



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Fort McKay First Nation cautiously optimistic that culturally significant Moose Lake Area will finally be protected**

**Fort McKay, Alberta (March 5, 2018)** – The Government of Alberta released the draft “Moose Lake 10km Management Zone Plan” for public consultation on Friday, February 16. Fort McKay First Nation hopes the final plan, which Alberta committed to develop in collaboration with Fort McKay, will protect its members’ Treaty rights, including traditional land uses and cultural practices. The release of the draft plan for public consultation is the latest step in Fort McKay’s nearly 20-year struggle to protect the Moose Lake area.

“Fort McKay is no stranger to collaboration to ensure responsible development in the Athabasca region. We are a recognized leader when it comes to working with the industry that surrounds us. We are working just hard with the Government of Alberta to finalize this important management plan.”

– Chief Jim Boucher

The Fort McKay First Nation has sought protection of the historically important Moose Lake area since 2001 against the encroachment of oil sands development and corresponding impacts on its members’ ability to meaningfully exercise their Treaty rights. Fort McKay’s largest reserves, 174A and 174B, are located at the heart of the Moose Lake area, the last remaining expanse of relatively unspoiled wilderness in the Athabasca oil sands region accessible from the hamlet of Fort McKay. The Moose Lake area is of enormous and growing historical and cultural significance to the community, and to other Indigenous people in the Wood Buffalo region, especially as Fort McKay itself is encircled by heavy industrial development and subject to the cumulative impacts of that development.

In January 2016, Chief Jim Boucher and Alberta Environment and Parks Minister Shannon Phillips signed a “renewed collaboration” letter that committed the Province to share the lead in the planning process that has resulted in the draft plan. Extensive industry consultation in the spring and summer of 2016 contributed to the jointly developed draft recommendations to manage development in the Moose Lake area.

“Fort McKay has so far been pleased with the collaborative planning process that designated co-leads from both Fort McKay and Alberta. The co-leads worked diligently to engage industry and Indigenous groups to develop recommendations for enhanced protection measures.”

– Chief Jim Boucher

The Moose Lake area’s paramount importance to Fort McKay will be shared with Albertans through a television commercial to be shown during local and national new broadcasts on CTV in Calgary and Edmonton from March 5 to April 1, as well as on APTN until March 25. Interested Albertans may also view a short film on the subject by visiting Fort McKay’s website at <http://fortmckay.com/moose-lake/>.

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“Fort McKay has worked to protect its reserve lands and the surrounding Moose Lake area for nearly two decades. Successive provincial and federal governments have acknowledged their importance, and the importance of respecting the Treaty relationship while developing Alberta’s energy future. We are confident this view is shared by the Notley government and so we look forward to the next steps in the planning process. We anticipate that a final plan with comprehensive protection measures endorsed by Fort McKay will be forthcoming shortly.”

– Chief Jim Boucher

The Moose Lake reserves were initially granted to Fort McKay in 1915 during the implementation of Treaty 8; they were expanded in 2006 when the Indian Claims Commission agreed Fort McKay was entitled to additional reserve lands in the settlement of its Treaty Land Entitlement claim with the Government of Canada and Province of Alberta. Moose Lake and its neighbour Buffalo Lake are known outside Indigenous communities as Namur Lake and Gardiner Lake. Fort McKay First Nation members and other Indigenous peoples have pursued traditional land uses and cultural practices in the Moose Lake area since long before European settlement.

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**Media inquiries to be directed to:**

Jauvonne Kitto  
Executive Director  
Fort McKay First Nation  
Cell: (403) 710-4479  
E-mail: [jkitto@fortmckay.com](mailto:jkitto@fortmckay.com)

The Government of Alberta has posted the draft “Moose Lake 10km Management Zone Plan” on its website at: <https://talkaep.alberta.ca/draft-moose-lake-10-km-management-zone-plan>.