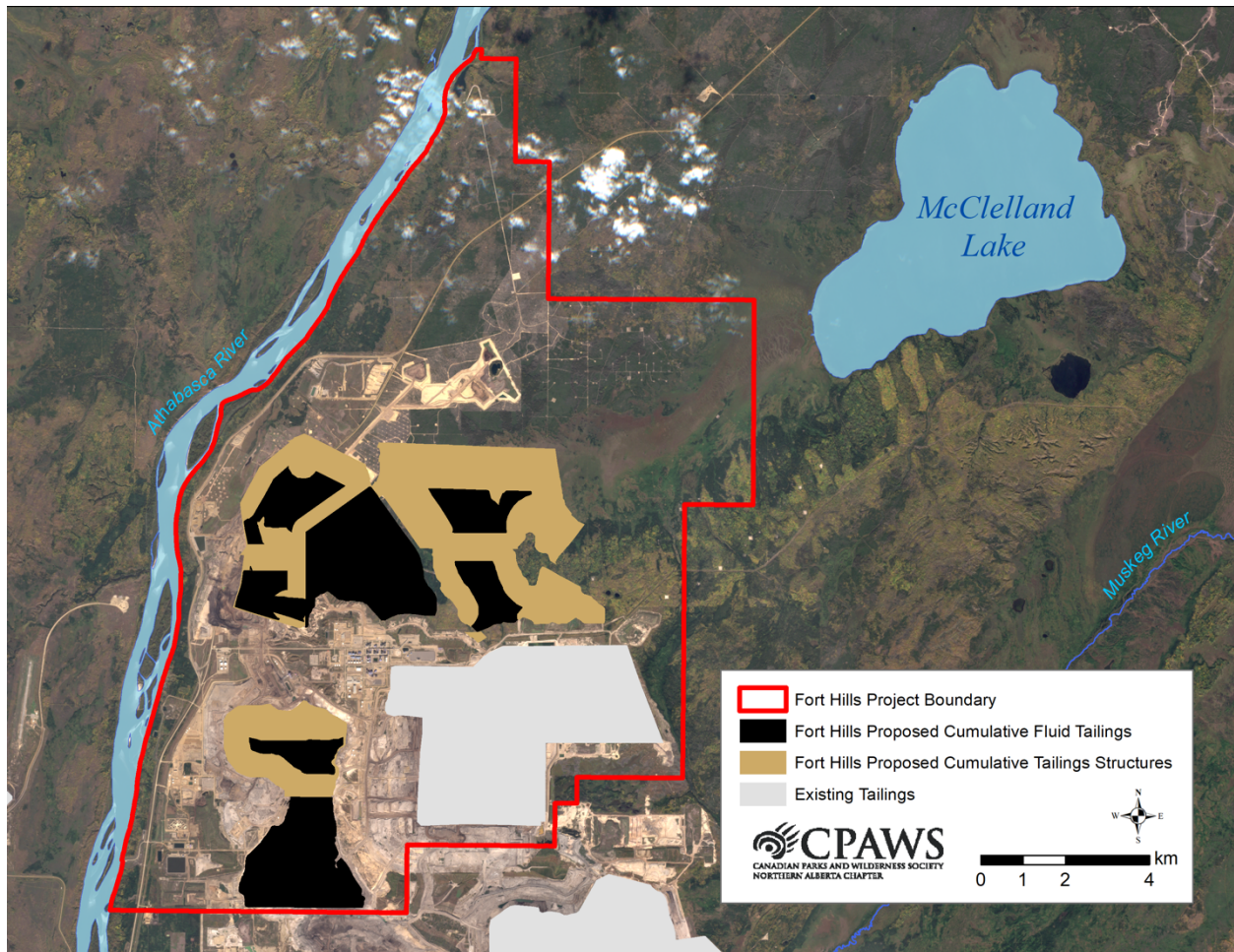


Figure 1: Total cumulative footprint of tailings ponds and associated structures, such as dams and berms, for the Fort Hills mine from 2025 to 2063, including the construction of the “North Pit” which will result in destruction of half of the McClelland Lake Wetland Complex.

Background information:

- The future tailings were mapped based on Suncor's Integrated Plan Amendment (IPA) Application (2022), obtained by Alberta Wilderness Association from Suncor via information request to the Alberta Energy Regulator. The tailings area value is a cumulative estimate of all tailings ponds that will exist from 2025 to 2063, though they may not all exist at the same time, as some will become reclaimed or moved elsewhere.
- Suncor's Integrated Plan Amendment (IPA) Application, submitted to the Alberta Energy Regulator on February 9, 2022, forecasts that the Fort Hills mine will produce approximately 732 million cubic metres of new fluid tailings between 2021 and mine closure.
- The expansion is for a third open pit mine for the Fort Hills project, which has been producing bitumen since 2017 at two other nearby mine sites. The third open pit mine will join with the existing "Centre Pit" mine, and combined will cover about 78 square kilometers.
- For more information on the impacts to McClelland Lake Wetland Complex and the AER review process, visit: <https://albertawilderness.ca/dontminemcclelland/>