

Alberta Métis and the Trans Mountain Expansion Pipeline



LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Citizens of the Métis Nation of Alberta,

I want to take this opportunity to close the loop on the Métis Traditional Land Use portion of the Trans Mountain Expansion (TMX) in west central Alberta and explain the Métis Nation of Alberta's (MNA) interest in the pipeline. From the original Trans Mountain Pipeline project to its current expansion, Métis people have been part of the pipeline journey.



In the beginning, we were there using the land to meet our needs for shelter, food, and economy. Eventually, Métis people began filling the jobs needed to make the project a success, and to present day, where we are being consulted on the project's impacts where we now have the opportunity to negotiate arrangements to protect our Métis culture and traditional ways of life. Métis people have a long history in many areas along the pipeline, and we know the area attracts use from all ends of the province. As you read through this booklet you will see how the Métis have contributed to Alberta's prosperity via the energy sector.

Consultation with the MNA on the TMX is a testament to the Government of Canada's (GoC) commitment to renew its relationship with our country's Indigenous peoples. While implementation of the Consultation Agreement between the MNA and GoC is ongoing, the process has come a long way, and, we are pleased to be part of it. As it states in the agreement, the GoC is committed to working on a nation-to-nation basis with the MNA through bilateral, government-to-government negotiations to renew relationships through cooperation and respect for Métis rights.

The following pages are an overview of our history and involvement in the pipeline.

Warm regards,

Audrey Poitras

President of the Métis Nation of Alberta

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Long before the Trans Mountain pipeline was a glimmer in the minds of Albertans, and even before Alberta existed as a province, Métis people had settled the west. Through a combination of family ties, scrip allocation, and westward migration with the bison, the Métis established themselves in Alberta in the early 1800s.

The Métis not only settled, but also harvested throughout Alberta from the North to the South, using traditional Métis hunting and gathering practices. This included towns and areas around what is now the Yellowhead highway, from Edmonton to just west of Hinton. Communities such as Marlboro, Edmonton, St. Albert, Edson, Hinton, Lac Ste. Anne, and many more were part of this settlement.

When the Trans Mountain pipeline was built in 1952-53, it ran along these areas. Unfortunately, at this time consultation with Indigenous communities did not exist, and as history has shown the Métis were often forgotten and overlooked.

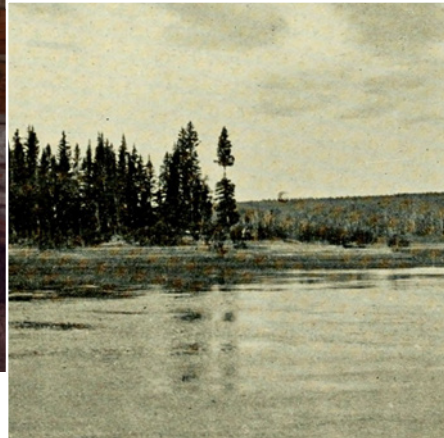


Métis on the Land

While construction and operation of the pipeline continued for the next 50 years, the Métis continued practicing their traditional ways of hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering plants for food, medicine, and art.

Under the *Métis Population Betterment Act* of 1938, Marlboro had been established as a Métis Settlement, and was located right along the aforementioned Yellowhead highway area. While it is no longer legislated as one of the Métis Settlements, it continues as a strong Métis community with a lot of Métis history.

Because the Métis settled in this area, we can see the continued use in several standing structures, such as burial sites, and hunting cabins. Another testament to this history can be found in traditional Lobstick markings, where a section of tree branches is removed near the middle or lower portion of the tree to act as a marker for important places for navigation.





Métis Practices with Plants

Historically, the Métis were a mobile people, but would always revisit mountainous regions to maintain their way of life. To this day, Métis from all over Alberta still visit this region to harvest plants of medicinal and spiritual significance.

Passing down traditional knowledge, such as the importance of the land and sustainable harvesting practices to younger generations is essential to Métis cultural survival. From the original pipeline in 1953 to the current proposed pipeline, harvesting has become more difficult due to clear cutting and increased industry development compromising the area's plant and animal life.



Other Related Métis Cultural Practices

The Métis are known as the flower beadwork people, and their style of beadwork often represents the native flowers and plants of their homeland. Métis visual arts and crafts were directly sourced from these plants, but also from animals. This includes using porcupine quills, fish scales, and animal hides to decorate clothing and other articles with colourful designs.

With strong connections to all life, the Métis have found a balance between conservation and ingenuity by using everything provided by their land to sustain themselves.





A New Economy in Métis Society – Oil and Gas

From the fur trade era to oil and gas industrial development in 1940s, the Alberta Métis entrepreneurial spirit has endured and thrived. As new jobs were created, the Métis filled these positions, and while some continued on with their traditional ways of life, for various reasons some could not. Many sacrifices to the Métis way of life were made to survive in a new economy, and these need to be addressed through the current TMX consultation protocols.



Expansion Announced – Consultation Begins

With the announcement of the TMX project by Kinder Morgan Canada in 2012, the extent and quality of consultation has improved, however, it still continues to be a work in progress. In Alberta, Kinder Morgan reached out to Indigenous Nations, including the Métis Nation, to consult on the project and discuss the project's impacts on Indigenous peoples.

In June 2019, Traditional Land Use Studies (TLUS) were conducted and included Métis Knowledge Holders and MNA technical staff who visited specific areas to identify affected plant and animal species. The MNA also held seven engagement sessions from May 15 to June 3, 2019 throughout the province to receive feedback on the impacts of the project. Over 170 MNA citizens participated in the engagement sessions and the TLUS process.

There were many potential and unavoidable impacts identified through these consultations. The MNA sought to strike a balance between the project moving forward, and creating jobs for Métis people, but without sacrificing the health of the environment and traditional Métis practices.





Impacts from the Project

Impacts from the TMX expansion that Métis people have identified are:

- Long term, cumulative effects to the environment from the original 1950s project
- The disruption and damage to plants and animals that the current construction will cause
- Potential risks of spills and leakage
- Land
 - Plants
 - Animals
- Water
 - Fish
 - Plant life
- Way of life

The information on the next three pages details some of these impacts.



Impacts – The Land

There are many important varieties of fungi, berries, trees, roots, and other plants that won't grow back once destroyed. In some cases, attempts to regrow the same diversity of plants in the area can be successful, but if not, the route of the pipeline must be relocated.

Further, dirty construction equipment can bring disease and invasive species, which can hurt plants naturally growing in the region.

In efforts to replant the area to its original state, industry develops seed mixes; however, these can prove ineffective because the species is sensitive and cannot grow from the seeds or they weren't included in the mix. In turn, these food sources for animals become scarce, ultimately affecting Métis traditional ways of life.





Impacts – Water/Fish

Damage to waterways or wetlands is irreparable. This damage includes visible and underground water flows, big rivers, and small streams. These are rippling effects impacting all fish, plants, and people relying on these waterways. Drilling and construction in the area cannot compromise the health and safety of these systems for both Métis and non-Métis peoples.





Impacts – Way of Life

As detailed throughout this impacts section, the Métis have a strong connection to their land, plants, and animals. Because of this connection, changes to the land have, and will continue to deeply affect Métis traditional ways of life, including all forms of Métis harvesting. These ongoing changes and impacts are a major concern to Métis people in Alberta, and through consultation efforts they will need to be addressed.



Ongoing Negotiations – The Future Ahead



Developing appropriate consultation practices has taken several years and still needs to be ironed out. The MNA isn't content with satisfactory consultation with Métis Knowledge Holders and its citizens; therefore it seeks meaningful and outstanding forms of mitigation and accommodation addressing all impacts of the expansion.

As we move forward into the future, the MNA will continue to represent the needs and priorities of the Métis in Alberta, and all future generations to come.



From the words of Louis Riel himself: “We must cherish our inheritance. We must preserve our nationality for the youth of our future. The story should be written down to pass on.” (Riel, c.1885)

It is important to protect Métis culture, and the story of TMX is another chapter in history, asserting the Métis right to be consulted.

CLOSING REMARKS

Tansi,

With the recent approval of the Trans Mountain expansion, it is important to reflect on its early beginnings and where we are today as Métis people. Growing up, it was very important to many Métis parents to pass on traditional ways of life, and this importance stands true for our Métis families to this day, along with mine.

Expansion of the pipeline is essential for Canada and many Albertans, including our Métis community; however, we must remain true to who we are as a people. For me, this means maintaining those traditions that showcase our individuality as a distinct people, but also honouring our culture, language, and ancestors. Living off the land, harvesting plants and animals, and honouring our Elders must remain at the forefront of all consultation, and only then will we have true partnership with all who share in our homeland.

Looking forward,



Dan Cardinal

Vice President of the Métis Nation of Alberta



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