

Stepping Stones



FIRST NATIONS TREATIES IN ALBERTA: TREATY 6

Planning your learning journey

What are treaties and who are the First Nation signatories of Treaty 6?



Adapted from AADNC
https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/htoc_1100100032308_eng.pdf

*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



What are treaties?

Treaties are constitutionally binding agreements between sovereign nations that set out the conditions for a peaceful alliance and the extinguishment of title from First Nations, from the Crown's perspective. This was to allow immigration, settlement and a transfer of land title to the British Crown, as set out in the royal Proclamation of 1763. From the perspective of Indigenous people, treaties are built on an assumption of a respectful, cooperative and bilateral relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Treaties outline the rights, benefits and obligations of the signing parties to each other. The treaties in Canada are between the Crown and signing First Nations and reflect the worldviews and understanding of identity of the signing peoples. The intent and provisions of the treaties do not end. This was assigned through a ceremonial and sacred agreement that incorporates the spirit and intent for treaties to last, "as long as the sun shines, the grass grows."

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Treaties are the law of the land in the relationship between First Nations and the rest of Canada.

There are 11 numbered treaties across Canada, with Treaties 6, 7 and 8 encompassing most of Alberta. The reasons to sign treaties differed for the two signatory groups. The British Crown, and later the Canadian government, wanted land for agriculture, settlement and resource development. The signing of treaty by the Crown was to extinguish Indigenous title to land so that the Crown could then exert claim. The First Nations in the territory now known as Alberta were concerned with the spread of diseases such as smallpox, and the dramatic disappearance of the bison, a main food source. They felt the signing of the treaty would ensure the survival of their people. The pipe ceremony conducted prior to the signing of a treaty had strong cultural and spiritual significance. Participating in the sacred ceremony required the signing parties to speak the truth during negotiations and to keep any commitments made in its presence.

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 6, 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 to the First Nations included farm equipment, farm animals, annuities, ammunition, and rights to hunt and fish on traditional territory. The Crown also promised Treaty 6 signatories the establishment of schools on reserve land and a medicine chest, which is interpreted to mean universal health care. To address the concern over loss of traditional food sources, a promise of rations during times of pestilence and famine was added.



Adrian LaChance, the talented Running Thunder Dancer, originally from James Cree First Nation, performs a traditional dance at Barnett House.

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, Cree, Chipweyan and Stoney nations. Adhesions (further signatories) were made throughout Saskatchewan and Alberta including Fort Edmonton in 1877, Blackfoot Crossing in 1877, Sounding Lake in 1879, and Rocky Mountain House in 1944 and 1950.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE OF TREATY 6 IN CENTRAL ALBERTA?

Treaty 6 encompasses 17 First Nations in central Alberta including the Dene Suliné, Cree, Nakota Sioux and Saulteaux peoples.

Denesuliné are also known as Chipewyan, a Cree term that refers to their manner of dress. *Chip-way-yan Enoowuk* means "pointed-hood-wearing people." The Cold Lake First Nations is the governing body for people



Indian Chiefs Medal, Presented to commemorate Treaty Numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

descended from several different Dene Suliné historic groups in Treaty 6. They occupy 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, the Cold Lake First Nation lost of much of their traditional territory and continue to fight to practice their treaty rights.

Cree *Nehiyawak*, or “the people,” in the Cree language, make up the largest population of Indigenous people in Treaty 6. The term *Cree* is a contraction of *Kristenaux*, the French Jesuit spelling of *Kenistino*, the name given to the Indigenous people of the James Bay area by the Anishnabe and later the French fur traders. Cree people migrated westward as hunters and traders. Cree Nations in Treaty 6 include 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 the Whitefish/ Goodfish Cree Nation. The Sharphead Band was considered abandoned by the government. The Papaschase and Pakan bands were strongly influenced and coerced to relinquish title. The Michel Band was the only group in Canada to be forcibly mass enfranchised. The Samson Cree Nation, Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe and Montana First Nation are members of the Four Nations of Maskwacis. Cree people used to gather in the Bear Hills, or *Maskwacisihk*, for social and spiritual purposes.

Nakota Sioux are also known as Stoney, which refers to the custom of preparing food using heated stones; the Cree 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*. Nakota Sioux are part of the individual nations of three separate groups: Dakota, Lakota and Nakota. The Nakota Sioux allied themselves with the Cree. The Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation is located near the sacred lake *Wakamne, Manto Sahkahikan* (Cree) or Lac Ste Anne. The lake remains a spiritual centre during the annual Lake Ste Anne pilgrimage. Reserve land was also created near Hinton and Whitecourt on historical hunting territories.

The Paul First Nation, or Paul Band, is of mixed Cree and Nakoda origin.

Saulteaux The O’Chiese First Nation is located near Rocky Mountain House, and O’Chiese people today are of Saulteaux and Cree ancestry. The O’Chiese First Nation were the last to sign an adhesion to Treaty 6 in 1950. There are a variety of interpretations of where the Saulteaux people of O’Chiese derived from. Their history states that the people of O’Chiese 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.

NEXT STEPS



“Treaties are the law of the land in the relationship between First Nations and the rest of Canada.”

Office of the Treaty
Commissioner of
Saskatchewan

Reconciliation is about understanding the past and working together to build a new future. First Nations people today view the treaties as a sacred covenant that applies to all the land in the treaty area, not just reserved land. “We are all treaty people” means that we all have rights and obligations with respect to the treaty area. Many school jurisdictions and schools demonstrate understanding of treaties during meetings and events by acknowledging the current and historical rights and contributions of First Nations people who have shared their land with Canadians. Statements of treaty land acknowledgements are also posted on the walls of some school buildings. As well, introducing First Nations elders and leaders who are in attendance shows honour and respect for our peaceful coexistence and shared community.

Continuing Your Learning Journey

a) What does the phrase, “We are all treaty people” mean? Do all people of Treaty 6 benefit equally?

b) How do differing world views impact the interpretation of treaty provisions in modern times?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

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Stepping Stones is a publication of the Alberta Teachers’ Association **Walking Together Project** intended to support certificated teachers on their learning journey to meet the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Foundational Knowledge competency in the Teaching Quality Standard.

Walking Together would like to acknowledge the contributions of Alberta’s First Nations, Métis and Inuit elders and community members in developing these resources.

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