



NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

ALBERTA CHIEFS AND THE IRC CALL ON FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO FULFILL ITS ENVIRONMENTAL OBLIGATIONS AND COMMITMENTS BY RELEASING FUNDING TO FIRST NATIONS

Government of Canada seeking to return \$135 million in previously committed funding to federal coffers to use as savings, instead of empowering First Nations to clean up inactive and orphan wells on their lands.

ENOCH CREE NATION, AB, March 11, 2024

Chief Cody Thomas, Enoch Cree Nation, Chief Roy Whitney, Tsuut'ina Nation, and Chief Ivan Sawan, Loon River First Nation, joined with Chiefs from across Alberta today to call on the Federal Government to release unspent funding committed to the Site Rehabilitation Program (SRP) – approximately \$135 million – to be utilized by Indigenous people to reclaim additional inactive and orphan wells on their lands. These funds are still in Alberta, but Ottawa is demanding them back.

On December 12, 2023, Chiefs from Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 territories wrote to Minister Jonathan Wilkinson appealing to the federal government to allow the government of Alberta to place unspent SRP monies into the FNSR Program, providing much needed funding to continue the successful work that has been accomplished by First Nations, for First Nations. Without these funds, governments and industry would be leaving over 2,000 sites to be abandoned or reclaimed on First Nations lands and territories.

Chief Thomas stated: “We still have many inactive wells on our lands that need to be reclaimed properly; we estimate nearly 2,000 sites which will cost over \$225 million. We acknowledge the work that has been done under the SRP but there is more to be done. This is a liability of the lessees, and the Alberta Government is holding them accountable through the Well Closure Program. However, time is not on our side. We have a very limited land base and a growing population. We must do the necessary land stewardship immediately”.

Chief Ivan Sawan stated: “Many Alberta First Nations have felt the greatest impacts of natural resource developments which have swept through our lands and ancestral territories for generations, leaving behind environmental wreckage, while being deprived of the opportunity to meaningfully participate or benefit. We are calling on the federal government to do the right thing and release these funds for the environmental and economic purposes they were intended, so that First Nations can create meaningful job opportunities, clean up our lands, and create a healthier and more prosperous future for our people.”

Chief Roy Whitney stated: “Too many oil and gas companies have simply walked away from their obligation to remediate their well sites on First Nation Lands. The SRP was a way for First Nations to have abandoned sites reclaimed. Accordingly, it was with great disappointment when we learned that the Federal Government was not going to release the remaining funds for the SRP. We fully support the request for the remaining funds being held to be released to continue the work to clean up our Lands.”

Under the previous Alberta Site Rehabilitation Program (ASRP) \$130 million was allocated to 32 Alberta First Nations and Metis communities to clean up 2,145 sites. First Nations were able to abandon 988 wells and 411 km of pipelines as well as complete 793 reclamations while working on 4,188 projects. The result was a reduction of over \$123 million in liability on reserves in Alberta while creating jobs, business development and training, and improving Indigenous community engagement and capacity.

The Indian Resource Council, an advocacy group that negotiated the set aside funding for First Nations, has detailed data on inactive and orphan wells on Indigenous lands. Stephen Buffalo, President and CEO of the IRC stated that the Federal regulator, IOGC, dropped the ball by failing to hold companies liable for their liabilities. He stated that First Nations can no longer depend on IOGC to get this work done.

Mr. Buffalo added: “Under Alberta's SRP program, the government allocated more than \$130 million for cleanup projects for First Nations and the Metis. So, we are doing what we can to keep that program going to maintain the success of the initial FNSRP. About 350 community members received jobs and skills training. By removing the aging wells and pipelines we can free up land to use for housing and other purposes” This is why we need the surplus funds.

When SRP funding was earmarked to support Indigenous-led projects in 2021, it was celebrated that this was an area where the federal and provincial governments were in “perfect alignment”. This spirit of collaboration was good news for the environment, for Canada’s fight against climate change, and for First Nations. Alberta Chiefs are continuing to call on the federal government to rekindle this spirit of collaboration, however, Minister Wilkinson has recently stated that the federal government has “no plans to provide additional funding for the clean-up of inactive and orphan wells.”

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