

THE LOWER ATHABASCA REGIONAL PLAN'S FUTURE IS HISTORY

Christopher Alton
University of Toronto

Perhaps the most industrially intensive site of the Canadian resource economy, the Athabasca tar sands, has made the province of Alberta the third largest oil producer in the world, behind Saudi Arabia and Venezuela (Energy.alberta.ca, 2012). The process of turning bitumen into oil for export has famously compromised an area the size of England in northern Alberta's vital boreal forest and has transformed the Canadian economy (Biello, 2013). The people who live in this region, many of whom are from Indigenous populations (Cree, Dene, and Métis), have seen their territories and lifestyles dramatically affected. Traditional economies are under threat, supplanted largely by wage labour in the oil sector. The process has been described as a "slow, industrial genocide": "Their ability to hunt, trap and fish has been severely curtailed and, where it is possible, people are often too fearful of toxins to drink water and eat fish from waterways polluted by the 'externalities' of tar sands production" (Huseman and Short, 2012, p. 1; see also Nixon,

2011). Indeed, these externalities are extended through the scales of both social life and time. Land-use planning helps facilitate this historical pattern of development and ongoing resource exploitation in the Athabasca region through the systematic settler colonial practice of the dispossession of land from Indigenous populations. A major recent expression of continuing settler colonial thinking is the 2012 Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP). This province-level regional plan has been the Alberta government's attempt to steward industrial growth, and as part of the largest and most comprehensive regional land-use framework in Alberta's history, it has demonstrated the degree to which land-use planning has been the handmaid of industry and settler colonialism in the continuation of tar sands development.

This essay will attempt to provide a historical contextualization of LARP and an understanding of the plan not simply as a current mode of regional land-use planning in Alberta, but one with its roots in the practice of and thinking around settler colonialism, in particular as a continuation of a project that was initiated by the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC), as natural science moved west in the 19th century. In this context, then, the land (square mileage) and geology (natural resources, what lies beneath the surface) ought to be viewed in tandem, suggesting a three-dimensional dispossession (see also: Braun, 2000; Brechin, 2006; Elden, 2013; Graham, 2016). Albeit not a definitive or singular history of the region, an exploration here is undertaken partially through the cartographic collection of the Provincial Archives of Alberta, in Edmonton, and partially through a review of literature that attempts to reconcile theories of planning with efforts at decolonization. As resistance to continued industrial expansion has taken multiple forms, two First Nations—the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) and the Mikisew Cree First Nation (MCFN)—are also looking at countering land-use policy with an independent response to LARP. I consider these programs and then propose means by which radical planning practitioners and academics (in particular settlers like me) may be better equipped to counter plans such as LARP through a reflexive questioning of the ability of planning practitioners to learn from decolonization movements and understand their own complicity in colonization. Referencing Métis scholar Zoe Todd's (2016) recent theory of "refraction," this paper is ultimately a call for planning practitioners and academics to expand their political vocabulary to include concepts and language of land-based politics, especially in settler colonial geographies where the displacement of Indigenous people has become a prerequisite for development.

Lower Athabasca Regional Plan

LARP was developed as part of Alberta's consolidated land-use framework, which was introduced in 2008. Of the seven different regional land-use plans—each of which refers to a different major watershed in the region—LARP is the first to be systematically implemented by the province to date (“the plan” from here on referring to LARP in particular). The Provincial government enacted LARP in the form of the Provincial Land Stewardship Act (2009), which went into effect on September 1, 2012. In the case of LARP, the plan pertains to 93,212 square kilometres that cover the lower Athabasca River basin and the Peace–Athabasca River delta, the world's second largest inland freshwater delta. The plan includes the industrial projects that rely on the Athabasca river waterway for production and sets out an agenda to steward the land and resources in this region. LARP's boundaries are also part of Treaty No. 8, an 1899 agreement signed between First Nations and Queen Victoria of England, wherein rights to hunt, fish, and engage in cultural activities (and share resources) are upheld within the traditional territories of 39 First Nations communities. Despite this dynamic cultural and historic landscape, this region is more commonly known worldwide as home to Canada's tar sands, where the conversion of heavy bitumen into synthetic crude is a carbon-intensive driver of the Canadian economy (Biello, 2013). The tar sands development expanded greatly after 2003 as a result of the commodities boom, as technology and the price of oil increased developers' profits; the notoriety of the area has increased along with this growth. In a press conference introducing LARP, Alberta's Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development (ESRD) admitted that “global scrutiny” (ESRD Alberta, 2012) facing the tar sands was the reason the province felt the need to develop a new framework for the Athabasca region. The ESRD promised that LARP would “deliver enhanced environmental management and orderly growth in one of the most dynamic economic regions in the world” (ESRD Alberta, 2012).

Supporting growth while pledging to benefit the environment is an irreconcilable trope that appears continually with LARP. For instance, LARP touts that it has “set the stage for robust growth, vibrant communities and a healthy environment within the region over the next 50 years” (Government of Alberta, 2012, p. 2). Several new land-use designations are also proposed, including a public land-use zone (PLUZ), recreation and tourism areas, and new wildland provincial parks (WPPs). Specific land-use redesignations in LARP are substantial, such as the creation of the Dillon River Conservation Area, which has been rezoned from a public land-use zone to a WPP. The rezoning has increased the size of the Dillon River Conservation Area by

27,245 hectares, to 191,544 hectares in total. LARP as a whole seeks to conserve more than 2 million hectares in the boreal forest, the largest parkland dedication in the region since the creation of Wood Buffalo National Park in the 1920s (Government of Alberta, 2012). Importantly, despite these myriad conservation areas and rezoning initiatives, the plan does not seek to place limits on current or prospective drilling or leasing by the oil and gas industry or the urbanization processes that follow extraction.

It is anticipated that local manufacturing and services will continue to expand in support of increasing oil sands development in the region. These trends will continue to stimulate development of larger and more diverse retail centres, and growing commercial and professional services and facilities. . . . Other sectors such as metallic and industrial mineral extraction, forestry, agriculture, tourism and service providers also contribute to the region's economic vitality and prosperity. Natural gas exploration and development in the region is expected to continue. (Government of Alberta, 2012, p. 13)

Indeed, it is through the *trompe l'oeil* of spatial reorganization that "conservation" stands in for industrial appeasement, with little regard for the transformation of traditional Indigenous territory into uses not commensurate with traditional economies. For instance, although the creation of the Dillon River Conservation Area promises to "[support] Aboriginal traditional use and [secure] more habitat for woodland caribou," (ESRD Alberta, 2012) it also exists alongside new recreation areas that provide camping and boating opportunities for wealthy Albertans. In the Peace–Athabasca delta, in the town of Fort Chipewyan, headquarters of the Athabasca Chipewyan and the Mikisew Cree First Nation, there is resistance to recreational activities related to boating and camping that may pose additional burdens on a subsistence lifestyle above and beyond the harm that has been caused by downstream industrial pollutants (Fort Chipewyan residents, personal communication, August 2013). An examination of proposed land-use designations in the Peace–Athabasca delta reveals the contradictions inherent in the settler colonial planning of capitalist extractivism: None of LARP's supposed benefits will compensate for the collapse of traditional economies. New park designations leave the door open for recreation to creep north, buoyed by the advancement of industrial operations that have moved northward along the river as new bitumen speculation and the leasing of areas for new production continue. WPPs adversely affect areas surrounding the Peace–Athabasca River delta. This designation has a conservation management agenda: "Areas will help achieve environmental objectives—especially those for biodiversity—by

maintaining ecological systems and processes for biodiversity” (Government of Alberta, 2012, p. 29). In the delta, Richardson Lake—known to the ACFN as Jackfish Lake—is at the heart of the ACFN traditional economy and continues to act as the heart of traditional life. Chipewyan 201 is the largest ACFN reserve in the Peace–Athabasca delta and is the cultural and economic centre of ACFN activity; the practices of everyday life here have developed over generations of activity.

LARP seeks a compromise in its approach to WPPs immediately adjoining First Nation reservations. Especially sensitive is the Richardson WPP, which specifically differs from the other WPPs. “The Richardson Initiative” considers the plan’s impact on treaty rights to hunt, fish, and trap, granting access to wildlife and fish by encouraging business opportunities for Aboriginal populations through the recreation and tourism industries. The Richardson WPP may be seen as a way to grant entrepreneurial opportunities to those most affected by LARP, but this gentrification simultaneously exposes the colonial legacy of LARP and galvanizes resistance to the redesignation by those who imagine a resurgence of traditional modes of life in the delta. According to the ACFN’s *Elders’ Declaration on Rights to Land Use*: “The lands from Firebag [River] north, including Birch Mountains on the west side of river, must be protected. Richardson Backcountry is not to be given away—not to any government” (Larcombe, 2012, p. 2-2).

The LARP consultation process is presented as a strategy that would reflect “ongoing commitment to engage Albertans, including aboriginal peoples, in land-use planning” (Government of Alberta, 2012, p. 2). Despite this, much of the local reaction to LARP has been swift and unenthusiastic. In reference to LARP, the ACFN and MCFN issued an initial joint statement: “Current land and resource use planning and decision-making in Alberta does not analyze adequately the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of development and land use on First Nations land and resource use, Aboriginal and treaty rights and interests” (King and Lepine, 2010, p. 3). The new land-use designations in LARP and the resulting northward industrialization have been met by resistance from local First Nations. This industrialization has been documented in *A Narrative of Encroachment*, a report by the ACFN that details the prolonged and continued incursion from industry into traditional territory. Settler industrial regimes have threatened the right to the exercise of rights to hunting, fishing, gathering, and trapping. Encroachment, according to the ACFN, is demonstrated by the movement of major operations further north in the Athabasca basin, especially since the early 21st century. In response, the ACFN has identified three homeland zones, defined as “areas of critical

importance to past, present, and future practice of ACFN use and rights” (Larcombe, 2012, p. 2–5), and three proximate zones, defined as “areas relied upon for the practice of use and rights by an increasing number of ACFN members living in and around Fort Chipewyan, Fort MacKay, and Fort McMurray” (Larcombe, 2012, p. 2–5). This dynamic will be explored later in this essay, but first it is important to take a look at the history of land use in this region of Alberta, which has deep antecedents in the Geological Survey, the settling of the west, and industrial growth.

Canadian orthodox planning is part of settler state colonialism, acting as an administrative mechanism. This becomes the history from which the profession of planning was born, and it continues to this day. The Town Planning Institute of Canada (now the Canadian Institute of Planning) was founded by Scottish architect Thomas Adams in 1919, as he sought to formalize related disciplines and promote a new professionalization of planning. The practice of planning predates this professionalization: at the time of the founding of the Town Planning Institute of Canada, “surveyor” was the most commonly represented discipline. One of the leading historians of this period of planning in Canada was Kent Gerecke, former chairman of the Department of City Planning at the University of Manitoba. Gerecke ties this professional emergence of planning to settlement, especially as urbanization pushed west. “In the context of Canadian colonial development, the rules of colonization represented a far more planned approach to land use and development than had been true in France or, later, in England” (Gerecke, 1977, p. 157). As Gerecke notes, the discipline existed in tandem with the Canadian Geographic Society and its legion of surveyors. The “chequered plan,” developed in the late 1700s, embedded imperial power relations in the planning of plots for the clergy and the Crown; plots in new townships were arranged in grids of checkerboard patterns through the 19th century and at a much larger scale in sections and quarter sections, as the exploitation of resources followed the railroad west and opened new spaces for development. Gerecke has called the Canadian prairies one of the most planned regions on earth, for “accompanying it was a settlement pattern with towns plopped on the landscape at regular intervals, with identical plans, and of course land ownership by the [Canadian Pacific Railway] . . . Along with this settlement structure is the ubiquitous rural grid of sections and quarter sections” (Gerecke, 1977, p. 157).

The cadastral grid “introduced a geographical imaginary that ignored Indigenous ways of knowing and recording space, ways that settlers could not imagine and did not need as soon as their maps reoriented them after their

own fashion” (Harris, 2004, p. 175). Cole Harris, writing of the west coast of Vancouver Island, has shown there was a “reconfiguration” of Aboriginal space—cleared and replaced “within scientific classifications, industrial management strategies, and visions of wilderness” (Harris, 2004, p. 175). The history of planning in this region is the administrative registration of this same spatial dispossession. In the economy and the practice of everyday life, orthodox planning, as seen with LARP, is often unable to reconcile uncategoryable elements of land, elements that do not fit into a grid. As the ACFN states in its study of traditional land use, *Footprints on the Land*: “The concept of a boundary is foreign” (Tanner and Rigney, 2003, p. 47).

Dispossession in 3-D: “What a Vast Storehouse”

This connection between the survey and orthodox planning practice has not been explored sufficiently to date. Understanding the survey and the grid as instrumental within planning ought to be part of the discipline in Canada. Certainly theories have been developed around the grid, but its connections to planning and colonialism can be extended further. In Canada, as Gerecke reminds us, “colonization established the location, rate of growth, land system, and pattern of Canadian cities. . . . Any understanding of Canadian city planning must recognize this part of the history of Canadian development and its relevance to today” (Gerecke, 1977, p. 155). A review of literature pertaining to the grid within the settler context may help further advance planning theory and is an important step in redressing the fact that Canadian planning has not kept up with the politics of land, decolonization and settler colonialism.

Planning has been noted for the division between theory and practice (Edwards 1995; Hague, 1991; Harvey, 1985; Lefebvre, 1991; Yiftachel et al., 2001; Porter, 2011; Holgersen, 2015). Similarly, the abstraction of the survey produces a world of binary forms, rendering land “legible,” allowing states to operationalize an otherwise complex network of ecological meanings, histories, and material flows. Through the survey, as geographer Nicholas Blomley reminds us, the everyday lives of people become stratified, and space becomes a container to be managed. “In the process, space is desocialized and depoliticized. Yet, at the same time, enframing conceals the processes through which it works as an ordering device” (Blomley, 2003, p. 127). This fundamental reading of the technology of spatial demarcation allows us to read backwards from LARP and the current spatial fix of the region to its deep settler colonial roots. Blomley describes survey as an infrastructure of dispossession, serving the interests of capital and the settlers of the Canadian west. In this interpretation, an ideology of land use is imposed while “the management

of dispossession rested with a set of disciplinary technologies of which maps, numbers, law, and the geography of resettlement itself were the most important” (Harris, 2004, p. 165). The effect of the survey was to lay the literal ground for a process of original (or primitive) accumulation, whereas land-use planning assumed a role in the service of capital (Dickinson, 1979), continuing to reproduce relations of ongoing accumulation through legislation like LARP. The survey has also been described as a form of territorial enclosure that dispossesses Indigenous peoples of their land in Canada. According to Charles Geisler, the North American context exhibits a “general principle of enclosure” (Geisler, 2014, p. 56). This framing helps advance a critical land-use analysis that understands the planning regime in Alberta as being motivated primarily by speculation and eventual extraction. Along with the demarcation and dislocation necessary to effectively render space legible to the settler colonial government, the establishment of geological science—surveyors have been infamously described as the ‘point men’ of British imperialism (Edney, 1994)—became the technology through which colonial order occurs. We ought to think of the theoretical relations between enclosure and territory, but importantly of planning itself as an administrative mechanism of settler colonialism.

By the end of the 18th century, the fur trade in Canada was declining and alternative resources were emerging as vital to the country’s export market. In various regions of Canada, fur as a resource was replaced by lumber or minerals. In the Athabasca basin, speculation quickly followed a pivotal act of enclosure—the signing of Treaty No. 8—and the move from an economy of exchange to one of extraction. This order remains, and political scientist Todd Gordon has described the Canadian state’s relationship with the First Nations as one of “dispossession by treaty” (Gordon, 2010, p. 88). In *Laying down the lines: a history of land surveying in Alberta*, Judy Larmour has noted that the signing of Treaty No. 8 effectively legislated a frontier capitalism that didn’t previously exist, the settlers were now both inscribing and implementing territorial ownership of land for the first time. “Simultaneously the survey was a project of extending the Dominion Land Survey while laying out reservations for First Nations. . . Surveyors tackled other challenges; the most immediate was to mark out boundaries for the first Indian reserves in Alberta” (Larmour, 2005, p. 98; see also: Fumoleau, 2004). The Victorian era saw the simultaneous enclosure of land in the name of the Crown and the registration of mineral and resource potential below. Settlers’ extraction of the tarlike substance that seeped from the banks of the Athabasca River is not the only mining activity that has shaped the region, which has seen enterprises ranging from uranium ore to lead–zinc deposits. Ultimately,

understanding the geology-focused motivation behind enclosure allows for a multilayered reading of planning's history in the lower Athabasca.

Historian Suzanne Zeller has provided a provocative and well-researched perspective on the basis of Canadian statehood. According to Zeller, early geological survey “helped to structure an imperial-colonial dialogue that reflected changing mutual perceptions and relationships” (Zeller, 2000, p. 85). Zeller argues that the institutions that facilitated colonialism were transformed as geologists set out to interpret Victorian ideology. In Zeller's account, the colonial project is tied directly to the study of geology and the exercise of geologic thought as a form of power. Responsible for much of the mapping and early settlement in present-day Canada, the GSC worked with (and on behalf of) the British Crown to secure access to fur and resources and then to survey land for settlement. From 1870 through the signing of the treaty in 1899, “missionaries, traders, geologists and geographers” (Zeller, 2000, p. 85) were relied upon to survey the Athabasca for settlement and resource potential while the movement to the north after the Klondike gold rush required gaining control of the Athabasca River as it became evident that the basin was rich in mineral resources and bitumen. Not only did the GSC benefit from this new political arrangement but its existence was justified through the survey. The intent was to claim title, and a “rationale for doing so became paramount, spurring an assessment of western oil, climate, natural resources, flora and fauna, and potential for agricultural development. The North-West was hailed as Canada's Promised Land, where her future lay as a nation rather than as a colony” (Larmour, 2005, p. 6). Expeditions during this era were the first steps toward establishing Treaty No. 8. The historical record reveals the economic impetus and rationale for the signing of the treaty; Jen Preston echoes Zeller's position, pointing out that the regime, as a result of early expeditions, came to the table with full knowledge of the area's resource potential: “The Canadian government commenced the treaty-making process with the indigenous populations of the Athabasca region in 1870, motivated by the [GSC]'s reports that petroleum existed in the area. The trajectory of this history has continued to bring the Canadian settler state—and its oil industry stakeholders—into negotiation with indigenous Nations over the Athabasca tar sands” (Preston, 2013, p. 42). The separation of people from their land and the expansion of the west, then, have as much to do with the ground as with what lies beneath; expanse and depth.

When the Dominion of Canada took control of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1870, the GSC—established in 1841—had a wealth of untapped area to explore. It was the reliance upon the findings of the

GSC that set two things in symbiotic motion in the region: the signing of treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal communities and the speculation that extraction of vast quantities of oil and minerals necessitated European settlement of the basin. The first GSC scientist to visit the region was John Macoun, in 1875. He would make five trips to the region during the 1870s alone, and he quickly reported on the importance of the area. Macoun's observation of the "novel" strata of the Athabasca basin had immediate consequences. He saw value in bitumen. The sticky and abundant substance was used by Indigenous people for various everyday tasks, but Macoun and those who followed him understood the resource as one that could spur economic development and transform the region. Contemporaries of Macoun agreed. Dr. Robert Bell, the "father of Canadian place names" and maybe the most prominent surveyor of the time, followed Macoun and for his 1882 survey (Figure 1) visited the Athabasca and Peace River areas. Near current-day Fort McMurray he noted tar on the banks and 30 feet of petroleum-bearing strata. Bell noted 20 feet of petroleum-bearing strata again where the most concentrated development is currently occurring. He would note as well the asphalt and sands but also developed a theory to explain the seepage he witnessed: the tar substance emanating from the banks had been produced from large pools below ground in the limestone. "The attitude and conditions of the strata are favorable for the accumulation of the oil amongst the limestone themselves, and it is therefore to be expected that productive wells will be found by boring into these rocks along the part of the Athabasca where they may be reached" (Bell, 1884, p. 33). This theory is now long debunked, and bitumen would never be as available or easily extractable as Bell had hoped—indeed it requires a much more intensive form of extraction than does conventional crude. Yet Bell's theory, faulty though it may have been, led the federal government in 1894 to approve its first plan for drilling in the Athabasca region; it provided \$7,000, largely on the basis of the claims made by GSC scientists such as Bell (Province of Alberta, 2016).

Another important CGS surveyor, William Ogilvie, kept field notes that describe "limestone exposures with bituminous sandstone overlaying it and tar wells" (Figure 2). Now this location is at the heart of the largest industrial landscape in Canada, the Suncor Millennium mine. But current production belies what was a muddling start. The \$7,000 drilling fund produced no oil and Ogilvie's notations from 1883 mirror much of what the fur traders had experienced: dependency on the Aboriginal populations. Ogilvie shows that the survey posed its own challenges and required Aboriginal guides for transport and supply movement. Rations were often scarce and communication with Ottawa difficult (Larmour, 2005, p. 55). Even with these early drawbacks,

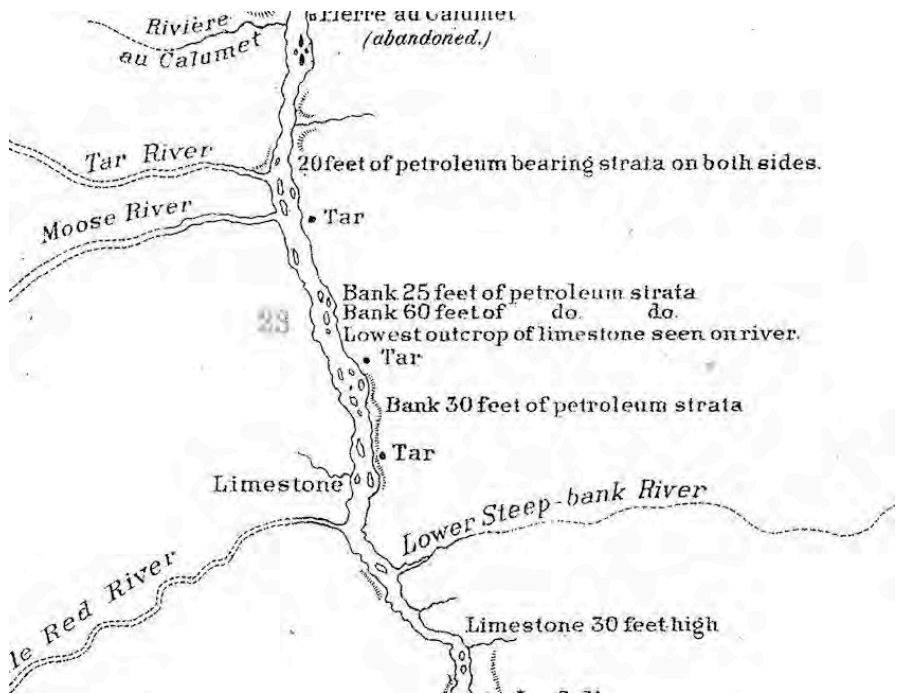


Figure 1: Dr. Robert Bell's Map of the Athabasca River, Provincial Archives of Alberta: 1882.

the potential for development had been established. The project of treaty making was dedicated to enclosing this region for the state for the purposes of mineral development and speculation. In 1899 Canadian nationalist and author Charles Mair joined the treaty expeditions, documenting the process of bringing Aboriginal people and their land into new legal status. This trip took him and several representatives of Queen Victoria through the Peace and Athabasca basins, signing Aboriginal communities either into treaty or individuals into scrip. Like Ogilvie and Bell before him, Mair could see deep into the future and helped to entrench white, European settlement alongside resource speculation. The signing would affect 840,000 square kilometres, and Mair knew much of it would be worth repeated visits:

We are now traversing perhaps the most interesting region in all the North. In the neighbourhood of McMurray there are several tar-wells, so called, and there, if a hole is scraped to the bank, it slowly fills in with tar mingled with sand. . . . That this region is stored with a substance of great economic value is beyond all doubt, and, when the hour of development comes, it will, I believe, prove to be one of the wonders of Northern Canada. We were all deeply impressed by

this scene of Nature's chemistry, and realized what a vast storehouse of not only hidden but exposed resources we possess in this enormous country. (Mair and MacFarlane, 1908, p. 121)

In creating the Department of Mines of Canada, the Geology and Mines Act of 1907 described the duty of the department and made clear the objective of the instrument of survey:

The Minister may for the purpose of obtaining a basis for the representation of the mineral, mining and forestry resources and of the geological features of any part of Canada, cause such measurements, observations, investigations and physiographic, exploratory, and reconnaissance surveys to be made as are necessary for or in connection with the preparation of mining, geological and forestry maps, sketches, plans, sections or diagrams. (Thomson, 1966, p. 241)

Don Thompson, author of *Men and Meridians: The History of Surveying and Mapping in Canada*, writes that the consequence of the formation of this governmental body, and for a period thereafter, was that it remained the only federal organization with the responsibility of assembling information on natural resources. "Accordingly the GSC turned from its initial concern with the broader picture to a steadily growing preoccupation with the needs of a prosperous, vigorous and rapidly developing mineral industry" (Thomson, 1966, p. 250).

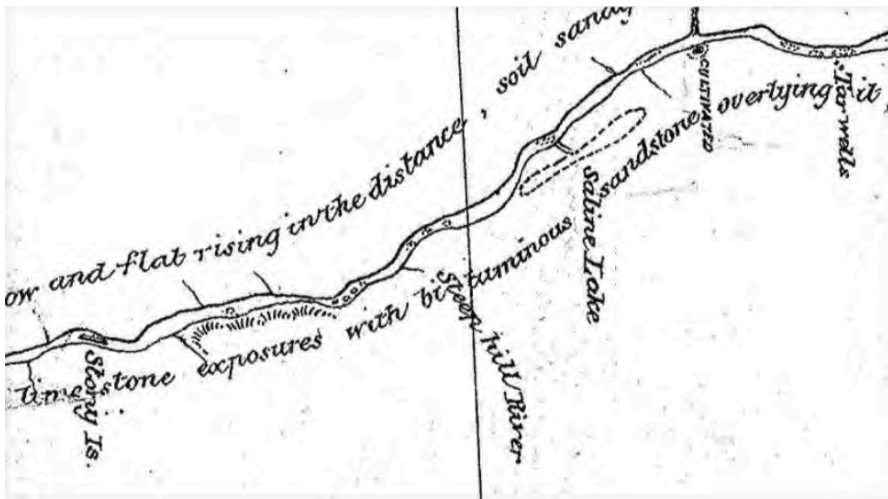


Figure 2: William Ogilvie. Athabasca River Exploratory Survey, Provincial Archives of Alberta: 1884.

Although speculation in the region had slowed down by the time of the First World War (Province of Alberta, 2016), settlement was the logical extension of speculation and claims began to be made along the bank of the Athabasca. The federal government took active and unprecedented steps to establish a settler colonial presence in the region around Fort McMurray. Frank Oliver, federal minister of the interior at the time, intervened directly in this process, motivated by the potential for a struggle over resource development. Because of “the possibility of conflict arising from overlapping claims for tar sands, petroleum and quarriable stone,” Oliver handpicked a Dominion land surveyor to plot the town of Fort McMurray. The chosen surveyor, Henry Selby, was to survey for lots but also “those of the adjoining lands for which demand may be seen in the future” (Larmour, 2005, p. 117–118). Because the end of the war coincided with planning’s professionalization in 1919, the role of geology was grafted onto methods and techniques consistent with the practice of planning; the two were becoming intertwined. To survey was to do planning.

Many scholars have argued that early modern surveying emerged with capitalism (Thompson, 1968) and in the lower Athabasca, this was certainly the case. Through survey, mineral notations become cadastral inscriptions and space is emptied of meaning; a tabula rasa becomes a project of settlement, the *terra nullius* of colonial conquest. As described by Nicholas Blomley, (2003, 129), “The survey helped facilitate a conceptual emptying of space.” In their ambitious study of cadastral mapping, Roger Kain and Elizabeth Baigent note that “[T]he survey was one of the most powerful instruments available to each of the royal colonies . . . for establishing their different political ideals by way of allocating land, their prime resource” (Kain and Baigent, 1992, p. 328). Andrew McRae has also connected the paternal management of property and people to geological survey, which ran in tandem with a paternalistic Aboriginal policy from Ottawa. The grid acts as an abstraction between land and social relations; as Blomley describes via Timothy Mitchell, “Space is marked and divided into places where people are put. In the process, space is desocialized and depoliticized. Yet, at the same time, enframing conceals the processes through which it works as an ordering device” (Blomley, 2003, 127; see also: Mitchell, 1991). The settlers who were moving westward during the late Victorian era became emboldened by their perceived legitimacy corresponding to the state’s understanding of its relationship with land as legitimate and others’ as illegitimate. Settlers, according to McRae, understand “the building of fences and the clearing of land as clear acts through which land in the New World could be appropriated” (McRae in Blomley, 2003: 122; see also: Seed, 1995). The legitimate use of land was one that required the ideology of property relations, where land could be “held, developed or transferred” (McRae, 1993, p. 333). As Richard Sennett

has suggested, the cadastral grid neutralizes space, emptying it of its history and conflict. In colonial settings, this geography is perhaps so common as to be rendered invisible, but the registration represents forms at the frontier of capitalization (Sennett, 1990).

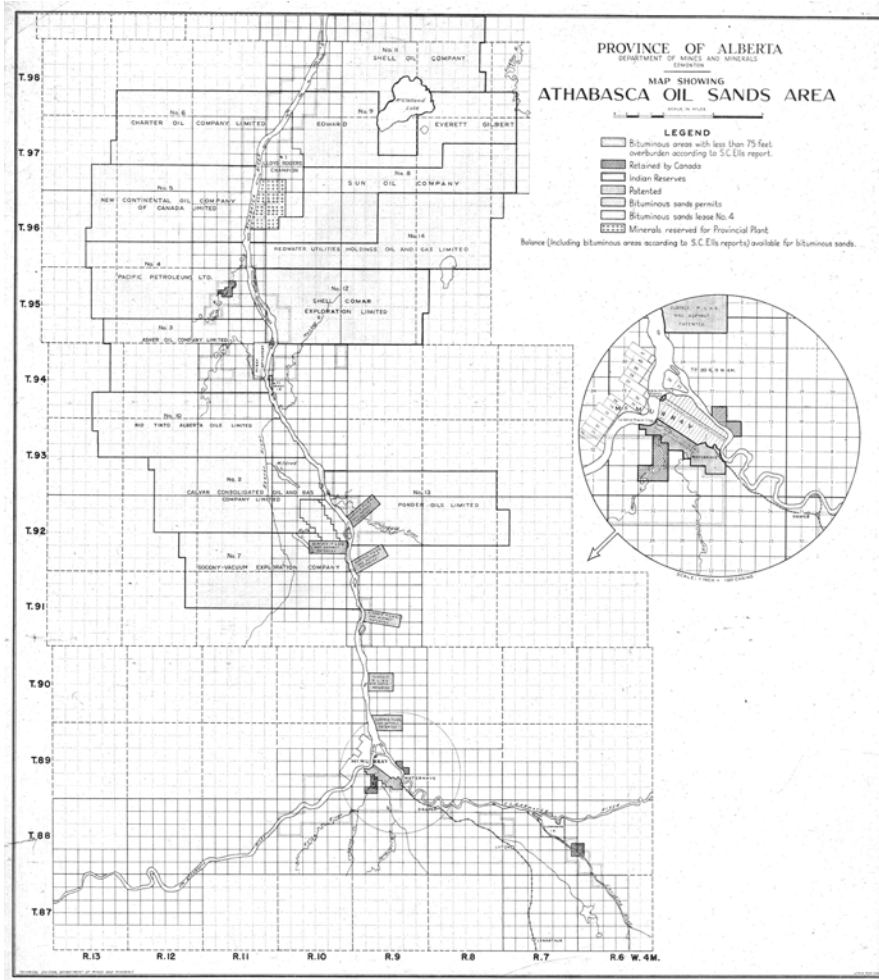


Figure 3: Department of Mines and Minerals. Athabasca Oil Sands Area, Provincial Archives of Alberta: 1952.

In the lower Athabasca, leases became indications of speculative resource urbanism. With Indigenous people marginalized from the resources of the basin, a land rush was initiated; initial oil leases were granted from the province at least as early as 1938, despite the fact that the first commercial

production didn't occur until 1967. The lease maps of this era (Figure 3) demonstrate a generation of enclosure that would eventually render the region a patchwork of the industry's who's who (Including Exxon, the Koch Brothers, Shell, and so on.) by the time the commodities boom in the 21st century transformed the region into one of the most industrially concentrated economies on earth. As Blomley reminds us, "contemporary entitlements and inequalities of property still rely on these foundational surveys and the ways they facilitated violent deterritorialization and reterritorialization" (Blomely, 2003, p. 126). LARP is the continuation of this project, an administrative violence recognizable in the settler society described by Peter McFarlane, wherein Canada "still derives its ultimate legitimacy from the same source: brute force" (McFarlane in Blomley, 2003, p. 128).

Planning Outside the Lines

This historic contextualization of planning's complicity forces settler planners (like me) to question the discipline's relationship to decolonization. In this history, wherein orthodox planning has played an integral role, any engagement with decolonization theory or practice must be handled responsibly and responsively. Planners should seek to act as accomplices to other groups in a nonmonolithic practice. But mere equivocation does not constitute action, which must take into proper consideration a definition of decolonization that engages with a literal politics of land. As Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012, p. 8) argue in their important essay *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, "decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically." Planning deals with land inherently yet works against radical politics. Cadastral mapping and single-use zoning, the type of which is enacted through LARP run counter to the life-form of resurgent economies that rely on flows of energy and habitat. But whereas planning is inherently embedded in the politics of land use, these planning logics are in fact—and counterintuitively—a means of depoliticizing land through the grid, as property and boundary are entrenched in the ideology of settler colonialism. A nonmonolithic definition of planning would allow the practice to step outside of the orthodox and professionalized confines under which it operates and counter the hegemonic norms on which planning has become reliant. Only then may we entertain the idea that planning may itself participate effectively alongside decolonization struggles.

The grid is a hegemonic ordering of space; a counterplanning practice may emerge in opposition to such conceptions of spatial order. Given the survey's role in "the imposition of a new economic and spatial order

on 'new territory,' either erasing the precapitalist indigenous settlement or confining it to particular areas" (Kain and Baigent, 1992, p. 328), we can allow ourselves a reading of planning as wedded to capital through enclosure and a Lefebvrian understanding of spatial-historical dialecticism. Geisler describes the process of enclosure as it spread across the American west: "Homelands became frontiers, and within those frontiers new enclosures of almost unimagined variety 'pulverized' what they found in their path. Through the lens made familiar by Henri Lefebvre, a new geographical space has been produced and an old one retired, and not by mutual agreement" (Geisler, 2014, p. 74). Stark differences in the American and Canadian contexts notwithstanding, this similar, general process of enclosure demands a reconciliation between urban theory and history.

Existing theoretical frameworks in planning allow us to imagine what work ought to be done in the settler colonial context in order to engage with decolonization politics. This engagement will be a reflexive move, similar to how John Pløger (2001; 2004) and Clara Irazabál (2009) encourage planners to work towards emancipation, with the latter describing emancipation as emerging when the planner is reflexively aware of their role in reproducing social relations and in turn empowered to change dominant hegemonic power structures (Pløger, 2001). According to theorist Faranak Miraftab, insurgent planning needs to be associated as much with the practice (planning) as with the actor (the insurgent planner) (Miraftab, 2009). In Canada, reconciling the plan and the survey recognizes planning's own complicity in the historic dispossession of Indigenous lands, and only from here may transformed perspectives of a new professional identity emerge. For planning to adapt itself as a discipline and to ally with decolonization movements, a radical form of planning is required that encompasses both a reflexive means of understanding its history and its ongoing complicity in settlement through the tools (grid, survey) and instruments available. Although a call for planning to address decolonization is bound to run up against contradictions, I believe that we, as a profession, ought to ask whether this is possible and, if so, how we may aid in this project. Moving away from communicative planning theory, agonism, based on the philosophy of Chantal Mouffe (1999; 2000), is based upon "permanent provocation" (Foucault in Pløger, 2004, p. 74) and "strife" (Lyotard in Pløger, 2004, p. 72-74). Orthodox planning models have relied on consensus-based approaches and rarely resolve disputes, instead reproducing power relations (Porter, 2011, p. 478). Agonism takes conflict as a given and accepts planning as a political discipline (McGuirk, 2001, p. 214). Agonism, helpful here in so far as it rejects consensus, ought to be seen in productive tension with the related subtheoretical practice of

insurgent planning. The insurgent planner directly confronts settler colonialism and capitalist power relations. This form of counterplanning does not abandon planning but seeks to understand it in its historical context in order to better unravel the accepted epistemological expectations that foreclose on discussions of land and decolonization from inside the discipline, in pursuit of a nonmonolithic practice that would be better equipped to confront the settler state and ally itself as an accomplice alongside decolonization movements.

“Decolonizing our approaches to urban planning and policy requires that we consciously decenter ‘Western’ authority over procedural and substantive knowledges that dominate and presume cultural neutrality” (Walker and Belanger, 2013, p. 196), write Ryan Walker and Yale Belanger in their study of Aboriginal planning policy on the Canadian Prairies. And by means of “expanding its repertoire” (Walker and Belanger, 2013, p. 196), planning as a cultural practice would replace this colonial and extractivist logic, tied to centralized state bureaucracies. Australian theorist Libby Porter has worked towards radical model of coexistence. According to her, planning with clear intentions to promote Indigenous claims “question[s] the foundations of Western planning: its conceptualizations of space and place, its understanding of human–environment relationships, and its assumptions about the correct forms of governance and management of both those things” (Porter, 2013, p. 478). Similar to agonism and insurgent planning, coexistence, as called for by Porter, is “comfortable with conflict and the possibility of incommensurability. It does not seek to resolve away the tensions inherent in any post-colonial relationship, but sees that as constitutive of this particular social domain” (Porter, 2013, p. 291). In sum, these theories recognize planning’s contradictions and the conflict that is inherent in the act of planning, turning on orthodox models that seek objectivity and, perhaps most importantly, deny a monolithic professionalization of planning the fundamental value that has historically been ascribed to it. Promoting a nonmonolithic practice requires amplifying existing practices based on traditional knowledge and an economy of fishing, hunting, trapping, and gathering, which allows us to return to the current planning regime in the Lower Athabasca.

The ACFN and MCFN’s Traditional Land Resource Use Management Plan (TLRUMP) represents an effort to prioritize knowledge of land over industrial development and understand the scope of history from which planning regimes have emerged. The TLRUMP intends to offer a means of providing information on resources and the rights associated with them, as well management and consultation processes with both federal and provincial

authorities. In the words of the ACFN and MCFN, the TLRUMP would “provide information necessary to understand the land and resource uses, interests and rights of the First Nations in Provincial and Federal land and resource management planning, decision-making and consultation processes” (King and Lepine, 2010, p. 3) and begin to confront that which is missing from LARP itself. The very intention of the TLRUMP recognizes the disparity between Indigenous and colonial modes of planning. Through this plan, capacities could be built that would allow a community such as the ACFN or MCFN to more fully and adequately be represented within provincial planning processes. “The purpose of the TLRUMP is to provide scientifically credible and culturally appropriate information on the land and resource requirements of the ACFN for the meaningful exercise of Treaty 8 rights—now and into the future” (King and Lepine, 2010, p. 3). The development of this alternate approach is an important step towards sovereignty. Given this, Alberta’s minister of the environment, Shannon Phillips,⁷ —a member of the now ruling New Democratic Party— has recognized the importance of the consultation process: “[This] is an opportunity for me to listen to the input that First Nations and Métis have when it comes to managing cumulative impacts and land-use planning” (Giovannetti and Cryderman, 2015). Although the consultation process was emphasized in LARP, the development of the TLRUMP and the conflicting interpretations of value around Jackfish Lake and the Richardson backcountry demonstrate that the communicative strategies developed by the provincial planning authorities are irreconcilable. Although the TLRUMP remains one of many tools being leveraged by First Nations in opposition to continued colonial development, the ACFN and MCFN have made it clear that honoring their rights to land-based economies and livelihoods will require not policy reform but a transformation in the way settler society lives with, knows, and shares resources with First Nations. This is detailed in their letter requesting a review of LARP:

The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation submits that the reduction of its relationship to its lands to a line on a map, or the square kilometres within said line, is overly simplistic and ignores the cultural reality that different parts of traditional lands are relied on for different resources, at different times. It also ignores the Dene cultural reality that knowledge about the land is more than simply physical features that can be empirically discovered and charted. (Daniels, 2014, p. 4)

This statement reflects a way of life that is incongruous with cadastral mapping and single-use land-use management. The concepts of property and boundary are entrenched in the ideology of colonialism, and they become

acute during the planning process. In the dynamic that plays out between orthodox planning, its history of dispossession, and the methods that are used to contextualize and resist the dispossession that arises from these regimes, I see an opportunity to remake the practice of planning; much of the theoretical work is already being done outside of the planning profession, as we have seen with Blomley and others. Building on the work of Indigenous legal scholars such as John Borrows (2015; 2016) and Val Napoleon (2005), Métis scholar Zoe Todd's work provides some contemporary and valuable insight. Todd's work is based on principles of ethical relationality, wherein colonizers and colonized alike share in the project of decolonization, and of theories of principled pragmatism. (For "ethical relationality," see: Donald, 2009; For "principled pragmatism," see: Kuptana, 2014). These concepts should have more resonance within planning theory. Todd's work has looked at human-animal relationships, particularly in arctic Canada, which allows one to shift away from anthropocentric frameworks and acknowledge the plurality of legal orders in Canada. Kinship and relatedness are given as examples that often fall outside of the priorities of state planning. "The way we build cities and the way we construct cities have largely erased those duties and obligations, and have shifted our understanding of how we come to be in these places" (Todd, 2016). Orienting practice towards these responsibilities, planning needs to be extremely careful to avoid any form of incorporation or assimilation, and work towards a means of confronting the past while accounting for a proper politics of decolonization. To the settler planner, these kinship models may offer a means of working towards a different world—and profession. In a recent talk at the University of Toronto's John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, Todd (2016) described her theory of "refraction" as

[t]he ways in which Indigenous actors work within and between legal orders and knowledge systems in order to operate within the layered and embedded structures, institutions, and power relations of ongoing colonialism in Canada. So through refractions, colonial logics are scattered and redirected through Indigenous kinship stories, cosmologies, in order to maintain local self-determination with regards to human-environmental and human-animal relations. (Todd, 2016)

Todd's research on the Paulatuuqmiut of Arctic Canada's involves "fish pluralities"—the multiple ways of knowing fish from within Inuvialuit culture—and the non-Eurocentric patterns of economy and social relations that emerge from this relationship wherein people, fish, and land become more enmeshed in social relations and policy (Todd, 2014). As the

nonhuman assumes a more centralized role, navigating colonial legal order becomes less intelligible without reference to and registration of Indigenous knowledge. Todd described her work as “an intervention into imaginaries of cities existing without responsibility, and looks to centre the non-human in discourses where Indigenous territories are compromised by ongoing colonial interventions” (Todd, 2016). To Todd, a new means of thinking through the process of resistance to settler models would sit alongside Indigenous resurgence, and refraction itself acts as a valuable complement to other strategies of decolonization.

In describing the tar sands as a product of settler colonialism, Preston has written, “This history of corporate and government alliance, which ultimately functioned to strip Indigenous Nations of their land base, is still at work” (Preston, 2013, p. 48). Although there may be a tendency to view the environmental violence of the tar sands as a series of passing events or crises, a more ecological and sociohistorical account of the region’s development necessitates action. As planners concerned with the means by which we may confront the settler colonial present, a method of planning must be devised that incorporates the flows of energy and history and denies the spatial supremacy of the grid.

Postscript: *Meet the New Boss?*

In large part as a result of the resistance by First Nations, including the Athabasca Chipewyan and Mikisew Cree, LARP is now under review. Requests for a review of LARP came from six Aboriginal groups in total. In the summer of 2014, in accordance with the Alberta Land Stewardship Regulation, a panel was convened to review and offer advice on determining how Aboriginal communities were “directly and adversely affected by either a specific provision or provisions in the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan” (Province of Alberta, 2014). In May 2015, Alberta’s centre-left New Democratic Party (NDP) was elected after 44 years of Conservative party rule. The panel was convened during the final months of the Conservative reign and the NDP has simply inherited it. In February 2016, an embargoed report to the First Nations panel was obtained by Canadian media, running in Canada’s largest circulating national daily, *The Globe and Mail*. What the Alberta government intends to do with the findings remain unclear. However, the initial details of the report confirm the claims made by Indigenous communities (Weber, 2016; Carmichael, 2016). The findings have not been officially released publicly but have been shared with the six First Nations that initiated the review. In the case of inclusivity, the report is damning, suggesting that the government did not properly integrate First Nations into the planning process.

Importantly, the findings reveal an understanding of the consequences of continuing without the full integration of First Nations' knowledge, and the panel recommends the development of a "traditional land use management framework." As Eriel Deranger, spokesperson for the ACFN, explains, "Failing to implement such a framework leaves industry, regulators, stakeholders, governments, and First Nations asking important questions about Aboriginal Peoples' constitutionally protected rights in their Traditional Land Use territories, which conflict with future development activities in the Lower Athabasca Region" (Deranger in Carmichael, 2016).

The region has seen a series of shocks since LARP was first approved and since it came up for review (the review is ongoing), not least of which have been the province's election of an NDP government and the bottoming out of the price of oil, which has temporarily halted much of the tar sands production; indeed its production is at the slowest rate since its initial boom in 2003. These two changes have altered the labour dynamics of the region while placing the government in a position to act with a different sense of priorities. In addition, in the Summer of 2016, the region's worst-ever wildfire was a reminder of the fragility of orthodox planning. The fires have devastated the region, including the major city of Fort McMurray, where hundreds of structures were destroyed and entire neighborhoods cleared. That the region needs to undergo a massive change in planning has merely been exposed through these events.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the support of my graduate advisor Neil Brenner during the initial research phase of this paper and subsequent guidance from Emily Gilbert and Kanishka Goonewardena. I would also like to thank the staff of the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton and especially John and Alice Rigney in Fort Chipewyan, whose hospitality and generosity made this work possible. This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Penny White Project Fund at Harvard Graduate School of Design.

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