



Backgrounder

Albertans' Perceptions of Oil Sands Development Poll

Part 2: Environmental Issues

The Pembina Institute commissioned Probe Research Inc., a professional research and survey organization based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to conduct a study among Alberta adults. The purpose of the study was to gauge public attitudes towards the environmental and economic impacts of oil sands development in Alberta and to identify the roles and responsibilities of the public and private sectors involved in oil sands development.

Survey data were collected using a state-of-the-art Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system, and data analysis was conducted using SPSS 11. Random digit dialing was also employed to ensure that all Alberta adults would have an equal opportunity to participate in the survey. The survey instrument was designed by Probe Research Inc. in close consultation with the Pembina Institute.

The study was conducted via telephone interviews between April 7 and 13, 2006 among a random and representative sampling of 500 adults from across the province of Alberta. With a sample of 500, one can say with 95 percent certainty that the results are within plus or minus 4.4 percentage points of what they would have been if all qualifying Albertans had been interviewed. The margin of error is higher for each of the survey's population sub-groups.

On May 23, Pembina Institute released Part 1 of the survey, which focused on Albertans' opinions of economic issues concerning oil sands development. This backgrounder describes Albertans' opinions on environmental issues concerning oil sands development.

For a full copy of the Pembina Oil Sands Survey report, data tables and questionnaire contact Simon Dyer, simond@pembina.org.

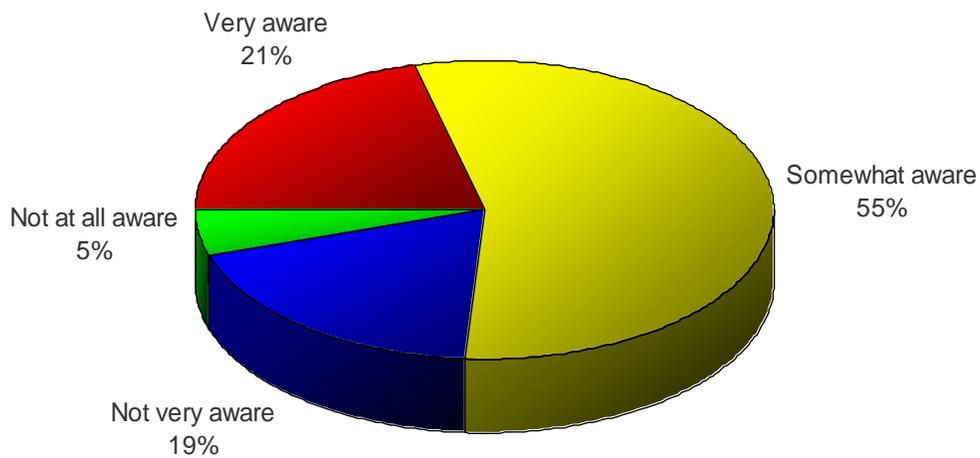
Question 1: Awareness of the oil sands

A majority of Albertans are aware of Alberta's oil sands and issues concerning their development.

Probe Research Inc. Statement:

"I'd like to begin by asking which of the following best describes the extent to which you are aware of the economic, social and environmental issues regarding the development of Alberta's oil sands. Are you . . . ?" (n=500)

Probe Research Inc. Results:



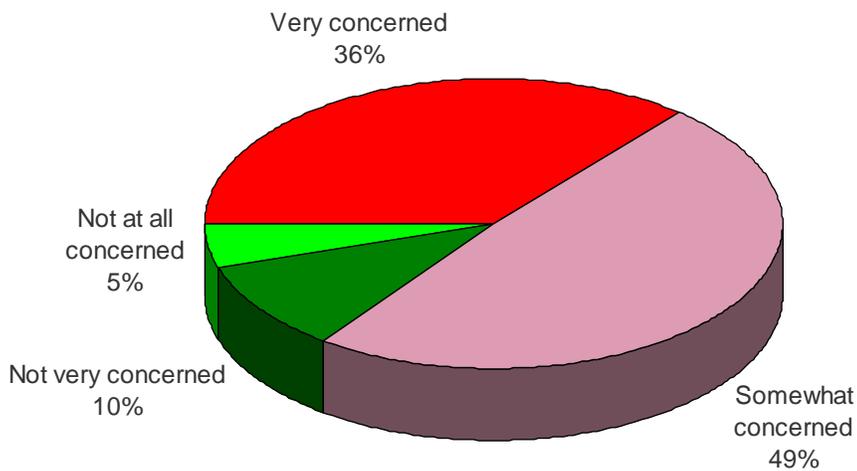
Question 2: Concern for the environment

There is a very high level of concern about environmental issues in Alberta. Among Albertans, 85% are either very or somewhat concerned about environmental issues in the province.

Probe Research Inc. Statement:

“How concerned are you about environmental issues as they relate to Alberta?” (n=500)

Probe Research Inc. Results:



Oil Sands Fact

Current government plans propose a surface mining area of 280,000 hectares, an area approximately four times the size of the City of Calgary.

Source: Alberta Government Mineable Oil Sands Strategy

<http://www.energy.gov.ab.ca/3005.asp>

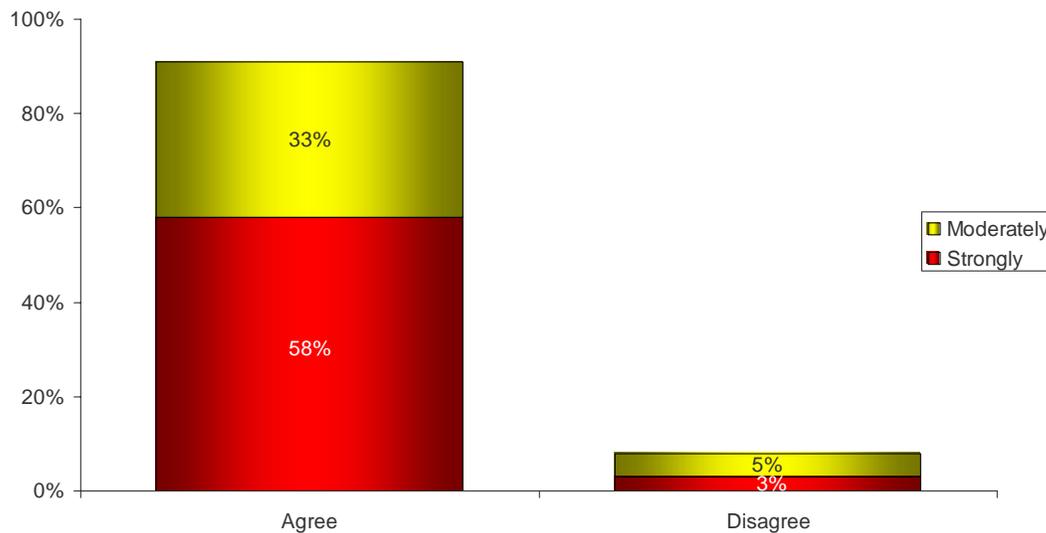
Question 3: Environmental trade-offs and oil sands development

An overwhelming majority of Albertans (91%) expect protection of the environment, even if this slows down opportunities for oil sands development.

Probe Research Inc. Statement:

“Protecting the environment is important, even if it means oil sands development occurs more slowly.” (n=500)

Probe Research Inc. Results:



Oil Sands Fact

In over 40 years of oil sands development, during which time more than 30,000 hectares of land has been mined and disturbed, not a single hectare of land has been certified as reclaimed and returned to Albertans. More than 90,000 hectares of oil sands mines have *already* been approved for development, and there are plans to develop another 280,000 hectares – an area approximately four times the size of the city of Calgary.

Source: Alberta Government State of the Environment

http://www3.gov.ab.ca/env/soe/land_indicators/41_oilsands_reclamation.html

Source: Alberta Mineable Oil Sands Strategy

<http://www.energy.gov.ab.ca/3005.asp>

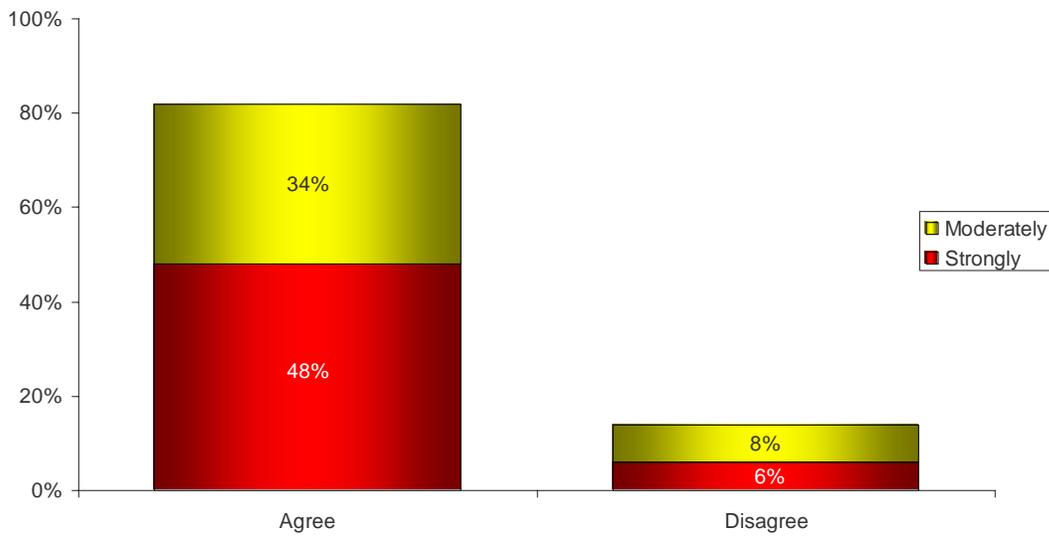
Question 4: Protection of wildlife and oil sands development

A large majority of Albertans believe that wildlife, such as woodland caribou, should be protected, even if this reduces opportunities for oil sands development. Among Albertans surveyed, 82% felt that protecting wildlife should be a priority.

Probe Research Inc. Statement:

“Wildlife such as woodland caribou should be protected, even if this reduces opportunities for oil sands development.” (n=500)

Probe Research Inc. Results:



Oil Sands Fact

Some woodland caribou populations in northeastern Alberta have declined by almost 50% in the last ten years. The decline is linked to high levels of industrial activity within caribou ranges (particularly in situ oil sands development). Government continues to lease lands for oil sands development in caribou range.

Source: Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan
<http://www.srd.gov.ab.ca/fw/status/reports/mam/index.html>

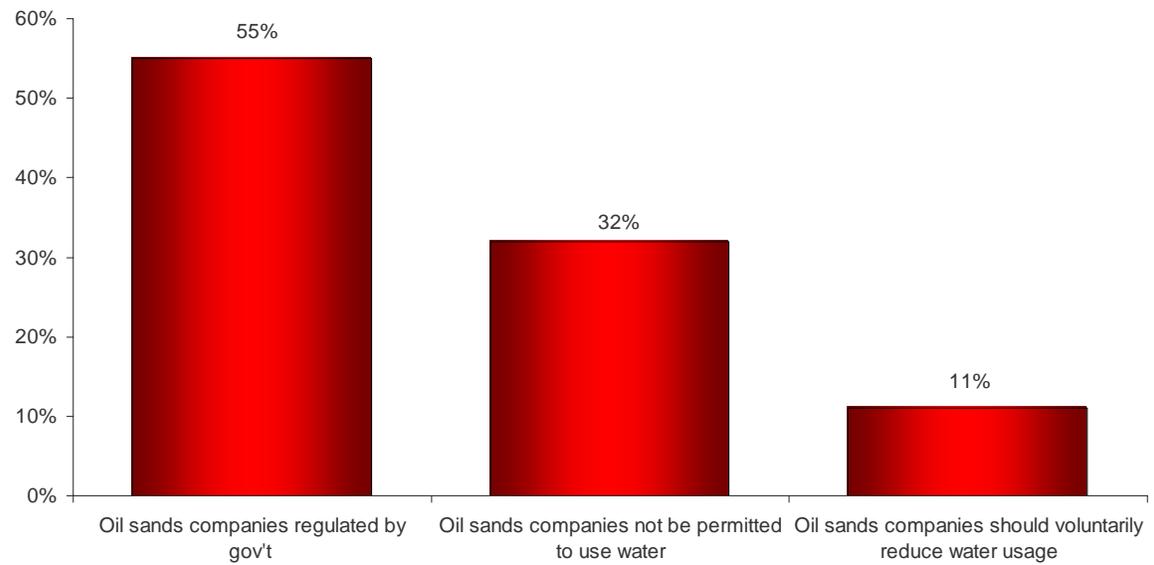
Question 5: Water use by oil sands companies

A majority of Albertans believe that the use of Athabasca River water by oil sands companies should be limited by government regulations during low flow periods. Almost a third of Albertans felt that oil sands companies should use no Athabasca River water during low flow periods. Voluntary reductions in water use by oil sands companies was the least preferred option supported by a small minority of Albertans.

Probe Research Inc. Statement:

“Oil sands mining companies sometimes use water from the Athabasca River. The Alberta Government is developing rules about how much water can be taken out of the Athabasca River when the water levels are low enough to damage fish and fish habitat. Which one of the following three approaches best fits your view?” (n=500)

Probe Research Inc. Results:



Oil Sands Fact

Current mining processes require two to five barrels of water to produce one barrel of oil. Current oil sands mines are allowed to use 349 million m³ of water annually – twice as much as the entire City of Calgary uses over the same time period. Less than 10% of this water is returned to the Athabasca River.

Source: *Oil Sands Fever*

<http://www.oilsandswatch.org/pubs-osf-book.php>

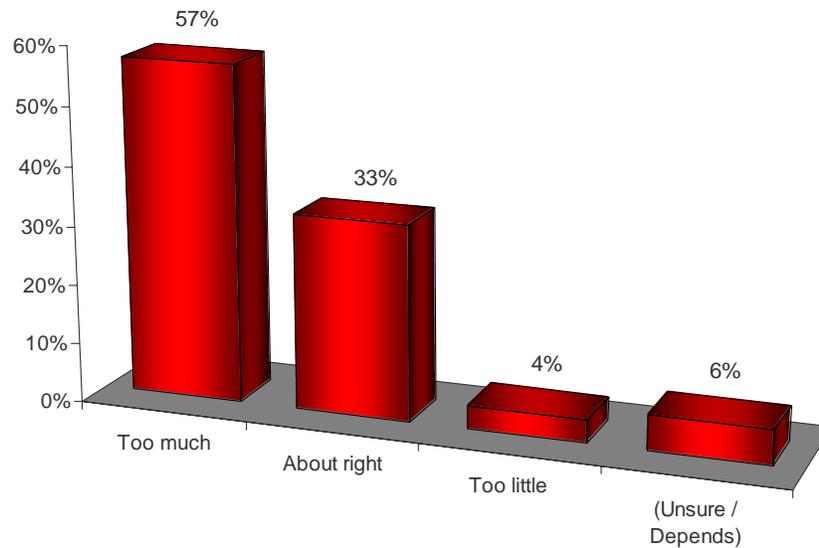
Question 6: Boreal forest protection

A majority of Albertans (57%) believe that too much of Alberta's boreal forest is open to industrial development.

Probe Research Inc. Statement:

"Today in Alberta, about 85% of the province's boreal forest is open to industrial development. In your opinion, is this amount that is available for development. . . ?"
(n=500)

Probe Research Inc. Results:



Oil Sands Fact

Despite Albertans' concerns that too much of the boreal forest is open to development, oil sands leases have been sold for more than 43,000 km² of land in Alberta – an area larger than Vancouver Island. There are no government plans to protect more forest in Alberta.

Source: *Alberta Energy website*
<http://www.energy.gov.ab.ca/108.asp>

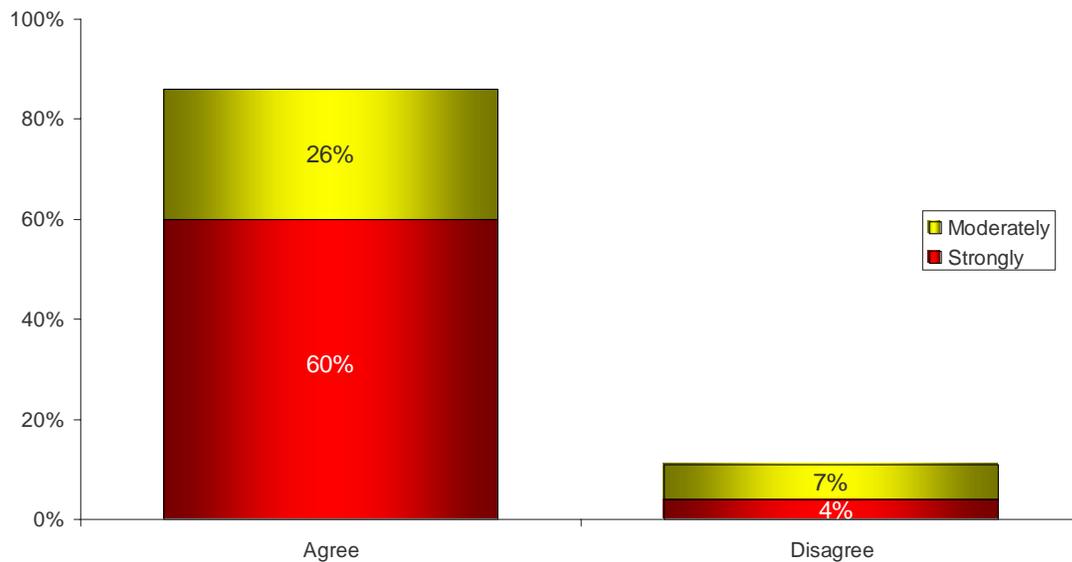
Question 7: Greenhouse gas emissions

An overwhelming majority of Albertans believe that oil sands companies should be required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with their development activities.

Probe Research Inc. Statement:

“In each of their oil sands plants, companies should be required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that are responsible for climate change.” (n=500)

Probe Research Inc. Results:



Oil Sands Fact

Emissions of climate-changing greenhouse gases from Alberta's oil sands are set to triple between 2003 and 2012, and increase fivefold between 2003 and 2020.

Source: *The Climate Implications of Canada's Oil Sands Development*
<http://www.pembina.org/climate-change/pubs/doc.php?id=586>

About the Pembina Institute

The Pembina Institute creates sustainable energy solutions through research, education, consulting and advocacy. It promotes environmental, social and economic sustainability in the public interest by developing practical solutions for communities, individuals, governments and businesses. The Pembina Institute provides policy research leadership and education on climate change, energy issues, green economics, energy efficiency and conservation, renewable energy, and environmental governance. More information about the Pembina Institute is available at <http://www.pembina.org> or by contacting info@pembina.org.