



Commission Partnering with First Nations on Restoration Projects

The BC Oil and Gas Commission (Commission) is partnering with First Nations from northeast B.C. to restore former oil and gas industry sites to their natural state.

Utilizing funding from the B.C. Oil and Gas Research and Innovation Society (OGRIS), the Commission is working with the Fort Nelson First Nation (FNFN) to restore borrow pits in the Clarke Lake area and other former industry sites, using ecologically suitable and culturally appropriate restoration techniques.

The project working group initiated field sampling and site specific prescriptions during the summer of 2018. Earth work followed in the early fall, completed by the FNFN's contractor and employees. Native plant seeds collected during the early fall have been provided to a local nursery in preparation for spring planting.

"This opportunity is an example of First Nation's people taking our environmental responsibilities to the next level. These projects will provide our people with employment and with the state of the local economy the partnership is very uplifting and we hope this partnership can be used as an example and create other opportunities to collaborate with the Commission going forward," said FNFN Chief Curtis Dickie.

"Our government is dedicated to reconciliation, and we are working with First Nations to build a better future," said Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources Michelle Mungall. "With this initiative, we are partnering with the Fort Nelson First Nation to make sure to protect the environment and restore oil and gas sites."

The Commission is also working with other Treaty 8 First Nations to launch pilot projects, funded through OGRIS and the Orphan Site Reclamation Fund, to jointly explore restoration practices on orphan oil and gas well sites in their territories. To date, discussions have been held with FNFN, Saulteau First Nations and Doig River First Nation (DRFN) to begin restoration work during the next year, with dialogues planned with other First Nations during the same time period.

"Doig River has experienced a lot of activity in its territory over the last 40 years and we would like to be part of the solution to reclaim and restore the land. This is important to our community so we can exercise our treaty rights on a landscape that is healthy and back to its natural state. We would like to work with the Commission to expedite reclamation and restoration activities on non-producing sites so the land and water is healthy for the wildlife population," said DRFN Chief Trevor Makadahay.

"Together these projects will create meaningful community engagement opportunities between the Commission, First Nations and other potential project partners. The projects will also increase understanding of the policies, procedures, and success levels of current and proposed restoration practices, and promote First Nations participation and use of traditional knowledge in areas of restoration," said Paul Jeakins, the Commission's CEO and Commissioner.

Oil and gas infrastructure are considered temporary land uses and when no longer utilized need to be dismantled, removed from the site and the land restored by the company. In some cases when the operator is insolvent or cannot be located, the facility may be designated as an orphan site.

Updates to the [Oil and Gas Activities Act](#), through the passing of Bill 15 last spring, have allowed the Commission to improve the funding model and provide new tools to complete the restoration of orphan sites in a timely manner, while ensuring no direct costs to taxpayers.

Additionally, the Commission collaborated with four post-secondary institutions during the spring and summer of 2018 to provide scholarships and [training programs](#) for Indigenous students, including two intensive training courses through the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) – the Environmental Monitoring Program and Land Reclamation Certificate. Some of the Indigenous students who took the UNBC courses will be employed on the FNFN borrow pit project, when planting gets underway in the spring. The Commission continues to engage First Nations, industry and educational institutions regarding future potential training opportunities.

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