

# Media release

## Treaty Rights Impacted Downstream of Tar Sands Chiefs Call on Governments to Protect Athabasca River

December 9, 2010 - Edmonton Alberta

Contaminants and low water levels in the Athabasca River system are impacting treaty rights, finds a new report released today in Edmonton.

The peer reviewed study was conducted with the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and the Mikisew Cree First Nation. It examined traditional land and water use, and the impact of contaminants and low water levels in the lower Athabasca River system.

Chief Roxanne Marcel of the Mikisew Cree First Nation said *"This study confirms what our elders and Chiefs have been telling government for years – that our treaty rights are being impacted by the quality and quantity of the water. When water levels are down, we can no longer access our Traditional Lands by boat, which limits our fishing, trapping and hunting. Our members have been stranded. We no longer drink the water. We see our rights along with our River deteriorating before us."*

Treaty 8 was signed on July 13, 1899, protecting hunting, fishing and trapping rights. These rights are guaranteed by Canada's Constitution, and affirmed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

Chief Allan Adam of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation said *"This study is the kind of research we have repeatedly asked the government to do, and is the type of information needed to properly assess the impacts of development on Treaty Rights. It provides an opportunity for meaningful dialogue between our First Nations and the Governments of Alberta and Canada. If the Governments are to fulfill their Treaty obligations with us, the information and recommendations in this study must be considered in plans for water withdrawals from the Athabasca River."*

Dr. David Schindler, award winning water scientist, and a peer reviewer of the study says *"This is an important report. The way in which the treaty was obtained and is now being ignored by our political leaders must rank as one of the darkest chapters in Canadian History."*

In publishing this report, the Mikisew Cree First Nation and Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation are also issuing an invitation to the Premier and federal and provincial Ministers to deal seriously with water quality and quantity issues downstream of the tar sands, something that even the federal Auditors General says they aren't doing. The Chiefs said *"We are inviting them to visit Fort Chipewyan early in 2011, to hear directly from our communities, to work with us to deal with the quality and quantity of water in the Athabasca River, and to address impacts to Treaty 8."*

The report maps how Treaty rights have been adversely affected by low flow, and by fear of contaminants in the river. It provides recommendations, and suggests rights-based thresholds to guide tar sands-related water withdrawals. Dr. Craig Candler, principle author and president of Firelight Research Group, says *"This study is a great example of First Nations working together to commission quality community-based research. The results and the recommendations are clear. The communities have been saying these things for years. This report just brings what the community already knows together with credible social science."*

Copies of the Report and the Executive Summary are at [www.parklandinstitute.ca](http://www.parklandinstitute.ca) and [www.thefirelightgroup.com](http://www.thefirelightgroup.com).

For interviews, contact:

- Chief Allan Adam, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation 780-713-1220
- Chief Roxanne Marcel, Mikisew Cree First Nation 780-881-7099
- Dr. Craig Candler, Firelight Group 250-220-2064
- Dr. David Schindler, water scientist 780-325-3770

