Syncrude has an application into the Alberta Energy Regulator for the Mildred Lake Extension Project (MLX).

MLX is a continuation of Syncrude’s existing North Mine site and will provide a replacement supply of bitumen for upgrading when oil sand deposits are depleted in the North Mine, around 2023. As a sustainment project, there will be no increase to production levels. The project will use existing Extraction and Upgrading facilities, that means no new infrastructure or tailings ponds. There will also be no increase to our water withdrawal license.

MLX consists of two mine sites – MLX West, located northwest of the current North Mine and west of the MacKay River; and MLX East, located between the Mildred Lake Settling Basin and the Athabasca River.

The primary construction involves a bridge across the MacKay River to allow heavy haulers to move oil sand to Syncrude’s existing facilities, making MLX unique in terms of new mining projects. If approval is granted, activities are scheduled to begin in 2018.

Over the last few years, Syncrude has been working with local stakeholders specifically five First Nations along with several Métis Locals to ensure our neighbours are well-informed on the project and have the opportunity to voice their site-specific concerns.

Engaging with local Indigenous people has provided Syncrude with a unique perspective on traditional land use within the region and identified matters that our neighbours are concerned about specifically environmental issues like air quality, water and the impact on local wildlife.
“There has been a lot of worthy dialogue about the project and information sharing over the course of the last few years,” says Colleen Ledgon, Manager of Community Relations. “We have provided open houses and have toured community members into the MLX mine area to get their input.”

Several communities have also completed Traditional Land Use studies on the MLX project area. Syncrude believes these studies will ensure we have an all-encompassing perspective.

The MLX project is in the application review stage with the Alberta Energy Regulator. The submission included an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Pending approval, pre-production activities for MLX-West would begin in late 2018 with first ore following in 2023.

Reclamation Engagement Focus Group

Aligning with Syncrude’s commitment to responsible oil sands development and meeting regulatory requirements, all disturbed land will be reclaimed. Local stakeholders are concerned about reclamation and as a result, Syncrude has created a Reclamation Engagement Focus Group. This group will look at reclamation processes and procedures Syncrude currently uses and how they can incorporate traditional knowledge. Several Nations and Métis Locals within the region have been asked to participate.

“This is a collaborative effort,” says Legdon. “We want to ensure Indigenous people in the region have a voice in returning the land to its previous form.”
Syncrude welcomed 12 local Aboriginal businesses to the Visitor Centre in Frank Spragins Centre on October 10, 2017 for a services and goods showcase.

“It was an opportunity for Aboriginal owned businesses to promote their offerings, share their joint venture partnerships and celebrate their success,” says Doug Webb, Syncrude’s Aboriginal Business Liaison. “It is important to inform Syncrude that not only are these companies cost effective and competitive, but that they are local and understand industry needs.”

Syncrude is committed to providing Aboriginal companies the opportunities for supplying goods and services to our operation. As of 2015, Syncrude has spent over $2.4 billion with Aboriginal companies.

“Pictured above is Tyrone Brass, a former Syncrude employee, who now owns and manages Bayzik Oilsand Services Inc.,” adds Webb. “Tyrone and his team identified a need for services and secured a successful business partnership with Syncrude several years ago that remains strong today.”

The companies represented a wide variety of services, from labor suppliers to printing and promotion, engineering services, civil contracting, building maintenance, security, fuel handling, environmental services, welding and fabricating, equipment operators, electrical services, crane and heavy haul services, equipment rentals, and vacuum Services.

The show had over 70 Syncrude employees and contractors that learned about the value and services offered by local Aboriginal business. Based on the success of this Showcase another date will be scheduled in the new year.
Each year Syncrude welcomes hundreds of visitors on to our site to learn about the oil sands and our reclamation activities.

In 2014, Syncrude held a naming and recognition ceremony with local stakeholders to celebrate the “New Beginnings” Reclamation site. Four years, almost to the date, stakeholders including Elders and youth from local Aboriginal communities, were brought back to the area to witness the progress.

The “New Beginnings” (“Oski Sechi Kewani” in Cree and “Ne Degóth Honitheí” in Dene) area has had 730 of its 1,245 hectares already reclaimed since 2005. Since 2009, bio-engineering has been used, rather than traditional reclamation methods, making it the largest area of its kind in the oil sands region. This project is a testament to the efforts of Syncrude’s reclamation teams to return the land we borrow back to nature.

In September 55 community members from Mikisew Cree First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Fort Chipewyan Métis Local #125, Fort McMurray Métis Local #63, Chipewyan Prairie Dene First Nation and Fort McMurray Métis Local #1935 visited Mildred Lake for their Annual Stakeholder Tour.

“The tour is a way to engage with our neighbours and exchange information about Syncrude’s progress on reclamation,” says Lisa Nelson, Stakeholder Relations Coordinator. “Community members are interested to see first-hand the growth and development in these types of areas. It also gives them an opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback and bring information back to their communities.”

The groups visited the Beaver Creek Wood Bison Ranch and received a reclamation overview of Sandhill Fen, Base Mine Lake and South Bison Hills from the Wood Bison Viewpoint.

In total over 4,500 hectares of land have been reclaimed or is ready for re-vegetation at Syncrude. This important work would not be possible without the support of Aboriginal Elders and community members who provide input at meetings and tours such as this.
Industry Open House
Community Relations team member Lisa Nelson attended the Fort McMurray First Nation #468 Industry Open House in September. Sharing information and engaging with local community members is key to relationship building.

Fort McKay Treaty Days
Syncrude’s Community Relations team had a fun time walking in the Fort McKay Treaty Day ‘80s themed parade in late June. Pictured are Jamie Sullivan, Doug Webb and Lisa Nelson who won first prize for “Best Use of Theme”.

Pathways Launch
Syncrude unveiled the 2017 edition of Pathways magazine on Nov. 2, 2017 at MacDonald Island Park. The publication launch was celebrated by more than 150 local community members.

Each year, Pathways highlights and recognizes success stories and role models from Indigenous communities across Canada. From young entrepreneurs to local war veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice to our country, the magazine provides their stories and perspectives. Interested in reading Pathways, please visit: www.syncrude.ca or connect with a member of the Community Relations Team to receive a hardcopy.

ACFN and MCFN Annual Cultural Retreats
Syncrude employees participated in both the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nations’ Annual Cultural Retreats this past summer.

Learning about local First Nations culture and traditional ways of life is important for our employees.
Even before she started working at Syncrude, Lori Cyprien appreciated the organization’s commitment to Aboriginal employment.

“I received scholarships from Syncrude and they helped me grow from a summer student in 2002 to a front-line leader and environmental scientist,” says Lori, who holds a master’s degree from Royal Roads University after completing her undergraduate degree at Thompson Rivers University and a diploma from NAIT.

The member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation is one of 475 self-declared Aboriginal employees working at Syncrude. Ten per cent of the organization’s permanent workforce is now Aboriginal, which Greg Fuhr, Syncrude’s Vice President, Production – Mining & Extraction, sees as an important milestone.

“One of Syncrude’s founding principles is local Aboriginal people should share in the opportunities created by oil sands development,” Greg says. “Seeing the growth of Aboriginal representation in our workforce shows we’re on the right track when it comes to meeting our commitment to employing First Nations, Métis and other Aboriginal people.”

Aboriginal employees have represented between 8.1 and 9.4 per cent of Syncrude’s total permanent workforce since 2003. The numbers have steadily risen since 2014 thanks to a low attrition rate among Aboriginal employees as well as an strong recruitment program. In 2017, 16.4 per cent of Syncrude’s new hires are Aboriginal. “We are hiring them because they are excellent candidates.” says Greg. “It’s not just the right thing to do, it’s been a smart thing to do and has helped us succeed.”

Ken Bell, a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta and Syncrude’s production manager for Tailings and Lease Development, agrees. Ken also oversees Syncrude’s BET team, which focuses on keeping birds and wildlife away from Syncrude’s operation. He sees this as an example of how both the company can benefit from Aboriginal employees.

“This is a seasonal rotational program that provides meaningful, sustainable employment while allowing people to practice traditional lifestyles, such as trapping, in the winter,” says Ken, a member of Syncrude’s Aboriginal Steering Committee. “We benefit from having that knowledge.”

Syncrude, in turn, ensures that knowledge is shared with its workforce. This includes mandatory awareness training for all its leadership, of whom 7.3 per cent are self-declared Aboriginal.

“People take pride in their past and their traditions. Having leadership aware of the culture of different First Nations and Aboriginal groups is very important,” says Lori. “It makes employees’ lives a little easier, knowing their leader has that background and an understanding of our culture.”
MEET SYNCRUDE’S COMMUNITY RELATIONS TEAM

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Syncrude is a proud supporter of the STEAM Horizon Awards. For more information on the available Aboriginal scholarships visit: www.steamhorizonawards.ca
As the season changes to winter we’re thankful for the many blessings that have come to us during the year. Soon the lights and decorations will be on display to signal the Christmas Holiday.

Syncrude will be offering its annual community holiday celebrations in the coming days, and I personally extend an invitation to you and your family to join us. We will have Santa on site for the little ones and each household will receive a turkey.

The Syncrude Executive Leadership Team joins me in extending our very best wishes to you and your family for a safe and enjoyable season and a happy, secure and prosperous New Year.

Warmest wishes,

Mark Ward
Syncrude Canada Ltd.
CEO

Below you will find our list of dates and time:

Fort McKay First Nation and Fort McKay Métis
Wednesday, November 15
Fort McKay, Band Hall
5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Chipewyan Prairie Dene First Nation, Conklin Métis, Anzac, Willow Lake Métis, Fort McMurray Métis, ATC, Aboriginal families residing in Fort McMurray
Saturday, November 18
Syncrude Sport and Wellness
11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Busing will be provided, check with your local office about pick up times.

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Fort Chipewyan Métis Local #125
Tuesday, November 28
Fort Chipewyan, Mamawi Hall