

Stepping Stones



NUMBERED TREATIES WITHIN ALBERTA: TREATY 6

Planning your learning journey

What are Treaties and who are the signatories of Treaty 6?



Adapted from
<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100032297/1544716489360>

*Note: This map shows the approximate area of Treaty land as there is no consensus between rightsholders and stakeholders about exact Treaty boundaries.

FIRST STEPS



“The Government of Canada and the courts understand treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal people to be solemn agreements that set out promises, obligations and benefits for both parties.”¹

From the perspective of First Nations, Treaties are built on respectful, cooperative and nation-to-nation relationships between First Nations and the Crown on behalf of present and future generations. Treaties outline the rights, obligations and benefits of the signing parties to each other. The intention of the Crown was to gain title to the Lands through Treaties. First Nations had other beliefs surrounding the negotiations of the Treaty. To First Nations, these Treaties are about sharing Land and resources and not extinguishment of title. The intent and provisions of the Treaties do not end. This was acknowledged through a ceremonial and sacred agreement² that incorporated the spirit and intent for Treaties to last “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and rivers flow.”³





Treaties describe a way of life and living in relation to each other and the Land.

There are 11 numbered Treaties across Canada, with Treaties 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 being within Alberta's provincial boundary. First Nations within the territory now known as Alberta were concerned with the alarming spread of diseases, such as smallpox, and the decimation of the buffalo due to overhunting. As a result, they felt that the signing of the Treaty would ensure the survival of their people.

How did Treaty 6 come to be?

Treaty 6 covers the central west portions of present-day Alberta and Saskatchewan. It was first signed on August 23, 1876, at Fort Carlton and on September 9, 1876, at Fort Pitt, Saskatchewan between the Crown and Nehiyawak, Denesuliné, Nakota Sioux and Anishinaabe. Adhesions (further signatories) were made throughout Saskatchewan and Alberta, including at Fort Edmonton in 1877, at Blackfoot Crossing in 1877, at Sounding Lake in 1879, and at Rocky Mountain House in 1944 and 1950.⁴

What obligations, rights and benefits are included in Treaty 6?

From the Crown's perspective, all Treaties included the surrendering of large parcels of Land to the Crown, with small parcels set aside for reserve land. First Nations signatories to Treaty 6⁵, however, were assured that they were agreeing to share the Land and its resources rather than to completely surrender it to the Crown. *Asotamaakewina* (promises) made in the Treaty "recognize the Medicine Chest Clause, Famine and Pestilence Clause as well as the rights to

Health, Education and other Treaty and Inherent Rights". First Nations within Treaty have Inherent Rights, such as "The Right to Self-Determination which includes, governance and establishing institutions, The Right to protect and preserve our lands, resources and water, The Right to preserve our languages, practice our cultural customs and ceremonies, and The Right to hunt, fish, trap and gather"⁶.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE OF TREATY 6 IN CENTRAL ALBERTA?

Treaty 6 encompasses 16 First Nations⁷ in central Alberta, including the Nehiyawak, Denesuliné, Nakota Sioux and Anishinaabe.

Denesuliné were known as Chipewyan, a Nehiyawak term that refers to their manner of dress. *Chip-way-yan Enoowuk* means "pointed-hood-wearing people." Cold Lake First Nations⁸ are within Treaty 6 territory. Over 30 different Denesuliné Nations span across a large area from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories to Cold Lake, Alberta. The Denesuliné are part of the larger group called the Dene Nation. Cold Lake First Nations reside within the territory around present-day Cold Lake, in the northeast of the province, close to the Saskatchewan border. With the creation of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range in 1952, Cold Lake First Nation lost much of their traditional territory, and they continue to fight to practice their Treaty rights.

Nehiyawak (Cree), or "the four-bodied people," in *nēhiyawēwin* (Cree), make up the largest



Adrian LaChance, Running Thunder Dancer, originally from James Cree First Nation, shares his traditional dance style during the Alberta Teachers' Associations' 2017 DEHR Conference



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Example of medal presented to commemorate Treaty No. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

population of Indigenous Peoples in Treaty 6. Nehiyawak⁹ migrated westward as hunters and traders. Nehiyawak Nations in Treaty 6 territory include the Alexander First Nation, Beaver Lake Cree Nation, Enoch Cree Nation, Frog Lake First Nation, Heart Lake First Nation, Kehewin Cree Nation, Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Sunchild First Nation and Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation. The Sharphead Band was considered abandoned by the government.¹⁰ The Papaschase¹¹ and Pakan¹² bands were strongly influenced and coerced to relinquish title.¹³ The Michel Band¹⁴ was the only group in Canada to be forcibly mass enfranchised. Samson Cree Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe and Montana First Nation are members of the Four Nations of Maskwacis. Nēhiyawak have long gathered in *Maskwacîsihk* (Bear Hills) for social and spiritual purposes, and continue to do so today alongside many other Nations.

Nakota Sioux are also known as Stoney, which refers to the custom of preparing food using heated stones; the Nehiyawak term for stone is *asini* and the Sioux term is *pwaatak*. The French wrote the word as Assiniboine. In parts of Canada, they are known as *Assiniboine*. The Siouan language family includes many different branches and “the three Siouan languages spoken in Canada all belong to the Dakotan branch: Nakoda (Stoney), spoken in Alberta, Nakota (Assiniboine), spoken in Saskatchewan, and Dakota-Lakota (Sioux), spoken in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.¹⁵” The Nakota Sioux allied themselves with the Cree. The Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation¹⁶ is located near the sacred lake *Wakâ Mne* (*nēhiyawēwin* for Creator’s

Lake) or Lac Ste Anne. The lake remains a spiritual gathering place during the annual Lac Ste Anne pilgrimage. Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation also has reserve land near Hinton and Whitecourt on historical hunting grounds.

Paul First Nation are of Nehiyawak and Nakoda Sioux ancestry. Paul First Nation are approximately 30 kms northwest of present day Edmonton, Alberta.

Anishnaabe (Saulteaux) O’Chiese First Nation¹⁷ is located near Rocky Mountain House. Today, the O’Chiese people are of Anishnaabe and Nehiyawak ancestry. O’Chiese First Nation were the last to sign an adhesion to Treaty 6 in 1950. There are a variety of interpretations about where the Saulteaux people of O’Chiese First Nation are from because their history states they came from various areas. Some accounts claim they travelled west for trapping. The Plains Ojibwa, or Anishinaabe, who moved to the west are known as Saulteaux, the French term meaning “people of the rapids.” Anishinabek people are most commonly found in central Canada.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MELISSA BIRD. CLOSEUP OF DESIGN PAINTED ON POWWOW DRUM

NEXT STEPS



Treaties are the basic building blocks of the relationship between First Nations and the rest of Canada.

—Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Saskatchewan

Reconciliation is about understanding the past and working together to reimagine a new future. As Treaty people we all have rights and obligations with respect to the Land we live on and each other. First Nations included the power of Ceremony and the sacred pipe in Treaty negotiations. Inclusion of the sacred pipe attested to the seriousness and spiritual connection of the Treaties because of the utmost sanctity of the pipe. The presence of the sacred pipe meant that Treaties are sacred agreements from the perspective of First Nations peoples and that the Creator was a witness and was the third party in Treaty making.

The phrase “We are all treaty people” emphasizes that all individuals residing in Canada, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have a shared responsibility and connection to the Treaties established between First Nations and the Crown.

Learning which Treaty territory you reside in can be a meaningful step forward, especially when it is accompanied by ongoing actions to remember, renew and honour Treaty rights and responsibilities to each other and to the Land.

Continuing Your Learning Journey

a) How can you increase awareness about and honour your responsibilities within Treaty relations?

b) How do differing world views about Treaty agreements between First Nations and the Crown impact Treaty relations today?

NOTES

1. Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAF). "Treaties and Agreements." Government of Canada website. www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1529354437231.
2. INAC, "Treaty Research Report – Treaty Six (1876)." Also available at <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028706/1564413507531>.
3. Morris, Alexander. *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories: Including the Negotiations on Which They Were Based, and Other Information Relating Thereto* (Toronto: Willing & Williamson, 1880).
4. Canadian Encyclopedia, "Treaty 6," <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treaty-6/>.
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7. The Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, "Treaty 6 Member Nations." <https://www.treatysix.org>.
8. Cold Lake First Nation, "About us." <https://clfn.com/about-us/>.
9. Canadian Encyclopedia, "Cree." <https://slcn125.ca/>.
10. APTN National News, "Remains of 28 First Nations people reburied after nearly 50 years in storage," APTN National News, October 20, 2014. <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/first-nation-remains-reburied-nearly-50-years-storage/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIt%20feels%20good%20because%20the,people%20are%20no%20longer%20wandering.%E2%80%9D&text=MASKWACIS%2C%20Alta.%2C%20%E2%80%93%20The,University%20of%20Alberta%27s%20anthropology%20department>.
11. <https://ochiese.ca/>.
12. <https://slcn125.ca/>.
13. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/25-billion-edmonton-land-claim-proceeding-to-trial/article4113817>.
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15. https://languagemuseum.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/indigenous_languages_in_canada_0.pdf.
16. Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation, "Heritage and History." <https://www.ansn.ca/>.
17. O'Chiese First Nation, "History." <https://www.ochiese.ca/ourhistory>.



Stepping Stones is a publication of the Alberta Teachers' Association's Indigenous Education and Walking Together programs and supports for teachers. This resource series is intended to provide entry points in the development and application of First Nations, Métis and Inuit foundational knowledge.

The Alberta Teachers' Association is grateful for contributions from First Nations, Métis and Inuit Elders, Knowledge Keepers, teachers, school leaders and community members in developing these resources.

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Walking Together

EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION



The Alberta Teachers' Association