

THE FORT MCKAY MÉTIS NATION: A COMMUNITY HISTORY

Peter Fortna

ISBN 978-1-77385-593-6

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

A Community Turned “Upside Down”: Fort McKay’s Response to Extractivism

Extractivism challenged land tenure in Fort McKay and changed the land that the community used to support the bush economy that sustained their way of life. This resulted from the government’s decision to allow companies to lease significant portions of the land surrounding Fort McKay and transform it to the point that it became unrecognizable to local community members. The First Nation and Métis attempted to coordinate their responses to the industrial incursion, quickly learning that the traditional governance structures they had used to manage the community for generations were no match against the liberal order framework introduced by the government that made the transformation of the land “legal” despite their repeated opposition. This chapter will explore Fort McKay’s response to regional industrialization and population growth, and throughout, I will argue that this experience prepared the community to become the self-governing First Nation and Métis Nation we know today.

After the Second World War, and especially in the 1950s and 1960s, change accelerated for northern people. As noted above, the cratering of fur prices likely had the largest single impact on communities that were structured around the bush economy. In addition, the provincial and federal government’s attention shifted away from agricultural development toward industrialization, which led them to explore developing “underutilized” land so it might be better “utilized” to benefit a wider society. In Alberta, government officials seriously considered how they might harness the energy potential of the oil sands in the provincial northeast, traditional oil and gas in the province’s north-central area, and coal in the province’s northwest.¹ These plans

would resemble the “high-modernist” strategies used throughout Canada in the 1950s and 1960s that centred on the belief that improved access to science and technology could positively reorder the natural and social world to benefit the majority of Canadians.² Unfortunately, many, if not most, of these projects would place the potential benefits of settler-Canadians above those of people (in Canada, most usually Indigenous or otherwise marginalized people) who were in the development or extraction zones, leaving those deemed to be “in the way” to suffer the brunt of the impacts, either by being moved or left to deal with the poisoned land.³

In northeastern Alberta, Fort McKay would find itself in the centre of the Alberta government’s efforts to modernize and would soon learn what it would mean to be deemed to be “in the way” of progress. This point was made explicit in 1979 in Fort McKay’s oil sands intervention to the provincial Energy Resources Conservation Board [ERCB]:

Before 1960, Fort MacKay was a relatively isolated settlement having little contact with the “outside world.” The building of the Great Canadian Oil Sands plant in the 1960s marked the beginning of the encroachment of major resource development upon the settlement. The plant was constructed on the site of traditional hunting and trapping grounds — an area which also provided summer residence for many families from Fort MacKay. The construction of the plant provided the first major conflict between the traditional lifestyle of the community and an industrialized way of life.

In such a conflict, the “old way” can not win. A giant like GCOS has not changed its way because of Fort MacKay. But certainly our community has had to turn “upside down” for GCOS and other specific resource developments . . .

When the present plant was first proposed, we did not know what to expect. But now we have had several years of experience living closer to the plant than any other community. As GCOS has appeared consistently to ignore any ongoing liaison with us to help us adapt to the new way of life, we are prepared now to initiate this cooperation ourselves. As a result, this intervention briefly outlines a number of our concerns pertaining to the

GCOS application for expansion. We request an opportunity at the scheduled hearings to expand upon these issues in the context of questioning and cross-examination of the application.⁴

Before the major oil sands development, the kinship system and bush economy provided the primary organizing principles at Fort McKay and led to community cohesion. Decisions were rarely made formally, and it was meetings between the family heads that sorted out questions or disagreements. Marriages linked families together, and community members easily flowed from being First Nations to Métis to First Nations — if they recognized the distinction at all. People were most likely to identify with their local families rather than endorsing a larger pan-Indigeneity, whether that involved regional, provincial, or national Métis or First Nations organizations. Hunting, trapping, fishing, and collecting during the proper seasons organized their time and activities. Their interactions with external political bodies were limited, and beyond the treaty and scrip negotiations and the accompanying land surveys in the early twentieth century, there was very little need for a common “Fort McKay” voice to respond to colonial incursion.⁵

After the invasion by oil sands industries, those traditional governance structures were disrupted and community members were forced to develop a more unified identity and voice.⁶ The first pressures on Fort McKay came when the government began to challenge the community’s traditional patterns of land use and land tenure, as detailed in the previous chapter.

The early impacts of GCOS must have felt like a tidal wave crashing down the Athabasca River. Within the first year of the plant’s operation, community members began to experience environmental, health, social, and psychological impacts. Community members were becoming sick with water-borne illnesses never experienced before, and wildlife and fish were starting to show signs of distress and disease or disappear completely. The wide range of societal problems that often appear in boomtowns, including alcoholism and familial breakdowns, also began to appear, thanks in large measure to the new bridge and all-weather road.⁷

By the late 1970s, community members had attempted to engage with the provincial and federal bureaucracies to help with land tenure, water quality, trapping regulation, and employment concerns. As described in the previous chapter, at best, these interactions were met with mixed results and, at worst, the requests were ignored entirely. The actions of the provincial government

were far from conciliatory, and officials constantly chose to exploit the economic potential of the oil sands, which were considered to be “in the public interest,” over the concerns of Fort McKay residents. Fort McKay followed the recommendations by Van Dyke, who in 1978 called for the “community committee” to take on an even more important role in the community, allowing Fort McKay “strong input into their own future,” displacing an “absent” provincial government that he criticized for its “lack of concern or commitment” to the community.⁸ Around the same time, the committee hired Jim Boucher to “co-ordinate the community effort in making an intervention at the ERCB hearings.” Boucher, like many people of his generation, had experienced first-hand the changes that the first industrial projects had brought to Fort McKay and had the basic education that the Indian day school built in the 1950s provided. Unlike many residents, he completed high school at the Blue Quills Indian Residential School in St. Paul, Alberta. The twenty-three-year-old employee recognized that the community’s challenges were complex and tied up in the lack of secure land tenure, the shift in the community’s economy and land-based way of life, and the increasing pollution brought by the new industries.

The community’s first intervention came as GCOS sought to expand its operation from 65,000 barrels per calendar day to 77,500 barrels per calendar day.⁹ It was signed by the “Fort McKay Community Committee,” which included Marcel Ahyasou, Dorothy McDonald, Ernie Lacorde, Clara Shott, and Rod Hyde.¹⁰ The signatories represented the whole of the community: Dorothy and Marcel represented the Fort McKay First Nation; Ernie and Clara represented the Métis Red River Point Society; and Rod Hyde, the school principal, represented non-Indigenous community members. The signatories also had experience working within the community and with various levels of government. Marcel Ahyasou was the relatively new Chief of the First Nation, and Dorothy was a First Nations councillor and the daughter of Phillip McDonald, who was Fort McKay’s last hereditary Chief. Rod Hyde was a teacher in the community; he later became Dorothy’s common-law husband. Clara Shott was the president of the Red River Point Society, and Dorothy McDonald’s friend; she was originally a Boucher and lost her First Nations status after marrying a Métis man, Henry Shott. Ernie Lacorde had penned some of the first letters on behalf of the Fort McKay Community Association to the government in the 1960s and, by this time, was a well-respected Elder. The fact that all parties worked together on a single intervention demonstrates the

community's desire to work as a unified entity in dealings with industrial incursion on their lands.

The goal of the intervention, Boucher told the reporter in 1979, was to "make sure we [Fort McKay] don't go under and get lost. We want the community to stay here for the people."¹¹ The committee members had learned from the frustrating experiences of the 1960s and 1970s, when they had attempted to work proactively with various levels of government and GCOS. Most of those strategies had failed or, at least, had not outmatched the negative impacts the community were now experiencing daily. For Boucher, these experiences were "a complete learning process for people [in Fort McKay]." He argued that the community needed to actively participate in local development and make its concerns known.¹² By intervening with the ERCB, community members believed they would have an opportunity to outline their concerns publicly, and they hoped to have their issues addressed in future project approvals.

The intervention highlighted the negative "environmental, social, and economic effects that GCOS had had on the community."¹³ The Fort McKay Community Committee, in their submission, asked for four things from the company: first, it wanted assurances that the expansion would not "lead to increased detrimental effects upon the natural environment"; second, that GCOS sponsor a program for the "recruitment, training and employment of residents of Fort MacKay"; third, that GCOS cooperate and liaise with the "Fort MacKay Community Committee regarding all matters of mutual concern"; and fourth, that GCOS would "assume responsibility for providing company employees from Fort MacKay with transportation to and from the job site at no cost to the employees."¹⁴

In response, GCOS argued that its corporate hands were tied as:

the board's authority was limited to recommendations to the Lieutenant-Governor in Council. If the ERCB decides the socio-economic concerns expressed by groups at hearings warrant further attention, recommendations may be made to appropriate government departments, but the board would not have the authority to attach them as a condition for approval of an application.¹⁵

Jim Boucher publicly rebutted this point, stating:

We are surprised by the public statement made by GCOS that the company sees no need to assume any responsibility for the social and economic impacts which it has had, or which it will have, upon Fort MacKay.

We now understand that nothing can be done legally at the present time to make industry accept responsibility for the social and economic impacts upon communities like Fort MacKay. And as we have seen, friendly persuasion only works as long as the company chooses to cooperate.¹⁶

At the hearing, GCOS attempted to address the concerns raised by Fort McKay, committing that there “would be no adverse environmental effects from the expansion,” and that it would “resume a job recruitment and training program for Fort MacKay,” a program that had been suspended about a year prior due to complaints from local unions.¹⁷ Given the close ties that the ERCB had to GCOS, it is not surprising that it ignored the Fort McKay Community Committee’s intervention and approved the project on March 29, 1979. Similarly, it is not surprising that Fort McKay continued to experience negative environmental, social, and economic impacts due to the industrial development.¹⁸

Boucher’s comment about how “friendly persuasion only works as long as the company chooses to cooperate” could also be applied to the provincial and federal governments, which were often willing to meet but far less willing to take action. Whether regarding land tenure, trapping policies, health, or other socioeconomic issues, the community of Fort McKay was constantly promised that help was coming, though rarely, if ever, did support materialize.

In 1979, Fort McKay also intervened at a hearing for the proposed Alsands project, a \$14 million development located on the east side of the Athabasca River just north of the Fort McKay First Nations’ original reserve land; a project that would have rivalled GCOS and Syncrude in terms of magnitude. This intervention made it clear that Fort McKay was no longer willing to be left on the sidelines. However, neither the opposition to the GCOS expansion nor the Alsand project seemed to materially impact their approval. This led Chief Dorothy McDonald, who was elected early in 1980, to conclude that the ERCB would not act upon community evidence until the community “rolled in with a wheel barrow with someone dead in it.” She added that “the

province is so intent on resource development that they don't care what impact it has on the people. They don't care what the public health cost is."¹⁹ This realization forced Fort McKay to take a different approach to dealing with the direct industrial impacts felt in the community, most notably through legal and direct action.



Shortly after the two hearings, in the winter of 1981–82, the negative impacts of the new industries were directly felt by the people in Fort McKay, this time in the form of polluted water. While the provincial government failed to act upon recommendations made throughout the 1970s to establish a water treatment plant in the community, in 1976, it finally installed two water towers, one erected on the First Nation's leased land to the north and the second on the Red River Point Society land in the south. The two "holding tanks" were meant to be temporary stopgap measures, and from the time of their installation, "confusion arose as to who was responsible within the government to maintain the tanks. This lack of action resulted in dirty, rusty tanks and poor-quality water" that often froze or malfunctioned in winter.²⁰ This remained the status quo into the early 1980s, leading community members to occasionally obtain their water from other sources, most often the Athabasca River, particularly when the water tanks froze or were otherwise unavailable due to some other malfunction.

The winter of 1981–82 was exceptionally cold, providing challenges for communities and companies alike. In December of that year, the propane heater on the south tank caught the tower on fire, burning it to the ground. At about the same time, the heater for the north tank also failed. The water froze, the tank cracked, and Fort McKay lost its second water source in the dead of winter. The harsh winter was also hard on the oil sands developers, and equipment failures at GCOS — renamed Suncor in 1981 — began in late December 1981 and resulted in "a massive spill, pouring large quantities of toxic substances into the Athabasca River. On at least one day forty (40) tons of waste and toxic chemicals had spilled into the river."²¹ The company failed to inform the Fort McKay community about the discharge, which continued into January 1982, even though community members — who were now forced to get their water from the river due to the failure of their "temporary" water towers — were beginning to become sick with headaches, flu-like symptoms,

and sores in their mouths.²² In February, at an unrelated community meeting with Suncor, Fort McKay brought these health concerns up to company officials, who then told them the “Athabasca river water was ‘dangerous’ to drink” and that they should stop taking water from the river immediately.²³

Publicly, Suncor initially downplayed the impacts of their spill. While admitting on February 26, 1982, that it had dumped “oil and grease” into the Athabasca River, company vice president Bill Oliver explained that it was only “a very small amount of oil in a huge flow of river that is used to oil,” adding that “the Athabasca River has a fantastic capacity for absorbing oil.” This position was contradicted by Fort McKay First Nation Chief Dorothy McDonald, who said that “about 20 to 30 people have reported problems with stomach ailments, vomiting and mouth sores.” She added that “all the Indian communities on the river, as well as the trappers in the bush could be using this water, but Suncor cares so little for people that they didn’t warn anybody.”²⁴ In an article published a few days later in the *Edmonton Journal*, Suncor’s environmental manager, Bill Cary, explained that he had no excuses for not warning Fort McKay of the dumping but that they “were tied up with their own problems” and, therefore, did not get around to letting the community know of the mishap. The article confirmed that Fort McKay First Nation had laid charges “against Suncor, Cary, and M. A. Supple, plant general manager” in provincial court, stating that the company was polluting the river in contravention of the federal Fisheries Act.²⁵ At the same time, the provincial government issued a control order against Suncor, demanding that the company clean up the pollution and explain to the province what happened by the end of March.

By June 1982, Suncor had spent ten million dollars upgrading its wastewater treatment facilities and testing the results, although Fort McKay remained unconvinced that the company was taking the necessary measures to reduce the community’s impacts.²⁶ The case proceeded through the courts, with the First Nation charging the company with seven violations of the federal Fisheries Act and two violations of the Alberta Clean Water Act.²⁷ The trial concluded in 1983. Suncor’s legal counsel had cross-examined the Chief, pressing her for evidence that Fort McKay residents had been made sick specifically because of the breach at the plant, evidence that Fort McKay (nor anyone else, given the lack of environmental monitoring on the river) simply did not have. Bill Cary took the stand shortly thereafter, and “McDonald reacted to one of [his] statements by yelling at him and running out of the

courtroom.”²⁸ The Alberta Court of Appeal ultimately acquitted Suncor on the majority of the serious charges, dismissing the appeals because neither Fort McKay nor the Crown could demonstrate beyond a doubt that Suncor had been negligent. An editorial in the *Edmonton Journal* commented that the government had pursued the Suncor pollution trial “in an amazingly lackadaisical way. Because there are indications the oil sands company is not facing the full power of the law, some explanations are needed to remove big question marks hovering over the case.”²⁹ The *Fort McMurray Today’s* editorialist, Ken Nelson, blamed the government’s lacklustre reporting requirements. Nelson wrote:

It’s not obvious at first, but the real culprit in this case may be the provincial government. Alberta Environment’s anti-pollution regulations are out-dated, difficult, if not impossible to enforce and do not put sufficient onus on the industry in question.³⁰

The failure of this court case to find Suncor guilty dramatically impacted the downstream communities, as they realized that their abilities to defend their communities against the impacts brought by industrial development were severely outmatched.³¹

While the regulatory interventions and court proceedings failed to bring about the result hoped for by the community, they did have the effect of raising awareness about industrial impacts with the broader public. The events also taught the community that any future intervention in a regulatory hearing would require expert evidence to counter material provided by the companies. Finally, it showed the community that it could not depend on the government to be a neutral observer. Fort McKay residents came to understand that the government was so heavily invested in the success of the development that it would not actively seek judgments against the developers even when they were “too busy to report pollution” to the communities to which the pollution would have a disastrous impact.³² In response, Fort McKay warned that companies could “expect the most serious scrutiny of their applications that they’ve ever had, the easy days for Suncor are over.”³³



In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as Fort McKay was beginning its interventionist strategy, other changes were beginning to affect the community. First, the economic divide between the Métis and First Nation was growing, as the First Nation was beginning to obtain increased support from the Department of Indian Affairs, while the Métis, represented by the Red River Point Society and the Métis Local, received little if any support from the provincial government.³⁴ Indian Affairs support allowed the First Nation to fund its first staff position, and Jim Boucher moved from Fort McKay Community Committee coordinator to become the Fort McKay First Nation's band administrator.³⁵ While leaders still wanted the community to work as a whole, the Band administration led the court cases, interventions, and later reports. Additionally, over this time, Chief Dorothy McDonald's profile increased. She proved to be a fearless advocate for Fort McKay, and as the community increasingly found itself in the news, Chief McDonald was often quoted —speaking truth to power — becoming the public voice of the community.

Federal legislative changes began to alter the demographic makeup of the community as well. A series of court cases forced the federal government to grapple with Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act, a sexist provision by which First Nations women who married non-First Nations men automatically lost their "Indian" status and assumed the legal status of their husbands.³⁶ This law had already had a major legal impact in communities such as Fort McKay, which had a long history of intra-community marriage and where the legal status of its Indigenous members was largely irrelevant before 1960. That changed when the federal government started to invest in First Nations housing programs, medical care, and other social services (however inadequate those services were) specifically for First Nations people. Thus, from the 1960s forward, Fort McKay members were increasingly incentivized to maintain a legal Indian status. It affected how community members structured their relationships, in particular forcing First Nations women to consider the legal ramifications of marriage to non-status men, which included Métis.

The existing law affected Dorothy McDonald and other community members in several different ways. First and foremost, if McDonald had chosen to officially marry her common-law husband, she would have become ineligible to be Chief of Fort McKay First Nation, the exact situation three of her sisters, Clara Shott, and many other members of the First Nation found themselves in.³⁷ While it is telling that Clara easily took a position as president of Red River Point Society, the law added an additional level of stress

to those who found marrying the person they loved could mean losing their First Nation status.

Second, in early 1982, the Fort McKay First Nation changed its membership code to ensure that “all Fort McKay Indians, male or female, married after Jan. 12, 1982 will retain their status for life and pass on that status to children in mixed-blood marriages.”³⁸ Fort McKay was the first Indian Band in Alberta to make such a move and one of forty-eight (out of a possible 576) to do so in 1982. This event is often cited as a demonstration of Chief McDonald’s leadership ability in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, though it also had a pragmatic element.³⁹ As McDonald noted at the time: “My greatest concern is that we are losing all our members.”⁴⁰ She was rightly concerned that Fort McKay First Nation would eventually disappear if the law remained unchecked. First Nations marriages with non-status people were increasing, meaning each generation, fewer and fewer people could qualify for their First Nation status. This provision of the Indian Act had been part of the federal government’s strategy to do exactly that: reduce and eventually eliminate all distinctive Indian persons through “legislative extinction.”⁴¹ The move also had an economic dimension, for if members were “lost” from the First Nation (though those “lost” members often stayed in the community), the Band would not be able to access the same level of funding, which was generally tied to population numbers and used, in part, to fund industrial interventions.⁴²

The revised membership code, along with Indian Affairs support, were factors that heightened the influence of the First Nation and inadvertently diminished the influence of the Red River Point Society and the role it would officially play in the community’s development. From the early 1980s to the late 2000s, the “Ft. McKay Band, formally or informally,” undertook “many administrative, program and service responsibilities for the community as a whole, including the Red River Point Society.”⁴³ However, the leadership in the community ensured that the new First Nation administration worked on behalf of the community as a whole and that although administrators were formally paid through by the band, they also represented the needs of the Métis. It seems to have been an informal commitment that ensured the Métis continued to have input in community decisions and access to community programs. It would also help to maintain cohesion in the community and resist new pressures from government and industry.



By the early 1980s, the community of Fort McKay became increasingly frustrated with the lack of action taken by the government in the prosecution of the court case against Suncor and with the results of the regulatory hearings for GCOS and Alsands. The final straw occurred in late 1982 when Northland Forestry received a contract to harvest burned logs just north of Fort McKay. The project would require at least ten logging trucks to drive through the community daily. Residents were greatly worried about this new development, which they saw as a direct threat to the community's well-being. Dorothy McDonald's father, former Chief Phillip McDonald, had died in a vehicle accident, and community members, including children, regularly walked along the road to visit friends and go to school.⁴⁴ The First Nation and the Red River Point Society sent a petition with eighty-five signatures expressing their concern about the project to the provincial government. As Jim Boucher told a Fort McMurray Today reporter, "the entire community is united in this position," and "we don't want either our children or the peace of the community jeopardized for the sake of economic expediency." Neither the logging company nor the government seemed to appreciate the concern. The owner of Northland Forestry, Roy Ewashko, stated, "I don't know what the problem is, it's a public road," and the government failed to respond.⁴⁵

By January 14, 1983, the concerns had escalated to the point where Fort McKay set up a blockade. In a news release sent from the "Fort McKay Indian Band and Red River Point Métis Society," the community explained that it was protesting the plan to allow logging trucks through the community and that it wished "to start negotiations on environmental issues affecting [Fort McKay]." The release stated that the "federal and provincial governments must recognize their actions for what they are — genocide. An ugly word but unfortunately for us, true." It concluded that "our graveyard is our proof. You are killing us." Dorothy McDonald and Red River Point Métis Society president Clara Shott signed the release. It was not well received by local MLA Norm Weiss, who called the protest "unreasonable" and asserted that spending 3 million dollars to build an alternative road "would not be a good use of the taxpayers' money."⁴⁶ It was an indirect statement about the so-called public interest.

If people in the community hoped to raise awareness about what was happening in northeastern Alberta, they quickly gained success. Within a

few days, the story was front-page news in the majority of Alberta publications and was also picked up by the *Globe and Mail* and *Maclean's Magazine*, as well as by national TV and radio programs.⁴⁷ The protest caught the attention of other politicians, who, like Weiss, were perturbed by the blockade at first. Local MP Jack Shields said: "The area is not a reserve. It's a provincial highway and it's not fair to ask the company to incur such an expense" of building an alternative road. Shields also asserted that "it's a fact of life, large trucks go through small communities," and that while he agreed that community members "have some very legitimate concerns, but to tie it all in with this issue is not too realistic. I don't think she's gaining any sympathy from it."⁴⁸ The provincial minister of Native Affairs, Milt Pahl, added that he thought the community's use of children who were pulled out of school to participate in the blockade was a "a callous exploitation" of the situation.⁴⁹ But Chief McDonald explained that the blockade was "like a last stand for us, we're fighting the same old battle that Indians everywhere have fought. We're struggling to survive as a people." The idea for the blockade reportedly came from Métis Elder Ernie Lacorde, who said at a community meeting, "Let's setup a roadblock. They won't throw me in jail."⁵⁰ This sentiment was reflected by the majority of participants who were prepared to "go to jail" if that was what it would take to have Fort McKay's concerns heard.⁵¹ Eventually, Minister Pahl and provincial Attorney General Neil Crawford agreed to meet with McDonald and Clara Shott. Charles Wood, president of the Alberta Indian Association, attended as a mediator. Though the details remained confidential, the parties discussed long-standing community grievances, including "environment[al] concerns, compensation for trappers and the lack of medical facilities in Fort MacKay."⁵² Eventually, they reached an agreement.

McDonald and Shott took the proposed agreement to their respective organizations on January 20, 1983, and the First Nation and Red River Point Society ratified the agreement the next day, ending the blockade. Chief McDonald was ecstatic. "You can't believe how good I feel now that this is over," she said. "I didn't want any of my people to go to jail and I didn't want anybody to get hurt. But we were determined to see this thing through. We would have stayed out there forever if we had to."⁵³ The two sides agreed to allow the forestry trucks to be escorted through the community, but more importantly for McDonald and Shott, the government agreed to meet with

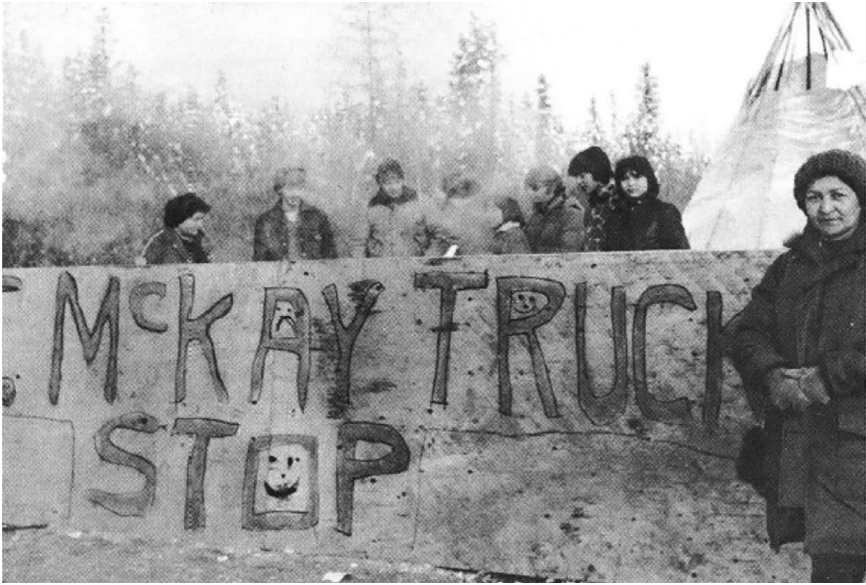


FIGURE 5.1

“At the barricades in Fort MacKay: fighting the same old battle,” photo from Gordon Legge and Peter O’Neil, “The Band That Pushed Back,” *Maclean’s*, January 31, 1983.

the community and a mediator to discuss the local concerns. However, it is unclear how productive those new meetings were.

The blockade galvanized Fort McKay, demonstrating that the community had the ability to influence government decisions. It also showed that Chief McDonald valued and wanted to continue to work with the community as a whole. Together, McDonald and Clara Shott were able to put up a formidable front toward both industry and government. The protest helped the community recognize the value of publicity and the pressure that just telling their story could place on company executives and politicians who, for years, had chosen to ignore the community’s concerns. Numerous editorials criticized the provincial government’s ineffective monitoring of environmental impacts, and some framed Chief McDonald as “a fierce fighter of right,” battling an overpowering industry and government, who they wished “would stop making news headlines” as a “nuisance and troublemaker.”⁵⁴ The blockade also helped the community recognize that their only power in the earliest days was to delay development, much to the consternation of local

and provincial politicians as well as local industry leaders. Although the community would not erect another physical blockade, it increasingly relied on strategic interventions to delay projects and, over time, increase its influence in the regulatory process. As McDonald had said, “the easy days” for industry applications were over.



In the same week that Fort McKay was blockading the road, Syncrude was applying to the ERCB to create a 170-hectare waste dump near its Mildred Lake Plant.⁵⁵ The dump was going to directly impact First Nations trapper Francis Orr, who had travelled to the site and taken pictures of Syncrude’s current operations, submitting the images to the ERCB as evidence against the project. Syncrude had an extremely negative reaction to the intervention, writing to Orr to tell him that if he continued with his intervention, they might use a “different approach in their dealings with” him and his trapping partners. Chief McDonald did not take kindly to the veiled threat, rhetorically asking the local reporter: “What would Syncrude have done if they had found Francis taking pictures — shoot him or beat him up?”⁵⁶ While Fort McKay was successful in delaying the project,⁵⁷ it would eventually be approved when the ERCB found that the dump posed “no health risk.”⁵⁸ The episode demonstrated the growing tensions in the region and strengthened Fort McKay’s commitment to challenging every application submitted by the major companies in the region until something began to change.

Approximately a year later, Syncrude put forward a much larger application to expand its Mildred Lake project. The expansion would cost 1.2 billion dollars and be completed in three phases over five years. While it was not a new project, it would significantly increase the company’s capacity to process bitumen and produce oil, increasing revenue. Thus, it was seen as a boon by the provincial government, which was facing decreased revenues and job losses due to the prospect of another downturn. Fort McKay remained concerned about the impact of the existing Suncor and Syncrude projects on the community. The First Nation, acting on behalf of the community as a whole, made extensive information requests to the ERCB, asking for more material about both existing operations. They argued that the community would be unable to make a decision as to whether to intervene without such information. The move by Fort McKay put additional pressure on both the company and the

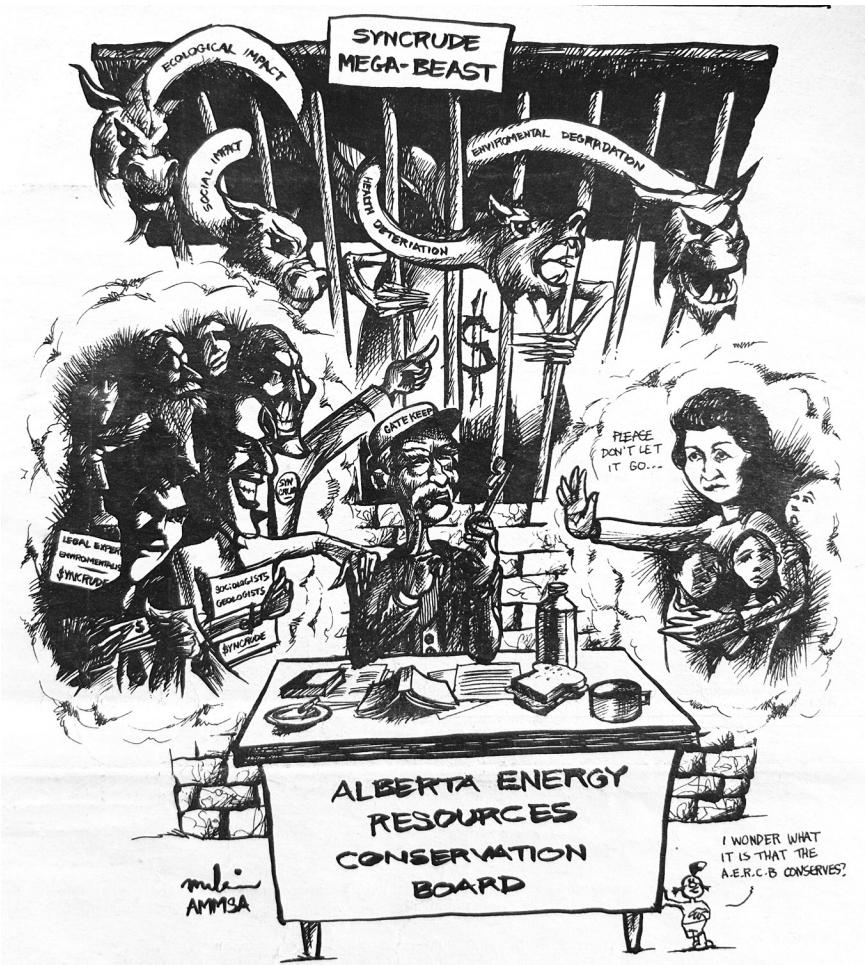


FIGURE 5.2
 Editorial Cartoon, AMMSA, 22 June 1984 from Rod Hyde Newspaper Collection.

government, which had an agreement that promised the company substantial tax relief if the project was completed within five years — tax relief that was required to make the project economic in the eyes of Syncrude. According to Syncrude spokesman John Barr: “Any delay beyond this summer will cost us money and endanger our completion schedule.” He added that “it’s not in

anyone's interests for anyone to slow this project down." In short, he equated the company's interest with the public interest. It is not surprising that Chief McDonald disagreed with Barr, stating: "millions of dollars doesn't mean anything to me when it comes [to] the health of my people."⁵⁹

The two parties met at a pre-hearing a week later, where Fort McKay presented evidence from two consultants regarding how the expansion would harm the community. The consultants showed multiple gaps within Syncrude's application, although Syncrude countered by claiming that such concerns were "irrelevant to the specific application before the board."⁶⁰ Syncrude suggested that the government should undertake a more substantial inquiry into Fort McKay's social and economic concerns but that such an assessment should take place outside the ERCB hearing rather than holding "the application's existing application for ransom to achieve the same objective."⁶¹ At the hearing itself in August, Fort McKay requested and was granted a fifteen-week adjournment so it might review the 431-page submission provided by Syncrude at the start of the hearing. The additional delay forced the company to postpone work on the project for nearly a year, leading Syncrude spokesman Barr to state that "ultimately the people who put the money on the table will evaluate the effects of the delay, and they'll tell us" whether the project should proceed or not.⁶²

In the end, the extension was approved by both the ERCB and the Syncrude shareholders. The ERCB provided its approval shortly after the hearing reconvened in October 1984. In its approval, the ERCB stated that many of the concerns brought by Fort McKay were beyond its scope, though it sympathized with the community and was "concerned about the wide difference in views between some of the local residents and the operators (Syncrude) respecting environmental impact," noting that there was a major deficiency relating to the "lack of communication between those conducting impact studies in the area and local citizens."⁶³

While Syncrude's expansion was approved without major revisions, Fort McKay had demonstrated its ability to exert pressure on both the government and companies through the ERCB hearing process. If the press releases are to be believed, the pressure was substantial, as both the government and company had expected that the approval process was a foregone conclusion and that work would be able to begin almost immediately. It helped all parties realize that the status quo would no longer suffice and that the government and industry had to do more to include Fort McKay and other local

Indigenous groups in the decision-making process or risk the community finding additional ways to interfere with “development” in the region.

Shortly after the Syncrude hearing, and at the request of and funded by the ERCB, Fort McKay established the “Fort McKay Interface Committee,”⁶⁴ to advise ERCB, Syncrude, and the government about community concerns. While the government aimed to avoid future interventions, Fort McKay reserved the right to trigger a hearing with the ERCB if community concerns were not being properly addressed.⁶⁵ Additionally, the committee began to receive funding from the ERCB to undertake their own studies and reviews of proposed new industrial projects. Although these funds seemed to have been collected and distributed by the First Nation, leaders from the First Nation and Métis Nation were thanked for their contributions to reports completed on behalf of “the residents of Fort MacKay.”⁶⁶ While it would be a stretch to suggest that Syncrude and Fort McKay’s relationship after the hearing was perfect, the commitment to work together meant that the community’s concerns were at least being heard. All sides realized that progress would only happen if they were sitting at the same table.

Fort McKay’s relationship with the surrounding oil sands companies was bolstered by the creation of the Fort McKay First Nation Group of Companies in 1986, which was initiated by Chief McDonald to create new job opportunities and revenue for the community. In her vision, a “parallel development” would occur that would see the community prosper simultaneously with the surrounding industrial developers and government.⁶⁷

This new, non-confrontational approach aligned with that of Jim Boucher, who was elected Chief in 1986. In his first post-election interview with the *Fort McMurray Today*, Boucher stated that “Dorothy had her own style, and I think my style is going to be more low key. I’m very interested in sorting out the problems through dialogue rather than through confrontation.” He spoke about the “community’s” priorities: running water, new office and commercial spaces, employment opportunities, and community-owned businesses, with a long-term goal to “train and employ people in administrative capacity so that the affairs of the community can be done by community members.”⁶⁸ Though McDonald’s adversarial approach had been necessary to get the attention of government and industry, Boucher was able to build on that and begin negotiations involving trusted advisors and technical experts to ensure the community’s interests were protected. By choosing to work within the system, Fort McKay was able to procure funding to pay for the

community's priorities and gain favour with Syncrude, expanding its newly founded companies, which would eventually fund the community's economic transformation from 1986 to 2005, building new homes, a new Band hall, and providing other related community services.⁶⁹

Fort McKay also began engaging in a number of regional initiatives with the hope of spurring economic development. In 1986, both the Fort McKay Métis and First Nation joined the Athabasca Native Development Corporation, which included all the Indigenous groups in the region and was created to "enhance" the economic development of "Indian and Métis people living in northeastern Alberta."⁷⁰ Fort McKay also helped to form the first regional environmental monitoring and policy organizations, such as the Cumulative Environmental Management Association, the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association, and the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program, which would help to shape how resource development and pollution would be managed in the future.⁷¹

Fort McKay also strengthened its relationship with regional developers, particularly Syncrude, forming the "Syncrude Expansion Review Group" to work directly with the company and address any community-specific concerns regarding the second Mildred Lake Expansion early in the process. Though the agreement details remain confidential, the review group ultimately concluded that the Syncrude expansion should be approved, as the community's "many concerns" were resolved "outside the context of a public hearing."⁷² It is also worth noting that, over this time, the Fort McKay Group of Companies grew exponentially, in no small part due to Syncrude's support by seconding employees and providing sole-source contracts to community-owned or partnered companies.⁷³



The turn of the twenty-first century proved to be the start of another era of significant change for oil sands development, as the price of oil finally reached a place where multiple companies believed they could profitably build mega-projects in the region. Those same companies were concerned about the adversarial experiences that Syncrude and Suncor had in the early 1980s, particularly in contrast to the relationship Syncrude had developed with Fort McKay through the Syncrude Expansion Review Group. As a result, the Athabasca Regional Issues Working Group (later renamed the Oil

Sands Developer Group or OSDG) — which included the majority of industrial developers in the region (including Suncor, Syncrude, Canadian Natural Resources LTD [CNRL], Albion Sands, Shell, Petro-Canada, and others) — “began to discuss the need for First Nations to build capacity in order to deal with the anticipated blitzkrieg of resource development in the Athabasca oil sands.”⁷⁴ In 1999, OSDG signed a three-year capacity-building agreement with the support of the federal and provincial governments. With the funding, each First Nation established an Industrial Relations Corporation (IRC) responsible for creating “the capacity for each community to deal with Industry and the impacts of industrial development.”⁷⁵

At its core, creating IRCs was how industrial developers hoped to meet the evolving law around “the duty to consult” and the requirement to provide First Nations capacity funding to understand potential impacts on communities’ traditional territories. Unfortunately, the duty to consult legal precedence in the late 1990s and early 2000s did not consider Métis groups. As such, governments did not feel the need to require companies to provide consultation funding to them.⁷⁶ Capacity agreements such as the one introduced above were only meant for First Nations and not for the Métis. The vision did not align with Fort McKay’s history. As a result, Fort McKay chose to establish an Industrial Relations Corporation (IRC) owned and directed by both the First Nation and Métis, tasking it with the following:

1. Preparing and otherwise facilitating agreements between Fort McKay and the Oil Companies for activities related to the application review process not included in the IRC scope of activities, including but not limited to, establishing the principles and method of community consultation, identifying potential project-related environmental, technical, social, and economic issues arising from each Application in consultation with the community members.
2. Working with the community and the Oil Companies to resolve issues within time frames agreed to with the Oil Companies and/or regulatory agencies.
3. As required, retaining third party technical, environmental, social, and economic experts to assess environmental, social, economic, cultural, and legal impacts of the Oil Companies’

activities as well as technical or scientific reports prepared (and?) commissioned by the Oil Companies or regulatory bodies and communicate their assessment to the Fort McKay members.

4. Summarizing and communicating the findings made by third party experts to lay persons within the community.
5. Developing and facilitating in-community consultation processes to facilitate effective communication of technical, environmental, social, and economic issues potentially affecting the community and obtaining the community members' input, advice, and if possible, consensus with respect to acceptable and non-acceptable impacts, project plans, and preferred mitigation-measures.⁷⁷

An important aspect of the Fort McKay agreement was that it bound the companies to work with both the Fort McKay First Nation and Métis.⁷⁸ This choice was significant as no other First Nation in the region explicitly partnered with its neighbouring Métis organization. Furthermore, every agreement signed by the IRC on behalf of Fort McKay between its founding in 1999 and 2010, when the IRC was formally dissolved, was done on behalf of the undivided community and most included both the First Nation and Métis as signatories. This commitment ensured that all community members would benefit from agreements made with oil sands developers, as they would benefit from all studies, engagements, facilities, and services funded through such agreements. It is ironic that the oil sands companies were willing to work with the community as a whole when the Governments of Alberta and Canada failed to develop a Métis consultation policy and actively discouraged resource developers from considering the concerns of Métis communities in their impact assessments.⁷⁹

The creation of the Fort McKay IRC helped the community negotiate improved agreements with regional developers. The leadership used some of the funding and the leverage it provided to bring much-needed infrastructure to Fort McKay. Additionally, Fort McKay's average per capita income in 1996 was \$16,325, notably higher than "any other northern Alberta First Nations community reporting to Statistics Canada," though still "38 percent lower than Alberta's average per capita income."⁸⁰

While the IRC was instrumental in transforming the community, it was also limited in the scope of its negotiations. “Economic development,” for example, was to be left to be negotiated with oil companies independently by the First Nation and Métis.⁸¹ With the legal landscape and provincial government requiring “First Nations consultation” and presumably accommodation, companies attempted to stay in the good graces of the area First Nations by typically offering them sole-source contracts guaranteeing significant financial benefits.⁸² Since the early 2000s, the Fort McKay First Nation’s Group of Companies was able to leverage this position, growing exponentially, reaching over \$150 million in annual sales by 2004⁸³ and a yearly income of \$240 million at the end of 2018.⁸⁴ While the achievement of the First Nation’s Group of Companies is an obvious success story for the community, it also raises the question of why the Fort McKay Métis Corporation (locally called Métis Corp.) did not experience similar success. This story, perhaps better than any other, helps to explain the birth of the modern Fort McKay Métis Nation.

The Fort McKay Métis Corp, like the First Nation’s Group of Companies, was primarily engaged in labour and general contracting activities and obtained some of their first contracts from Syncrude in the 1980s. By the late 1990s, industrial developers, recognizing the government’s preference to legally recognize First Nations’ rights, led most of the companies to seek partnerships with local First Nations. As a result, while Fort McKay First Nation (and many of the other First Nations in the region) were able to successfully negotiate sole-source contracts with members of the Oil Sands Developers Group, the Fort McKay Métis were largely left on the outside looking in. This helps to explain why the Fort McKay Métis were eager to sign an agreement to become the prime contractor for Solv-Ex, a company that had secured a lease and a provincial loan to build a new multi-million-dollar project just north of Fort McKay.

Solv-Ex was founded by John S. Rendall, who claimed to have a new technique using solvents to extract and refine low-grade oil from New Mexican shale or Canadian bitumen. In 1995, the company was able to secure financing (nearly \$70 million) and an oil sands lease from the Government of Alberta, and shortly thereafter began building a pilot plant at the Fort Hills site. In July 1996, Solv-Ex hired the Fort McKay Métis Corp. as a general contractor. Roger Faichney, who was president of Métis Corp (as well as Métis Local 122), explained that while they had “a few new contracts,” the Solv-Ex agreement

would be transformational as their “first major agreement.”⁸⁵ Despite this optimism, Solv-Ex was already under investigation by the FBI for “alleged stock manipulation, negative media stories, and fund-raising problems.” This perhaps explains why the Fort McKay First Nation limited its participation in the project, leaving the Fort McKay Métis Corp. to take on the majority of the risk.⁸⁶

As described by Manuel P. Asensio and Jack Barth, Solv-Ex was “a convoluted, international scam of epic proportions,”⁸⁷ By November 1996, the company had burned through the Government of Alberta’s investment and began defaulting on its other international loans. As a result, it failed to pay its contractors, including the Fort McKay Métis Corp., which sued Solv-Ex for \$3 million.⁸⁸ The loss was crippling for the Métis Corp, which had to lay off 250 workers (including many community members) explicitly hired for the Solv-Ex contract. By August 1997, the Métis Corp. was having “a tough time keeping [the] telephones [and] lights on.”⁸⁹ At the same time, Solv-Ex was delisted by NASDAQ and placed under investigation by the US Securities and Exchange Commission in 1998.

The impact on the Fort McKay Métis community was catastrophic. The Fort McKay Métis Corp. was not only the main source of revenue for the community (as meagre as it was) but also the Métis community’s main employer. As reported by Ron Quintal, after the Solv-Ex bankruptcy, community members would literally “race to the bank to see who would cash their cheque first to make sure your cheque didn’t bounce.”⁹⁰ Adding to the challenge was the fact that the Métis Local 122 and Métis Corp.’s finances were closely tied together. This meant that its financial obligations, such as paying the yearly fees associated with the Red River Point lease,⁹¹ were also falling behind, as were its commitments to repair homes on the lease (perhaps contributing to community members’ belief that the houses on the lease were individually as opposed to communally owned) and make improvements to the community more generally.

Métis Local 122 remained operational under Roger Faichney’s leadership until 2002 when it was finally struck by corporate registries and replaced by Métis Local 63, a new organization with new leadership.⁹² The years 2002 to 2007 were politically difficult times for the Fort McKay Métis, exacerbated by the fact that it no longer had a robust social enterprise to take advantage of the economic opportunities available as industrial development in the region grew exponentially. Ron Quintal remembers that “these were the dark days

of Métis politics in Fort McKay. Because it was at that time that people were absolutely galvanized and polarized against each other. Like it was scary to walk down the road because you're afraid someone's gonna swear at you or, you know, flip you off because of the political infighting."⁹³

Over the same period, the Fort McKay First Nation negotiated a series of economic development agreements that drastically improved its fiscal well-being and dramatically increased its yearly income.⁹⁴ The economic benefits belonging to the First Nation were real (including yearly per capita distributions of \$10,000 or more),⁹⁵ and more and more community members whose ancestry included both First Nations and Métis heritage rejoined the First Nation through Bill C-31 (and after 2011, Bill C-3).⁹⁶



In 2007, in recognition of the growing economic disparity between the Fort McKay First Nation and Métis, the two groups signed the “Moose Lake Accord,” a memorandum of understanding that provided base support for the Métis to begin building their administrative capacity, restart their social enterprise, and secure their land lease.⁹⁷

Shortly after, the Fort McKay Métis undertook a series of community planning initiatives, charting a path toward recognized modern Métis nationhood. In the summer of 2008, the organization participated in the Fort McKay Specific Assessment, providing input into the community's indicators of cultural change.⁹⁸ Through this process, the community confirmed the uniqueness of the Fort McKay Métis experience and its desire for self-determination.⁹⁹ The following year, the Fort McKay Métis initiated a comprehensive community strategic plan in which community members were clear that they wanted to “transform the Fort McKay Métis Community through the pursuit of self-reliance, self-determination and self-management.”¹⁰⁰ At these sessions, the community's leaders began openly calling for the establishment of the modern “Fort McKay Métis Nation,” a move to confirm the will of the community that had been developing this unique identity for generations.¹⁰¹

Initially, it was believed that the shift to “self-reliance, self-determination and self-management” could be accomplished through the structure of the Métis Nation of Alberta, whose bylaws confirmed Métis communities had “the inherent right of Métis governance which may be expressed and implemented by its members at the local, regional, provincial/territorial and

national levels.”¹⁰² After all, the Fort McKay Métis Local 63 was incorporated as a separate entity with its own directors and assets. As such, it seemed perfectly reasonable that the Fort McKay Métis would be able to assert its autonomy, much like First Nations groups assert their autonomy within other provincial and/or national organizations (the Fort McKay First Nation, for example, is a member of the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta as well as the National Assembly of First Nations). However, it was becoming clear that the Métis Nation of Alberta was moving away from this commitment to individual community autonomy. Most specifically, a series of court cases and announcements made by the MNA around this time signalled the MNA’s intention to remove local authority and enter into negotiations with the provincial and federal governments for “Métis collective rights.”¹⁰³ As explained by Ron Quintal, this shift was recognized by outside organizations including the Government of Alberta, Fort McKay First Nation, and resource developers who were concerned about the potential for the “MNA to put their hands in the cookie jar” and take resources away from Fort McKay Métis community members.¹⁰⁴

As the MNA charted this new path, the Fort McKay Métis community was forced to reconsider its options, as there was legitimate fear that “everything” it had built through the generations could now be colonized by the MNA, a provincial-scale collective with little history or connection to the local community of Fort McKay.¹⁰⁵ Continuing the work that had begun through the strategic plan, the Fort McKay Métis began a deep community engagement to create bylaws that reflected the community’s commitment to self-determination. Those engagements began in 2010, with the first draft of the bylaws presented to the board of directors in spring 2011. A second draft was reviewed by the board and community members in August 2011, and a final draft was reviewed and approved by the community in late 2011. The Fort McKay Métis Community Association (FMMCA) was officially incorporated in early 2012.¹⁰⁶

As explained by the Fort McKay Métis Nation, it hoped that the creation of the FMMCA might spark a revitalization of the MNA, encouraging the provincial organization to refocus its attention on issues of provincial importance and to support local communities in a federated governance model, where the majority of decision-making power stayed local. It was their view that Fort McKay should continue to be one of the Otipemisiwak, “the people

who own themselves,” and not beholden to rules designed by people who did not understand the unique history and culture of the Fort McKay Métis.¹⁰⁷

As such, Fort McKay maintained its membership within the MNA but with the “local governance functions of the community — including the management of leased land and financial agreements” being transferred to the FMMCA.¹⁰⁸ It continued to participate in the provincial organization in hopes that it might be able to advocate “with other likeminded Métis organizations” for a provincial governance model that allowed for individual members’ independence and sovereignty.¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately for the Fort McKay Métis, over the next number of years, the MNA continued on its path towards creating a centralized Métis government. This forced the Fort McKay Métis to seek out new ways to protect its nationhood, as the FMMN writes:

Between 2017 and 2018, and after consultation with their members, the FMMCA board took steps to formalize its governance structure so that it could become a self-governing nation. That included developing a Fort McKay Métis Nation constitution. It also ramped up negotiations with the Alberta government to secure its land base and entered into a conversation with Alberta to determine the process by which the Nation could submit its own credible assertion claim. Through these actions the FMMCA hoped to actualize what their research and members were telling them: that they were their own people, capable of governing themselves, and that they were unwilling to relinquish their personal and community autonomy to the MNA or anyone else.¹¹⁰

As the Fort McKay Métis undertook these initiatives and began to assert their independence, they realized that their vision was incompatible with that of MNA, which continued in its attempt to centralize governance structures in the province. By late November 2018, the community collectively decided to sever their relationship with the MNA.¹¹¹ Subsequently, the FMMCA’s bylaws clarified that they were the only group that could represent Fort McKay Métis community members’ rights.¹¹²

In March 2018, the FMMCA purchased much of the land set aside as part of the original Red River Point lease for the community.¹¹³ On May 24,

2019, the Fort McKay Métis community ratified a community constitution establishing the “Fort McKay Métis Nation” as the representative body for the community.¹¹⁴ On February 13, 2020, the Government of Alberta approved the Fort McKay Métis’ credible assertion application, recognizing that “government and industry” need to consult with the Fort McKay Métis when “natural resource development may adversely affect their credibly asserted Aboriginal harvesting rights and traditional use practices.”¹¹⁵ Together, these actions and decisions demonstrate the complete actualization of the Fort McKay Métis Nation and its shift to becoming a fully formed Métis Nation in northeastern Alberta.



Fort McKay’s commitment to working together throughout the history of the community has helped both the Métis and First Nation prosper and laid the groundwork for creating self-governing nations. The IRC helped ensure that the community as a whole would benefit when agreements with industrial developers were signed. The Fort McKay Métis business ventures have been generating much-needed revenue for the community for key services such as housing, education, and basic group health benefits to all community members¹¹⁶ It also ensures that benefits are measured against the concerns of the community as a whole, by utilizing expert reports and Indigenous land-use studies that themselves recognize the interconnectedness of Fort McKay. The fact that the community was able to continue working together, nearly 120 years after the federal government first imposed First Nations and Métis distinctions, is a testament to the strength of the community’s kinship network and an ideological commitment that seems to be lacking in other settlements in the region where Métis, Cree, and Dene peoples did not integrate, particularly after the 1960s. It is also unsurprising that outside interests would take notice of this success and attempt to insert themselves into the conversation in more recent history.

