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Frequently Asked Questions

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What is RAMP?

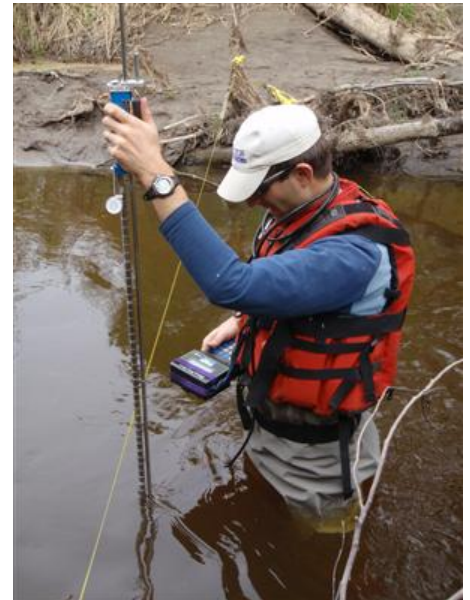
Initiated in 1997, the Regional Aquatics Monitoring Program (RAMP) is a science-based, joint environmental monitoring program that assesses the health of rivers and lakes in the oil sands region of northeastern Alberta.

The program is designed to identify and address potential impacts of oil sands development and is frequently adjusted to reflect monitoring results, technological advances and community concerns.

What are the objectives of the RAMP Program?

RAMP's objectives are to:

- Monitor aquatic environments in the Athabasca oil sands region to detect and assess cumulative effects and regional trends;
- Collect baseline data to characterize natural variability in the aquatic environment in the Athabasca oil sands region;
- Collect and compare data against which predictions contained in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) can be assessed;
- Collect data that satisfy the monitoring required by regulatory approvals of oil sands and other developments;
- Collect data that satisfy the monitoring requirements of company-specific community agreements;
- Recognize and incorporate traditional environmental knowledge into monitoring and assessment activities;
- Communicate monitoring and assessment activities, results and recommendations to communities in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, regulatory agencies and other interested parties;
- Continuously review and adjust the program to incorporate monitoring results, technological advances, community concerns, and new or changed project approval conditions; and
- Conduct a periodic peer review of the program's results against its objectives, and recommend adjustments necessary for the program's continued success.



Source: Hatfield Consultants 2009
(click to enlarge)

What aspects of the environment does RAMP monitor?

RAMP monitors the following environmental components:

1. Climate and hydrology
2. Benthic invertebrate communities
3. Water and sediment quality
4. Fish populations
5. Acid sensitive lakes

What area is involved in the Study?

The RAMP Regional Study Area (RSA) is defined by the northeastern Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. The RAMP RSA is bounded by the Alberta-Saskatchewan border on the east, the Alberta-Northwest Territories to the northeast, the Wood Buffalo National Park to the northwest and various demarcations including the Athabasca River and Cold Lake Air Weapons Range to the south. Within the Regional Study area is the Focal Study area and this area is defined by the watersheds in which oil sands development is occurring or will occur as well as portions of the Athabasca and Clearwater rivers found within the RSA.

RAMP has focused on these main aquatic systems:

- The Athabasca River and Peace Athabasca delta.

- Tributaries to the Athabasca River including the Steepbank, Clearwater -Christina, Hangingstone, Ells, Tar, Firebag, Calumet, Muskeg, MacKay Rivers as well as several smaller tributaries.
- Wetlands and lakes occurring near current and proposed oil sands developments (Isadore's Lake, Shipyard Lake, McClelland Lake and Kearn Lake).
- Acid sensitive lakes in northeastern Alberta.
- Regional lakes important to fisheries.

Is water quality testing for human health part of the RAMP program?

Human health is not within the mandate of RAMP, but is the responsibility of Health Canada, Alberta Health and Wellness and the Northern Lights Health Region. Representatives from these organizations sit on the RAMP Steering Committee to keep informed on results of the environmental monitoring, particularly with respect to issues that may influence human health.

Who performs the analysis on samples collected by RAMP?

The analyses of environmental samples collected as part of RAMP are analyzed by a variety of laboratories. All commercial laboratories are formerly accredited and every effort is made to ensure all quality assurance and control procedures are adequate for RAMP's needs. Below is a list of key laboratories that RAMP uses:

- ALS Environmental - most water and sediment quality analyses
- Alberta Research Council - some ultratrace metal analyses
- AXYS Laboratories - sediment concentrations of [PAHs](#)
- HydroQual - water and sediment toxicity analyses
- Flett Research - mercury analysis in non-lethal fish tissue samples
- Jack Zloty - benthic invertebrate taxonomy

How can we trust RAMP to deliver accurate results?

RAMP is governed by a multi-stakeholder committee with representatives from all levels of government, Aboriginal communities, and industry. The Terms of Reference outlines issues of governance specific to RAMP and was developed to ensure all groups represented in RAMP are part of the decision process.

All data collected by RAMP are submitted on an annual basis to regulatory agencies within Alberta Environment, Environment Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for their assessment of the program and results.

Finally, RAMP periodically undertakes a scientific peer review of the entire program. Reviews are conducted to obtain an independent evaluation of the monitoring design and whether it is meeting the objectives of the program and the needs of local stakeholders. The first Peer Review was conducted in 2004 and provided helpful recommendations to improve and refine the program. Many of the recommendations have been implemented over the past 5 years, as the recent annual report and the Design and Rationale document demonstrate. In June 2010, an External Peer Review of the technical aspects of RAMP was initiated, and is expected to be completed by the end of 2010. The results of the 2010 Peer Review will be made publically available.

How do I find the results from this year's RAMP monitoring program?

Please refer to [Technical Reports](#) under the [Monitoring Results](#) section of the RAMP website: <http://www.ramp-alberta.org/ramp/results.aspx>

Does RAMP use Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in their work?

RAMP encourages the incorporation of traditional knowledge in our work. We have Aboriginal representation on our committees and these Aboriginal groups have had input into the design of the program. We have fostered collaboration and transfer of information through open houses and Aboriginal field assistance. We have also directly asked Aboriginal groups how TEK can be better incorporated into the program. RAMP is also looking for relevant capacity building initiatives within First Nations communities of the region.

RAMP has formed a pilot Elders Advisory Group with Fort McKay, an Aboriginal community in the area, to facilitate the incorporation of TEK into the monitoring program. RAMP plans to expand the Elders Advisory Group to other communities in the future.

How does RAMP communicate with regional stakeholders?

RAMP encourages an ongoing dialogue with regional stakeholders. RAMP is committed to regular reporting of results through annual and community reports, the RAMP website, community open houses, trade shows and special presentations. RAMP often partners with CEMA and WBEA in order to provide a regional perspective of environmental monitoring activities. RAMP also employs a communications consultant to help improve communication and education and to increase RAMP's profile in the region.

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