
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preliminary Decision Support Tools (DST) were presented at a working session in December 2019 to facilitate a discussion involving industry (oil and gas and environmental practitioners) and government (Alberta Environment and Parks [AEP] and Alberta Energy Regulator [AER]) related to change in land use requests. Subsequently, a draft decision framework incorporating recommended revisions to the Decision Support Tools was prepared and released by PTAC – *Certification of Mineral Soil Pads in the Boreal Region – Decision Framework and Support Tools*. This report presents the results of a stakeholder review of the draft *Certification of Mineral Soil Pads in the Boreal Region – Decision Framework and Support Tools* report and a field verification trial by practitioners.

A Knowledge Transfer webinar was held June 7, 2021, by PTAC with presentations by Dean MacKenzie, Vertex, and Bonnie Drozdowski, InnoTech Alberta. Workshops with selected industry, practitioner and government stakeholders were held February 10, 2022 (35 industry/practitioner attendees) and February 16, 2022 (18 AEP and AER attendees), to solicit additional feedback.

Five practitioners and one energy company identified a total of 122 sites for potential field verification spanning northern Alberta. Sites were constructed from 1972 to 2008 and abandoned from 1988 to 2021. The nominations were for a mix of sites that had been either: submitted to AEP and rejected; submitted and approved; submitted and awaiting a decision; or pending submission. Comments from the practitioners or energy company about the site and the AEP decision were summarized.

Nine of the nominated sites from two practitioners working for two energy companies were tested using the Decision Framework and Support Tools. In seven of the nine cases, the Decision Framework and Support Tools led to the same conclusion as AEP – five sites were approved for a change in land use and two were rejected (both fens). In the eighth case (also a fen), an application for a change in land use had been submitted but a decision had not been made at the time of this report. In the ninth case, the site required use of Table 7 modifications which led to a tie between the modified Peatland Rating and the modified Upland Rating. The draft report didn't state what to do where a tie occurs so the revised version of the report will indicate that a tie results in a final site recommendation of Candidate for Peatland Reclamation; however, in this case, both the practitioner and AEP agreed that the pad should remain in place (Candidate for Upland Reclamation). Comments about use of the Decision Framework and Support Tools from the practitioner were summarized.

The draft report will be revised to incorporate the stakeholder feedback and the results of the field verification trial. At a minimum, the revised report will include the following changes:

- A new section will be added to describe caveats related to the use of the Decision Framework and Support Tools and a screening tool will be provided to assist practitioners in deciding if the DST Framework and Support Tools should be used.
- A more detailed description of the Decision Framework and Support Tools will be provided.
 - Add defined terms to better explain how the Decision Support Tools are used and how the calculations are made. The terms defined in the Glossary in this report will inform the update.
 - Explain that partial pad/access removal is implied as an option wherever pad/access removal is mentioned.
- In the draft report there was no clear explanation of how the DST supporting tables are to be used. The update will clarify that the tables are meant to assist practitioners in deciding whether to answer Yes or No to specific Decision Nodes.

- In the draft report there was no guidance on how to use Table 7 to modify the Site Rating when the difference between the Peatland Rating and Upland Rating was less than 3. The update will clarify that **every row** in the Table must have a score to avoid practitioners selecting those modifications that agree with their view of what the final recommendation should be.
- In the draft report guidance was provided on how to use the Site Rating modifications made from Table 7 however there was no indication on what to do when the modifications lead to a tie (as was the case in one of the sites in the field verification trial). The update will indicate that in the event of a tie the site will be deemed to be a Candidate for Peatland Reclamation.
- In the draft report there was no mention about the implications of below-pad liners to the decision process. This will be mentioned in the update under the Site-specific Considerations DST.
- In the draft report there was no guidance on what information to provide as backup documentation for the change in land use request made to AEP. The update will provide recommendations for the types of information to be provided.