

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 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



“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 for their own claim. First Nations had other beliefs surrounding the negotiations of the treaty. To the First Nations these treaties are about sharing the 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 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 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 residing in Alberta. The First Nations in 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 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, Cree, Chipewyan 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 1950.⁴

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 6](#)⁵, 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.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE OF TREATY 6 IN CENTRAL ALBERTA?

[Treaty 6 encompasses 17 First Nations](#)⁶ in central Alberta including the Denesuliné, 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](#)⁷ is the governing body for people descended from several different Denesuliné 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.



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



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

Cree *Nehiyawak*, or “the four-bodied people,” in the Cree language, make up the largest population of Indigenous people in Treaty 6. [Cree](#)⁸ 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 government⁹. The [Papaschase](#)¹⁰ and [Pakan](#)¹¹ bands were strongly influenced and [coerced to relinquish title](#)¹². The [Michel Band](#)¹³ 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](#)¹⁴

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](#)¹⁵ 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 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 build a new future. “We are all treaty people” means that we all have rights and obligations with respect to this land and each other.

Many schools are on their journey towards understanding that “We are all treaty people” and choose to acknowledge the treaty territory on which they reside. Also, schools are fostering and developing relationships with Indigenous people and communities, which is an essential component on the path towards reconciliation.



MELISSA PURCELL

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?

NOTES

1. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), “Treaties with Aboriginal People in Canada,” <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032291/1100100032292>
2. INAC, “Treaty Research Report – Treaty Six (1876),” <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/110028706/1100100028708>
3. Alexander Morris, *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/>
5. INAC, “Treaty Research Report – Treaty Six (1876),” <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100028706/1100100028708>
6. the Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations, “Treaty 6 Member Nations,” http://treatysix.org/member_nations/
7. Cold Lake First Nation, “About us,” <https://clfn.com/about-us/>
8. Canadian Encyclopedia, “Cree,” <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/cree/>
9. APTN National News, “Remains of 28 First Nations people reburied after nearly 50 years in storage,” <http://aptnews.ca/2014/10/20/first-nation-remains-reburied-nearly-50-years-storage/>
10. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/25-billion-edmonton-land-claim-proceeding-to-trial/article4113817/>
11. http://www.saddlelake.ca/noflash/?page_id=222
12. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/25-billion-edmonton-land-claim-proceeding-to-trial/article4113817/>
13. Michel First Nation, <http://www.michelfirstnation.com/>
14. Alexia Nakota Sioux First Nation, “Heritage and History,” <http://www.alexisnakotasioux.com/my-community/our-heritage-history/>
15. O’Chiese First Nation, “History,” [http://www.ochiese.ca/History/\(see below\)](http://www.ochiese.ca/History/(see%20below))



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 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Elders and community members within Alberta in developing these resources.

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EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION

