THE EYES OF THE WORLD ARE UPON US:
THE ROLE OF VISUAL IMAGES IN THE FIGHT OVER ALBERTA'S OIL SANDS

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the [thesis or dissertation] entitled

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT

In the controversy over the mining of the Alberta oil sands, tourism has become a tool used by both those who want to stop further development of the oil sands and perhaps also by those who want it to continue. The goal of this research is to examine how the visual images of the environment, within the context of tourism, are being used to influence public opinion over the oil sands operations. Through a multistep process, promotional materials from tourism brochures, guidebooks, and websites, and also from anti-oil sands campaign websites, were analyzed according to their content, with just under 2000 images examined. Nature-tourism is the dominant form of tourism in the oil sands region, and therefore tourism experiences and images from the oil sands region largely feature images of wildlife, scenic views, and outdoor activities in the oil sands region. In contrast, images used by the Rethink Alberta campaign and other anti-oil sands organizations focus on mining operations themselves and their immediate negative effects on the environment. Results of the examination found differences in means of distribution, environmental emphasis, and geographical scale between material from tourism and from anti-oil sands campaigns. The differing goals of the tourism industry and the anti-oil sands campaigns were also reflected in the imagery used, with tourism attempting to attract visitors to pristine environments, while anti-oil sands groups are trying to discourage visitation as a form of protest. By promoting the availability of

outdoor experiences through advertisements for nature-tourism activities, and wide use of visual images featuring aspects of nature, the tourism industry may be unintentionally countering anti-oil sands campaign groups' allegations of wanton ecological destruction and unsustainability

Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

In most places where tourism and the oil industry occur in close proximity to each other, the relationships between the two are limited. Tourism may be seen as a means of economic diversification in areas where oil extraction is the predominant generator of revenue, or oil extraction may begin in an area heavily relying on tourism, or both may simply be two components within a single economy. In some cases they may exist in largely separate realms from each other, and therefore do not interfere with the other's operations. In others they may be in direct competition over such resources as labor, funding, or aspects of the ecosystem of which they are a part. In extreme cases they are seen as incompatible or even mutually exclusive. In the oil sands area of northern Alberta, tourism and oil extraction, as might be expected, are competing for the same natural resources (e.g. the boreal forest ecosystem). However, tourism also finds itself playing a less expected role. In the worldwide controversy over the Alberta oil sands exploitations, tourism has become a tool used by both those who want to stop the development of the oil sands and perhaps also by those who want it to continue. This thesis will describe these two roles. More specifically, it will examine how the visual images of the environment, within the context of tourism, may be playing a critical role in the public battle over the continued exploitation of the oil sands and whether or not future developments are in the public's best interests.

The use of tourism by those calling for an end to the oil sands operation is very formal and clear. "Rethink Alberta" is a multi-continent campaign against the oil sands that attempts to accomplish this goal by discouraging tourists from visiting Alberta until oil sands mining is ceased and clean energy alternatives are pursued (Rethink Alberta,

2010). The use of tourism to rationalize the continuation of the oil industry is less explicit and more diverse in that it may involve both intentional and unintentional efforts performed by a variety of people and organizations. Whether or not they are intended to have this effect, promotional material from tourism operators may have the consequence of propagating a more environmentally-friendly image of the oil sands region. Tourism promotions and images from the oil sands region largely feature images of wildlife, scenic views, and outdoor activities in the region. In contrast, images used by the Rethink Alberta campaign and other anti-oil sands organizations focus on mining operations themselves and their immediate negative effects on the environment.

The goal of this thesis is to examine how visual images used in both attempts to reduce tourism in Alberta as a tactic to end the oil sands operations, and in the materials used to promote tourism in this part of Alberta, may be influencing public opinion over the oil sands operation. To this end, I will present and analyze just under 2,000 tourism images – 1,918 from tourism materials, and 75 from anti-oil sands campaigns – in regards to their means of distribution, environmental content, and human-environment depictions. Tentative qualitative evaluations are offered for the effectiveness of tourism materials as indicated by the numbers of tourists visiting the province, the growth of and the reaction to the Rethink Alberta, and references to tourism images in political decisions. The possible implications for environmental and visual anthropologists, as well as for the anthropology of tourism, will also be discussed.

Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Several bodies of literature must be linked together in order to provide a description of tourism in Wood Buffalo municipality, which is located in the northeastern corner of Alberta, Canada. The primary urban center in the municipality is Fort McMurray, which is also where mining of the oil sands is currently taking place. First, a brief history of the study of tourism in anthropology will be presented, followed by a discussion of the construction of a destination image and its implications for environmental behavior. Then, because of the proximity of the oil sands mining, previous research on the relationships between oil extraction events and nature-tourism will be discussed using global examples.

Tourism in Anthropology

Tourism studies in anthropology were few and far between before the 1970s (Nuñez, 1963). Then, as globalization increased and interest grew in power inequalities between wealthier, industrialized nations and poorer, less industrialized nations, tourism became a more common subject of anthropological study (for examples of early tourism studies, see Cohen, 1972; Cohen, 1974; MacCannell, 1976; Smith, 1977; Crandall, 1980; Nash 1981; Grabern, 1983; Crick, 1989). Stronza (2001) describes several reasons for why tourism developed as a legitimate field of study. One reason is that almost every human society has been impacted either directly or indirectly by tourism: as a host community to tourists, as a targeted demographic by tourism marketers, as a monetary beneficiary of the tourism trade, etc. Tied to this economic transaction is another reason for anthropological interest: the sheer number of tourists and the revenue they generate is enough to warrant further examinations. In 2009 the World Tourism Organization

3

reported 880 million international tourism arrivals who generated $852 billion dollars in receipts (UNWTO, 2010). The last reason has to do with the nature of anthropological inquiries and the cross cultural interactions found in tourism. Because anthropologists often study the dealings between two cultures, and tourism almost by definition allows for such exchanges to occur, tourism studies can contribute to understanding of global dynamics.

Stronza (2001) highlights many disparities in the anthropological study of tourism, the foremost of which is the focus on either the historical origins of tourism or the impacts of tourism on a host community. This focus reifies the assumption "that tourism has been imposed on locals, not sought, and not invited" (Stronza, 2001, p. 262). Yet the literature is rife with examples of community based, grassroots, and locally initiated tourism projects (see Bell, 2000; Bernard and Young, 1997; Butler and Menzies, 2007, Butler and Hinch, 1996; Butler and Hinch, 2007; Colton and Harris, 2007; Honey, 2008; Phuthego and Chanda 2004; Stevens, 1997; Weaver, 2001; Yi, 2004; Zeppel, 2006) and most of these use cultural heritage or the natural environment to attract tourists. Not only do promotions of these tourism experiences contribute to the mental construction of a destination image (Chon, 1990; Wheeler, 1999; Jenkins, 1999) but also to the social construction of the institution of tourism itself (Curran, 2003; Hanna & Del Casino, Jr., 2003; Palmer, Wolff, & Cassidy 2008). Images and text descriptions can act as a transmission chain from tourism operator to a potential demographic, from host to guest, images and text descriptions by conveying certain attitudes and expectations connected with the destination.

Destination Image and the Use of Brochures

Destination image is a phrase used in a range of contexts "including…images projected by tourism promoters, the publicly held or 'stereotype' image of destinations and the destination images held by individuals" (Jenkins, 1999, p. 1), but is generally thought of as the overall impression or mental picture of a geographical place held by an individual or group of individuals. Destination image can refer to both the images promoted by tourism marketers as well as the mental impression formed by individuals of that place using those promotions (Jenkins 1999). Formation of a destination image pulls from not only promotional literature and media such as travel brochures, newspapers, or movies, but also the opinions of relatives, friends, and those who have visited the destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). Construction of a destination image has implications for marketing both a product (the destination and its experiences) and a behavior (such as appropriate ways of acting at a destination and/or engaging in certain activities) because of its ability to greatly influence the decisions of potential tourists regarding where to visit, which experiences to take part in, and the satisfaction level of the tourist (Jenkins, 1999).

The goal of marketing a place is to create a desirable or appealing image to influence individuals to travel to that particular place, and can be used by tourism operators to appeal to certain demographics. For example, Yamamoto (2000) compared the functional structure of fifteen skiing package tour brochures to Whistler, British Columbia targeted at Japanese demographics and used semiotic analysis to decipher the symbolic image representation of these tours. The decision to use brochures as the unit of analysis is based on the argument that tourism functions as a means of signifying

status within society. The semiotic analysis revealed several things: 1) an absence of Japanese figures in all brochures, which is argued to reaffirm Japanese "adoration of Western culture and people" (Yamamoto, 2000, p. 126), 2) messages portrayed by images were diverse and included cost advantage, romance, fantasy, quality of skiing, and nature, and 3) only a few images portrayed information about the destination area outside the resort, implying that tourists' are coming to ski at the resort and not to learn or experience a different culture, place, or history. The creation of a destination image on the part of marketers conveys not only builds a mental image of a certain place, but also accompanying attitudes and ideals of that place.

In a discussion of the function of tourism marketing in the tourism industry, Wheeler (1995) has argued that in the marketing of a tourist product, operators are able to promote not just destinations, but also behaviors and attitudes. She defines the tourism product as being the experience of a place, both location and people, at a specific time. A major consideration in tourism marketing is the matching of tourist expectations, which have been formed as a destination image through means of destination promotion on the part of marketers, to the actual experience of the tourist. This is measured as the degree of satisfaction, which Wheeler defines as relating "to the expectations of the tourist, the degree of reality on which those expectations were based, the ability of the tourists to adapt to perceived realities and the nature of the critical encounter that shaped that reality" (Wheeler, 1999, p. 40-41). In the past, tourism operators have used different media constructs (brochures, maps, articles etc.) to promote the awareness of and create an image for a destination in order to increase the number of tourists. With ethical considerations such as responsible natural resource use, matching expectation to

experience, and sensitizing people to a unique geographical or cultural situation, marketing could extend its role beyond just the promotion of images to the promotion of messages. These messages can include codes of conduct for visitors and/or ecological issues and statements that can not only influence the decision to visit (by encouraging certain demographics while discouraging others), but also influence the behavior of the tourists themselves upon reaching the destination (Wheeler, 1999; Chon, 1990).

The analysis of tourism brochures can contribute to the study of the tourism landscape of Wood Buffalo municipality. It can identify the constructs being promoted in an effort to form a positive destination image in the minds of individuals, reveal the portrayal of nature that endorses a certain attitude or behavior towards the environment, and allow the researcher to establish the dominant types of tourism in the region.

Methods of study in analyses of tourism constructs depend on the phase of destination image creation in focus: qualitative methods seek to identify the constructs used in the formation phase of a destination image and makes use of content analysis, free elicitation, triad elicitation, and photo elicitation, while quantitative methods measure the tourists' mental image of a given destination and generally use rating/ranking scales for attributes and attitudes (Jenkins, 1999). As mentioned above, image constructs that can build a destination image include tourism brochures, maps, posters, and other promotional material which have been used in various studies using content analysis. Several studies use brochures to gain insight into postcolonial tourism and cultural commodification (Downey, 2008), ideology (Yamamoto, 2000), and claims of authenticity (Palmer, Wolff, and Cassidy, 2008).

In the Shadow of Giants: Nature-Tourism in the Presence of Oil

Disaster tourism, also known as dark tourism, entails the visitation and appeal of tourist destinations associated with death, tragedies, or other disasters (Lennon and Foley, 2000). Much of disaster tourism research focuses on war memorials or sites of mass casualties (Beech, 2000; Henderson, 2000; Lennon and Foley, 2000; Seaton, 1996; Seaton, 1999; Wight and Lennon, 2005). Only recently has the subset of ecological or environmental disaster tourism emerged. Since Erikson's (1994) categorization of four types of environmental disasters (technological and nontoxic, technological and toxic, natural and nontoxic, and natural and toxic), studies of tourism connected to environmental disasters have steadily increased, but remain few (Gould 1999; Garza Gil et al, 2006; Gould, 2007; Widener, 2009). Investigations of tourism associated with ecological devastation caused by oil disasters, though limited in the literature, will be the focus here. Relationships between the tourism industry and the oil industry may vary in any given area, ranging from simply sharing the same economy to directly impacting each other. Oil disasters such as spills, burst pipelines, or leaks could have a negative bearing on any tourism operation located in the same area. Inversely, travel to the site of an oil disaster may actually increase as a wider audience becomes aware of the disaster and its location.

Research into nature-tourism associated with oil developments has been generally confined to South America, the Middle East, or parts of Asia, with no work being done on the region with the second largest oil reserves in the world: Alberta, Canada. Also, most of the studies of the connections and relationships between the oil

industry and nature-tourism stem from places where an acute disaster has occurred, such as an oil spill, rather than a chronic disaster such as the surface mining of the oil sands. From the available literature, the two models that emerge relating the tourism industry to that of the oil industry are Widener's (2009) oil-induced nature-tourism process, and Gould's (1999) studies of nature-tourism as a form of compromise and defense, known as tactical tourism. It remains unclear if these same models apply when the disaster is a chronic one, or has an inimitable ecological setting, as is the case in the oil sands.

Oil-induced nature-tourism

One of the smallest segments of disaster-related tourism studies are those concerned with the oil industry and how oil disasters affect the tourism industry. Widener (2009) developed a model for outlining how nature-tourism can emerge from an oil disaster that focuses specifically on acute disasters such as oil spills or new construction projects. Through this examination, Widener (2009) discusses possible links between oil disasters and tourism and argues that an unexpected outcome of an oil disaster is the increase of nature-tourism, which she referred to as "oil-induced, nature-based tourism" (Widener, 2009, p. 267) or simply oil tourism. However, it may be more accurate to refer to this type as oil-*disaster*-induced, nature-based tourism. The article first links environmental disasters with nature-tourism, using the literature and case studies from Ecuador and the Philippines to demonstrate how an oil disaster creates conditions for nature-tourism to develop. She then uses those same case studies as evidence of both oil and tourism industries affecting local communities and their ecosystems. These effects include damage to the ecosystem (either by drilling or by

9

increased numbers of tourists), changes in the local infrastructure to support the new

industries, and changes in social and political dynamics of the community (Widener,

2009).

In Widener's model of how oil disasters can spark interest in tourism

development, she describes the steps or stages following an oil disaster that lead to

nature-tourism. These components occur in a sequential order, with each event triggering

the next and can be condensed as follows: 1) the environmental disaster itself occurs,

which is an acute disaster event such as a spill or a threat of a disaster event such as the

building of a pipeline, 2) media coverage raises public awareness of the event and the

ecosystems and communities affected, 3) tourism is offered as either an economic

alternative to the oil operations or as a way to renovate the impacted communities, and 4)

the tourists arrive. Disasters attract media attention and bring awareness and knowledge

of the affected area to a global audience and also may motivate the community to

challenge the oil industry more directly, with tourism often promoted as an alternative to

the oil industry. An increase in funding for the infrastructure to support that tourism

industry then follows (Widener, 2009). Studies of two separate and distinct oil disasters,

one in Ecuador and one in the Philippines, are used to offer support for this model.

In 2001, the construction of the Oleoducto de Crudos Pesados (or OCP) oil

pipeline through Mindo, Ecuador was met with strong opposition by a number of

communities and several grassroots organizations (such as For the Route of Least Impact,

Action for Life, and the Puntos Verdes Foundation) who staged several activist- oriented

campaigns against construction. For fifteen years before the announcement of the

pipeline's construction, landowners had been slowly forming the region into an ecotourism destination, and protest campaigns centered on protection of the natural resources. As Widener explains, these campaigns "generated media attention that led urban, middle-class Ecuadorians…to 'discover' a constructed 'pristine' and 'natural environment only two hours from the capital" (2009, p. 273). While construction of the pipeline did occur, a number of concessions were made by the oil companies including funding of training courses in the tourism industry and infrastructural developments and improvements. Media attention also garnered enough interest for other international organizations to become involved in conservation efforts in the region, most notably the establishment of the Mindo Cloudforest Foundation and consequent donations and purchases of cloud forest in the affected area (Widener, 2009).

Another case study of Widener's displays a similar pattern. In 2006, the *Solar I* tanker carrying 530,000 gallons of oil sank off the coast of the Philippines near Guimaras Island and began leaking oil into the waters (Toms, 2006). Approximately 124 to 220 kilometers of shoreline were contaminated and over 40, 000 people were affected (Widener, 2009). The spill attracted a large amount of media attention that followed the initial spill, clean-up progress, and connected it to previous spills. The International Oil Pollution Compensation (IOPC) international insurance agency acted to aid the tourism industry, which had seen 80 tourism resorts affected by the oil spill, and donated monetary compensation as well as promoting market campaigns aimed at the recovery of tourists to the resorts (Widener, 2009).

Tactical Tourism

Real or perceived threats of a disaster, such as a potentially destructive construction project, often spur the promotion of nature-tourism as an economic alternative (Sharpley, 2002; Marshal, Picou, & Bevc, 2005; United States Agency for International Development [USAID], 2006) and also as a form of resistance to oil development (Gould, 1999; Gould, 2007). Concerning the latter, Gould (1999) puts forth what he describes as *tactical tourism*, the use of nature and ecotourism as "a defensive political strategy to circumvent extractive and agro-export development" (p. 248). Nature-tourism can therefore be used not just as a simple economic alternative but as a means to shift the focus from conflicts between preservation and destruction of an ecosystem to a more sustainable compromise of economic developments dependent on preservation (Gould, 1999). Because the oil industry is often more dominant in terms of political influence and monetary backing, direct conflict is a losing option for local constituencies fighting against it. Instead, nature-tourism is promoted by local groups as both a means of alternate revenue, and also as a strategy to protect the biophysical environment because nature-tourism is dependent upon the unique ecology, geography, or cultural history of a place – making destruction of such a place extremely undesirable (Gould, 1999).

Like Widener, Gould studied the nature-tourism and oil developments in Ecuador, looking specifically in the eastern Ecuadorian rainforest. He points out that jungle tourism, even with its good intentions, was made possible only by oil explorations and both industries are bringing rapid cultural change and colonization. Because oil revenues

12

are the principal source of foreign exchange, Gould argues that tourism would not generate enough financial return for the government to favor it over the oil industry. Within this setting, a handful of indigenous groups partnered with tourism operators to protect indigenous communities and the forest. The rainforest tourism industry in eastern Ecuador collaborated together and fought "to pressure the Ecuadorian government to designate almost one million acres of rainforest…" (Gould, 1999 p. 252). Using nature-tourism as a tool of compromise (as a less unsustainable option for producing revenue from the environment) and relative protection is encouraged through a tactical tourism plan.

In the next section, more detail is offered on the oil sands mining operations in northern Alberta, its relationships with the nature-tourism industry in the same region, and how the oil sands case compares to the models by Widener (2009) and Gould (1999).

Chapter 3
THE OIL SANDS OF NORTHERN ALBERTA

In 2008, Alberta supplied 15% of U.S. crude oil imports and it is predicted that

the United States will come to depend more and more on Canadian oil due to the more

stable economic and political climate of the country, as opposed to oil from Middle

Eastern countries (Government of Alberta: Energy, 2010). As stated in one of the oil

sands campaign slogans: "A good neighbour lends you a cup of sugar. A great neighbour

supplies you with 1.4 million barrels of oil per day" (Fekete, 2010). In the following

section, the oil sands mining operations will be described in its ecological and

economical context. Then, the situations where oil sands mining and nature-tourism

industry are linked will be compared to Widener's and Gould's models to look for

similarities and differences. The purpose of this comparison is to show the co-existence

of the nature-tourism and the oil sands mining industries in the Wood Buffalo

municipality creates a unique opportunity to further knowledge of range of connections

between tourism and the oil industry.

The expansive northern arboreal forest in the northern parts of the province are

known as ideal places for backpacking, fishing, hunting, and are part of an international

flyway for migrating birds. Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation reported over 1

million visitors to northern Alberta in 2008 (Government of Alberta: Tourism, Parks, and

Recreation, February 2010). Outdoor experiences and images are promoted through

multiple media channels: internet websites, television campaigns, and brochures.

However, the landscape of northern Alberta nature-tourism contains a unique and controversial feature: oil sands. Oil sand is quartz sand that is covered in a layer of water and clay and then a layer of heavy oil called bitumen. Because bitumen is not usable in this naturally-occurring state it must be upgraded to crude oil through a series of mechanical and chemical treatments (Oil Sands Discovery Centre [OSDC], 2010).

Mining of the oil sands stands requires the removal of up to 75 meters of forest and topsoil in order to reach the deposits of oil sands below (OSDC, 2010). While there are several oil sands deposits in the world, the largest and most accessible for mining are those found in northern Alberta, Canada. Of the three major oil sands areas – Peace River, Athabasca, and Cold Lake – the largest, and the region currently being mined, is the Athabascan site in the Wood Buffalo municipality. In all, there are about 54, 000 square miles of oil sands reserves in Alberta – or about 1.7 trillion barrels of oil – all underneath the boreal forest ecosystem (Government of Alberta: Energy, 2010).

Mentions of the oil sands go back to early European explorers describing how Native Americans used the heavy sand to waterproof their canoes, and by 1923 the first attempt at drilling the oil sands had begun with Robert C. Fitzsimmons' explorations at a site he called Bitumount. Fitzsimmons' company, the International Bitumen Company Ltd, struggled through the next several years due to the lack of technology and understanding to separate the heavy bitumen from the sand. Throughout the next decades several other companies attempted to mine and process the oil sands and met only limited success. Today the major corporations working in the oil sands are Suncor, Syncrude, and Shell, however several other companies are entering the arena as well (OSDC 2010).

Mining began in earnest in the late 1960s with arrival of the "mighty mining machines" (OSDC, 2010, p. 15) and new upgrading innovations that made oil sands mining profitable. Today, there are two mining methods: surface mining using a truck-and-shovel method and *in situ* technology, which has yet to be fully developed.

Surface mining is the most common method of extracting the oil sands from the earth and requires the removal of up to 75 meters of forest, overburden, and muskeg– the top layers of soil. Once the oil sand layer is exposed, giant shovels scoop up the sand and load it into large heavy haulers able carry up to 400 tons of oil sand. In situ technology is used for deep deposits and does not require such a vast amount of overburden removal or the use of tailings ponds (OSDC 2010). Developing methods for *in situ* extraction of the oil sands include steam injection, solvent injection, and firefloods - the cultivation of a fire underground in an oil sand pocket that reduces the viscosity of the oil sands and allows it to be piped out (Edmonton Journal, 2007). As of 2009, approximately 375 square miles of the oils sands were being mined in either open pit mining operations or through *in situ* technology (Government of Alberta: Energy, 2010).

After the oil sand is removed from the ground, the heavy haulers take their loads to a cleaning facility where it is mixed with hot water and a diluent, usually a naphtha variant, in order to separate the bitumen from the sand and to increase fluidity. The sand, water, residual bitumen, industrial solvents, fine clays and minerals are collectively referred to as tailings, and are pumped into holding places, known as tailings ponds. The diluted bitumen is then piped to an upgrader. The upgrading process generally either adds hydrogen or removes carbon in order to create a lighter hydrocarbon that is easier to

refine and is more valuable. Upgrading also removes contaminants such as heavy metals, nitrogen, and sulphur from the oil sand (OSDC, 2010).

As part of the lease agreement with the government, companies are required to commit to a land reclamation program, meaning they will return the land to its original condition once the mining is complete, and this goes for both mined areas and tailings ponds. On September 23rd, 2010, Suncor officially celebrated becoming the first oil sands company to successfully complete surface reclamation project for their first tailings pond that opened in 1967 (Suncor Energy, 2010). It is expected further restoration of plant species will take twenty years or more.

In order to begin to reclaim an area, processed sand and sediment from tailings ponds are used to even out the land and build contours that resemble the original state of the landscape. Soil and organic material (called overburden) that was removed as part of the mining process and stored is placed over the sand. Then, the area is replanted and/or reforested with the original species from that area. There have been other reclamation projects, including Gateway Hill from Syncrude that now is home to a herd of over one hundred wood bison. Matcheetwain ("Beginning place" in Cree) is another reclaimed mining area that is now covered in trees and home to wildlife and nature trails.

The majority of the mining is taking place within the Wood Buffalo municipality close to the urban center of Fort McMurray, which is host to a range of environmental issues. The carbon emissions from the oil sands makes up 5% of Canada's overall greenhouse gas emissions, and about 0.1% of the world greenhouse gas emissions (Government of Alberta: Energy, 2010). Apprehensions about air quality have resulted

in the placement of fifteen air quality monitoring stations throughout the mining region.

Another subject that receives attention, especially from researchers, is the reclamation

and ecological restoration of mined out land. Water, residual bitumen and crude oil,

solvents, sand and clay particles from the upgrading process are placed in large tailings

ponds. Once these ponds are dry (a process taking years to decades) they must be

restored to the ecosystem that exists prior to mining – an immense process itself because

of the ecological knowledge, resources, and time required for restoration (OSDC, 2010).

The northern boreal forest of Alberta is a major flyway for thousands of species of

migrating birds, and the mining of such large tracts of land could prove detrimental to

both migratory and residential wildlife. One example of this is the case of a flock of

1600 ducks that landed on a tailings pond and only five survived (Brooymans & Farrell

2008).

Nature-tourism and the Oil Sands

Nature-tourism is linked to the oil sands in a number of ways. First, the two

industries together make up the bulk of the Albertan economy, but deciding which

industry is dominant to the other depends on whether the focus is on the provincial

economy or the municipal economy. In addition, nature-tourism is being used and

endorsed as a means of economic diversification and a growing alternative in outlying

communities. Second, nature-tourism may be competing with mining developments over

use of natural resources, but tourism of the oil sands mining locations themselves is

growing, and in some cases actually overlaps with nature-tourism. Reclaimed areas that

have been more or less restored to their pre-mining form are now featured stops on oil

sands bus tours operated in partnership by oil sands companies and the Albertan

government and boast wildlife-viewing opportunities and hiking trails. Third, an anti-oil

sands marketing campaign is aimed at achieving the opposite of what Widener's model

would predict. While Widener proposed that media attention of an oil disaster would

attract tourists to the location, the anti-oil sands campaigns actively seek to discourage

visitation.

Sharing the Economy: Tourism and the Oil Industry

As previously discussed, nature-tourism is often promoted in areas affected by oil

extraction as a means of economic diversification, and this seems to also be the case in

the region surrounding Fort McMurray –a community self-proclaimed to be the "home of

the oil sands." The oil sands operations have had a huge impact on the economy of not

only Alberta, but on Canada as a whole. In 2008, over $3 billion dollars in royalties from

oil extraction were collected by the Alberta government (Government of Alberta: Energy,

2010), and it is worth noting this number is in addition to company profits and individual

salaries of those who work in the oil sands. As technology improves and costs of

production go down, this number is predicted to rise. Tourism to Alberta, on the other

hand, generated over $5 billion dollars in revenues in 2006 (Travel Alberta, 2008). The

economic prevalence of tourism over oil stands within the province stands in stark

contrast to other contexts studied, where the oil industry is responsible for the majority of

revenue.

However, if the perspective is narrowed to just the oil sands region being mined,

to a portion of Wood Buffalo municipality, then the picture becomes closer to that of the

studies previously discussed. Fort McMurray is the major urban center for the oil sands,

and is also the largest community in the Wood Buffalo municipality at approximately

72,000 people (Government of Alberta: Employment and Immigration, 2008). Fort

McMurray has undergone rapid and intense socio-economic transformations since the

establishment of the oil sands industry and its population has nearly doubled since 1999

(Government of Alberta: Employment and Immigration, 2008). This is because the high

global demand for oil translates into a high demand for labor in the mining regions.

Approximately 67% of the population is employed by mining companies or their

affiliates. Nature-tourism, primarily in the form of fishing and hunting lodges and

wildlife-viewing, is more prominent outside of Fort McMurray in the less-urbanized

areas of the municipality. At this level the oil sands mining and nature-tourism industries

may share the municipality's economy, but nature-tourism is viewed as both an economic

alternative and as a competitor for natural and financial resources. This dominance of the

oil industry is similar to the cases in South America discussed by Widener (2009) and

Gould (1999).

Tourism of Reclaimed Mining Sites

As mentioned, the oil sands themselves are also being promoted as tourism

experiences with the offering of bus tours through Suncor's operations and Syncrude's

reclaimed areas. Gateway Hill was the first mining site to be reclaimed and supports a

herd of wood bison. A lookout and several interpretive panels are open to the public and

located nearby to Syncrude's operations. Matcheetwain is the other reclaimed site

included on the bus tour and features sculptures by an aboriginal artist, interpretive panels

and displays, and several hiking trails. Here, the overlap of the oil industry's mining and

reclaiming process and nature-tourism at first glance seems to somewhat follow Gould's

promotion of tactical tourism; the mined out areas are restored and endorsed as unique

features of a bus tour and suitable destinations for hiking and wildlife-viewing. It could

be concluded then that a political compromise was reached – mining is allowed but only

if the land is restored to its natural health and biodiversity. However, Gould's examples

from South America have local constituents (communities, grassroots campaigns, and

NGOs) working to protect the natural landscape. In the case of the oil sands, it was not a

local group who fought for reclamation requirements, but environmental lobbyists and

the government that created the regulations. Also, the bus tours that promote the

reclaimed areas are owned not by a local group or the oil sands companies, but by the

Albertan government. In addition, tactical tourism involves using nature-tourism and

ecotourism to both protect natural resources and to generate at least some revenue. No

such protection is evident in the case of reclamation tourism. The original ecosystem has

already been destroyed, the oil sand removed, and a new one has been built in its place.

The reclamation process takes decades, possibly centuries, to achieve the pre-mining

function and biodiversity. While tourism of the reclaimed areas may provide future

incentive for restoration efforts, it was not the primary reason for the creation of the

reclamation requirement.

Tourism and the Anti-Oil Sands Campaigns

One of Widener's (2009) stages of oil-induced nature-tourism is that of media

awareness, and consequently the oil disaster or perceived disaster attracts national and

international attention. This increased awareness will then act to draw more tourists to the area, either because visitors want to support efforts against the oil industry, because of a desire to go to the previously unknown location, or because they want to see the disaster for themselves. Nature-tourism is indeed picking up more interest by local representatives of the Fort McMurray tourism industry, this interest is stemming more from a desire to diversify the local economy and improve the area's image than from any specific media story. While developments in the oil sands are often in the media in Alberta and the rest of Canada, reporting on the site is relatively uncommon in the United States. If Widener's model is to be followed, then after a media event involving the oil sands one would predict an influx of support for the nature-tourism industry followed by an increase in the number of tourists.   It is acknowledged this model was developed for acute disaster events rather than on-going developments, yet mining is perceived as a chronic eco-disaster by those who oppose it.

During July of 2010, Corporate Ethics International and several other organizations launched their Rethink Alberta campaign discouraging tourism to Alberta with a number of billboards and a video contrasting the accepted view of Alberta as a nature-tourism destination. In the video, scenes of rivers, horses, and wildlife are suddenly replaced with the images of tailings ponds, drowning waterfowl, and aerial views of the mining operations near Fort McMurray (Rethink Alberta, 2010). The video ends with the narrator stating "Thinking of visiting Alberta? Think again." This campaign is targeted towards American and British tourists and is a protest against the mining of the oil sands. On the Rethink Alberta website, one can sign a pledge to not

visit the province of Alberta until the Alberta Government does the following: 1) Ends the expansion of the oil sands developments, 2) No longer runs "public relations campaigns designed to keep the United States addicted to dirty Tar Sands oil," 3) Invests in energy alternatives (Rethink Alberta, 2010).

In essence, the Rethink Alberta campaign was a media response to a chronic oil disaster that had the explicit intention of dissuading tourists from visiting Alberta as a protest against the oil industry. The desired result would be a substantial decrease in tourism, leading to a substantial decrease in the tourism revenue, forcing the government of Alberta to comply with the demands of the campaign. This is the opposite of the visitation encouragement that Widener's model would predict, due to the content of the media campaign itself.

Tourism is then recognized as a powerful way to influence behavior concerning visitation, the environment, and the oil sands mining in the area around Fort McMurray. Nature-tourism of outlying parks, lakes, and lodges as well as of reclaimed areas of former mining sites are all promoted in Wood Buffalo by local operators as well as the provincial government as integral economic components. Alternatively, the Rethink Alberta campaign uses what can be considered an *anti* -promotion of tourism, and calls for tourists to boycott visiting Alberta in an effort to convince the Albertan government to stop oil sands development and protect the northern forests.

The particular context of nature-tourism and the oil sands mining operations make it unlike anything else in the world. Not only are the mining technologies and practices unique due to the geographical placement and physical properties of the oil sands, but

23

also the provincial economy is not completely dependent upon oil for revenue, as is the case in other parts of the world being tapped for oil. Instead, nature-tourism holds a relatively strong sway in comparison and continues to be endorsed by local communities and the government. Mining of the oil sands is also not considered an acute disaster event, but rather perceived as a chronic eco-disaster. Another thing to be considered is the location of the oil sands mining operations in respect to the rest of the world. Canada is a developed nation with several economic similarities and partnerships with the United States. Other countries studied for their oil industry and tourism industry relationships are less developed and their economies are not as competitive in the world market.

Because context of the oil sands region is different than that of other studies on oil and tourism connections, it does not seem to follow any of the same patterns or predictions other researchers have found. For one, nature-tourism was a substantial part of the Albertan economy and continues to be one of the dominant segments, generating more revenue than oil. Therefore, nature-tourism is not an emerging industry, but one that is already established and competing with the oil industry. Second, tourism of the oil sands themselves is increasing and includes bus tours, aerial tours, and the Oil Sands Discovery Centre in Fort McMurray. Bus tours feature stops that are clearly meant to appeal to nature-tourists, offering hiking and wildlife-viewing on former mining sites, and use the reclamation process and its result as a key attractor. Lastly, the Rethink Alberta campaign is a wide-scale media event (aimed at the United States and England) that encourages the opposite response than would be predicted by Widener's model.

Chapter 4
METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature and draws on both quantitative and qualitative methods. Using sequential mixed methods, the research involved both quantitative and qualitative content analysis on tourism images from brochures, guidebooks, and websites as well as images used in online anti-oil sands campaigns.

Data Collection

Identification of the materials used in the formation, or intended formation, of a destination image in the mind of potential visitors required the collection of the primary means of promotion – the tourism brochure. These constructs and their content can be used to determine what types of tourism are being advertised more heavily as well as what kinds of environmental behaviors or attitudes are being promoted through such advertising. Brochures and guidebooks were collected in the field during July 2010 from the community of Fort McMurray, the largest urban center within the Wood Buffalo municipality, from various locations including hotel and motel lobbies, the Fort McMurray Tourism and Convention Bureau, local restaurants, and convenience stores.

The internet is growing as an additional outlet for operators to advertise tourism experiences, and websites connected to the area were recorded both prior to fieldwork and afterwards, from June 2010 until October 2010. Data collection for content analysis was limited to free brochures, guidebooks, and websites because these are more accessible to a wider audience. Time and mobility constraints prevented travel to communities more than twenty miles outside of Fort McMurray, however several outlying communities' attractions were represented in the materials collected. Recording

of images from anti-oil sands campaign websites began in July 2010 with the beginning of the Rethink Alberta campaign and continued until January 2010.

In addition to the image collection and recording, participant observation in common tourism experiences in Fort McMurray and semi-structured interviews with representatives of different segments of the tourism industry were conducted. Participation in bus and aerial tours of the oil sands and visits to the Oil Sands Discovery Centre, Heritage Park, and Gregoire Lake provided firsthand experience with tourism options. Semi-structured interviews were sought with representatives from Fort McMurray Tourism, Oil Sands Discovery Centre, and the Department of Tourism, Parks, and Recreation in Fort McMurray to provide perspective on the tourism industry of the region. This purposive sample of representatives was determined based on knowledge of common tourism experiences and their operators. No formal analysis will be performed on participant observation data or the data collected from interviews because neither serves as the primary unit of focus. Results from participant observation and interviews will instead be used to provide additional context for the analysis of tourism materials and some supplemental information.

Data Analysis

The units of analysis are the images used in promotional tourism materials and in anti-oil sands campaigns and the methods of analysis aim to describe the environmental emphasis of these images and how they are being used in the controversy over the oil sands mining operations. The analysis took several steps. First, tourism brochures, guidebooks, and websites were separated into either nature-tourism or heritage tourism categories based on the attractor, or the primary experience marketed. Preliminary

research prior to entering the field had revealed two tourism segments in Wood Buffalo municipality: nature-tourism and heritage tourism. Nature-tourism was defined as encompassing all activities that took place in the outdoors, usually in a natural setting and include fishing, camping, and wildlife-viewing among many others. Heritage tourism was defined as including historical monuments and attractions as well as experiences that emphasize a distinct culture as attractors. In nature-tourism, the focus is on some aspect of nature itself, while heritage tourism uses people's histories or backgrounds to entice visitors. While some heritage tourism does include an element of nature or outdoor activities, these features are considered secondary To determine which tourism experiences are dominant, regional brochures, guidebooks, and websites were first categorized by the researcher into those advertising a nature-tourism experience, a cultural heritage experience, or those that advertised both nature and heritage tourism. This categorization was based on the activities offered and those that advertised activities taking place outdoors were labeled as nature-tourism, and those that involved historical or cultural presentations and encounters (such as museums) were labeled as heritage tourism.

Second, those same experiences were themselves specifically listed and grouped to determine the dominant activity or activities. This was done by listing all the experiences or activities mentioned in the nature-tourism materials, and then doing the same for the cultural heritage materials. The tourism type (nature-tourism or cultural heritage tourism) having the higher number of promotions was considered the more dominant type.

The categorization of tourism experiences used to help determine the dominant type of tourism also contributed to describing the environmental behaviors and attitudes being promoted and transmitted to the audience. Those experiences that promote activity in the outdoors are endorsing involvement in nature, while those that promote cultural heritage activities are endorsing heritage education or consumption. These promotions are not considered mutually exclusive, as many heritage experiences may take place outdoors (or nature is considered an integral part of a culture), and are best thought of as existing on a continuum. The division of experiences in categories as described is therefore subjective and based on the familiarity of the researcher with the material. However, the results do reflect locally meaningful categories which provide a considerable contribution to the description of environmental behavior advanced by tourism operators.
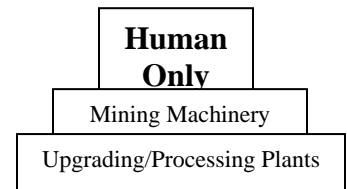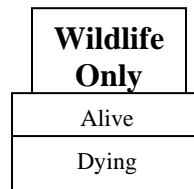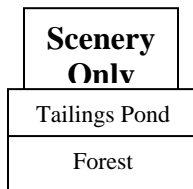
Third, images from all constructs were divided into categories based on the featured subject in individual images to determine emphasis. Images from the brochures, guidebooks, and websites were sorted into the following categories: Scenery Only, Wildlife Only, Human Only, Human and Environment Interaction, and Education/Convenience. Those images depicting a scenic view or landscape were labeled Scenery Only, and those that had a specific plant or animal as its focus were labeled Wildlife Only. The Human Only designation was used for images that depicted only humans, a manmade structure, or humans inside a manmade structure with no visible plant or animal elements. The fourth category, Human and Environment Interaction, depicts humans in a natural setting with plant or animal elements. The last

category was designated as Educational or Convenience and mainly included maps or trails related to the destination.

The anti-oil sands campaigns have a very clear, specific intent: to halt the mining operations as they exist in the oil sands. Because of this explicit goal, all of the images from these campaigns feature only the oil sands mining operations and must be categorized using different criteria than images collected from tourism materials. Classification is still based on the dominant feature or focus of the image, but categories are tailored to be more oil sands-specific. Images and supplemental video footage, known as b-roll, from anti-oil sands campaigns were first placed within one of the same categories of imagery used in analysis of tourism images: Scenery Only, Wildlife Only, Human Only, Human Interaction with the Environment, and Educational/Convenience. After this initial separation, the images classified under Scenery Only, Wildlife Only, and Human Only are further divided into more detailed categories in regards to the focus of the images:

Scenery Only
Tailings Pond
Forest

Wildlife Only
Alive
Dying

Human Only
Mining Machinery
Upgrading/Processing Plants

Chapter 5
RESULTS

A total of sixty-four brochures, guidebooks, promotional pdfs, and websites, which translated into just under 2000 images, were collected and categorized in terms of their means of distribution, environmental content, and human-environment depictions. Of these, 1918 images were recorded from tourism literature, while 75 were recorded from online anti-oil sands campaigns.

Table 1. Number and type of tourism materials collected for analysis

Category	Brochures	Guidebooks	Promotional PDFs	Websites	Total
Accommodation	3	1	-	-	**4**
Heritage-tourism	10	1	-	1	**12**
Nature-tourism	8	5	4	20	**37**
Nature-tourism & Heritage-tourism	2	4	-	1	**7**
Total	**23**	**11**	**4**	**22**	**60**

Means of Distribution

The tourism promotion data were separated by construct type as a tourism brochure, guidebook, promotional pdf, or website. Table 1 provides a report of the number and type of constructs collected for analysis and shows which media are currently being used by tourism promoters and operators.

The data collected consisted of twenty-three tourism brochures, eleven guidebooks, four online promotional pdf files, and twenty-two websites for a total of sixty constructs. Nature-tourism materials were the most common with thirty-seven of the constructs advertising some kind of outdoor experience. Most of these came from online websites for hunting and fishing lodges. The majority of heritage-tourism

advertisements came from brochures, which were also the highest number of brochures followed by nature-tourism. All of the promotion pdfs were for nature-tourism.

In the absence of printed material, five websites were used in the analysis of anti-oil sands images, which were the website for the Rethink Alberta campaign and the sites of four of its affiliated organizations: Corporate Ethics International (corpethics.org), UK Tar Sands Network (no-tar-sands.org, tarsandswatch.org, and dirtyoilsands.org). Within these websites, however, there was more variety of presentations of images. A total of fourteen videos related to the oil sands, fourteen b-roll clips meant for download and use in the making of other videos, and nine editorial cartoons were recorded in addition to sixty-two photographs. In contrast, only one video was recorded as being part of a tourism website, and was a demonstration video on the upgrading process of oil sands from the Oil Sand Discovery Centre's site (www.oilsandsdiscovery.com).

There are several notable differences between tourism and anti-oil sands campaign's modes of distribution. First, brochures and websites are the most common tourism marketing tools, with over twenty units being recorded for each. Second, these printed brochures and guidebooks are used by tourism operators much more than the anti-oil sands campaigns, which seem to only have a strong presence on the internet. During four weeks of fieldwork in Fort McMurray, no printed material manufactured as specifically anti-oil sands was found, although billboards have been used as part of crusades against mining operations. Third, while anti-oil sands campaign material is generally found online, they employ a variety of methods besides photographs or images, including b-roll clips for download and use by others, videos, and editorial cartoons.

Environmental Emphasis

Based on the types of tourism experiences offered, and the content of images used in the constructs, nature-tourism is both the dominant form of tourism and employs the majority of images. Of the images used, the most common depiction is of humans interacting in some way with nature, such as fishing, hiking, and wildlife-viewing. These experiences and photographs create an environmentally-friendly representation of the region as well as lending credence to claim of unspoiled nature available for recreational use. Rethink Alberta and other anti-oil sands campaigns employ a much narrower selection of photos, primarily featuring photographs and videos of just the oil sands mining operations, especially of tailings ponds and machinery. Depictions of human environment interactions and locality are two characteristics that differ to the greatest extent between tourism and anti-oil sands campaigns. While tourism constructs focus on sites scattered around the whole of the municipality with an emphasis on responsible and sustainable use by humans seeking recreation (for example, many of the fishing lodges are catch-and-release only), anti-oil sands imagery seem to forgo depictions of human-environment interaction and center only on the mining operations, using photographs and videos to portray the oil sands developments as distinctly irresponsible and unsustainable.

Nature-tourism is a category of tourism that involves any activity that takes place outdoors, whether it be fishing, hunting, backpacking, camping, hang-gliding, boating, or simply viewing wildlife (Honey 1999, Widener, 2009). Marketing of nature-tourism experiences is often based around geographically or environmentally distinct features, such as those found in national parks or designated conservation areas, or charismatic wildlife, such as birds, predators, or trophy species (Wheeler 1999). In Wood Buffalo

municipality nature-tourism is much more varied and more options for outdoor activities are offered. Out of thirteen recorded types of experience offered, the top three activities are first fishing, then wildlife-viewing, followed by both outdoor recreation and water recreation. Fishing is the most commonly advertised form of nature tourism with sixteen different promotions as shown in Table 2. Due to the presence of Wood Buffalo National Park and a major flyway for migrating birds, the second most commonly advertised experience is that of wildlife-viewing, including bird-watching. The category General Outdoor Recreation refers to promotions that did not advertise a specific activity or activities and advertised the destination as being a good location for multiple types of outdoor recreation. Water recreation includes boating, swimming, and canoeing and is distributed across the municipality. Other experiences promoted include those led by aboriginal guides, skiing, camping, hiking, hunting and trapping, golfing, horseback riding, riding all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) or quadding, and snowmobiling.

Table 2. Experiences promoted in nature-tourism only materials

Category of Experience	Number of Promotions
Fishing	16
Wildlife-viewing	8
General Outdoor Recreation	7
Water Recreation	7
Aboriginal Outdoor Experiences	6
Skiing	5
Camping	5
Hiking	5
Hunting/Trapping	4
Golfing	1
Horseback Riding	1
Quadding	1
Snowmobiling	1
Total	**54**

Out of the heritage-tourism only material, the seven promotions for tourism experiences in the oil sands including the Oil Sands Discovery Centre and bus tours

through Suncor's operations represent the majority of promotions (see Table 3). Following these promotions are those for The Heritage Trail which extends throughout Alberta, and a section runs through Wood Buffalo municipality. Within constructs that advertised both nature-tourism and heritage-tourism experiences, most promotions were for aboriginal experiences either outdoors or for cultural museums, or for experiences related to the oil sands, such as the Oil Sands Discovery Centre (see Table 4).

Table 3. Experiences promoted in heritage-tourism only constructs.

Category of Experience	Number of Promotions
Oil Sands Experiences	8
Heritage Trail	3
Aboriginal Museums & Demonstrations	2
Museums	1
Aerial Tour	1
Total	15

Table 4. Experiences promoted in combined nature-tourism and heritage-tourism constructs.

Category of Experience	Number of Promotions
Aboriginal Outdoor Experiences	4
Oil Sands Experiences	4
Aboriginal Museum	3
Aerial Tour	3
Fishing	3
Camping	2
Hiking	2
Water Recreation	2
Total	23

Images found within the collected tourism brochures were sorted into the type of tourism promoted, nature-tourism, heritage-tourism, both nature-tourism and heritage-tourism, and accommodation. Despite having fewer materials in the brochure collection, nature-tourism brochures had the most overall images with eighty-four separate pictures, nearly twice as many as those from heritage-tourism brochures (see Table 5). Most

images found in nature-tourism brochures (as well as overall) depicted people involved in some kind of outdoor activity and were placed in the Human Interaction column. Among the collected heritage-tourism brochures, thirty of the images were placed in the Human Only category and featured only people or man-made structures with no pictorial elements of nature. Within the collection of guidebooks, nature-tourism promotions had more Human Only images than would be expected, images categorized as Human Interaction with the Environment were far fewer than those recorded from brochures, and no images were used in the promotion of heritage-tourism experiences in the guidebooks (see Table 6). Human Only images were the dominant form of image found in guidebooks, primarily from mixed constructs that advertised both nature-tourism and heritage-tourism activities. These mixed constructs also contributed the majority of images from guidebooks, using 133 images within their pages.   While fourteen of those were of scenery, the rest of the images were fairly evenly split between Human Only and Human Interaction. Only four online pdf files were found in association with one of the websites and all four were promoting a nature-tourism experience including wildlife-viewing and hiking. Seven out of the eleven images recorded featured humans taking part in these outdoor experiences (see Table 7).

Table 5. Images recorded from tourism brochures

Tourism Type Promoted	Scenery Only	Wildlife Only	Human Only	Human Interaction with Environment	Education/ Convenience	Total
Nature-tourism	6	19	6	44	9	**84**
Heritage-tourism	2	0	29	8	5	**44**
Nature-tourism and Heritage-tourism	2	0	13	17	0	**32**
Accommodation	1	1	8	7	1	**18**
Total	**11**	**20**	**56**	**76**	**15**	**178**

Table 6. Images recorded guidebooks

Construct Type	Scenery Only	Wildlife Only	Human Only	Human Interaction with Environment	Education/ Convenience	Total
Nature-tourism	4	3	34	11	0	**52**
Heritage-tourism	0	0	0	0	0	**0**
Nature-tourism and Heritage-tourism	14	2	58	57	2	**133**
Accommodation	0	0	2	0	0	**2**
Total	**18**	**5**	**94**	**68**	**2**	**187**

Table 7. Images recorded from online promotional pdfs

Construct Type	Scenery Only	Wildlife Only	Human Only	Human Interaction with Environment	Education/ Convenience	Total
Nature-tourism	3	0	1	7	0	**11**
Heritage-tourism	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Nature-tourism and Heritage-tourism	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Accommodation	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Total	**3**	**0**	**1**	**7**	**0**	**11**

By far the biggest contributors of images were the various websites advertising experiences in Wood Buffalo. Table 8 represents the recordings of images from online websites. Just over 1500 images were recorded from twenty-two websites and 1346 of those were associated with nature-tourism. Within the nature-tourism constructs, almost one thousand images were of humans engaging in outdoor activities, nearly two hundred images were of scenic views and landscapes, seventy-six images were of only humans or lodge interiors, and sixty were of wildlife. In contrast, heritage-tourism had twenty-seven total images, almost all of which were of only humans or buildings. Mixed constructs had their images mainly distributed between Human Interaction, Human Only, and

Scenery Only. These mixed websites contained more scenic images than their brochure

or guidebook counterparts.

Table 8. Images recorded from online websites

Construct Type	Scenery Only	Wildlife Only	Human Only	Human Interaction with Environment	Education/ Convenience	Total
Nature-tourism	199	60	76	999	12	**1346**
Heritage-tourism	0	0	25	0	2	**27**
Nature-tourism and Heritage-tourism	38	6	49	76	0	**169**
Accommodation	-	-	-	-	-	**-**
Total	**237**	**66**	**150**	**1075**	**14**	**1542**

A total of 1918 images were recorded from all of the tourism constructs, and just

under 1500 images came from those advertising nature-tourism experiences (see Table

9). Over twelve hundred images featured an one or more people in nature participating in

an outdoor activity, and most of those images came from constructs advertising nature-

tourism.   Human Only images were the next most common with about three hundred

images stemming from both nature-tourism constructs and mixed constructs. Most of the

images depicting scenery or wildlife came from nature-tourism promotions. As shown in

Table 5, the vast majority of images from the collected data promoted both nature-

tourism and human involvement in nature.

Table 9. Total images recorded from tourism constructs

Construct Type	Scenery Only	Wildlife Only	Human Only	Human Interaction with Environment	Education/ Convenience	Total
Nature-tourism	212	82	117	1061	21	**1493**
Heritage-tourism	2	0	54	8	7	**71**
Nature-tourism and Heritage-tourism	54	8	120	150	2	**334**
Accommodation	1	1	10	7	1	**20**
Total	**269**	**91**	**301**	**1226**	**31**	**1918**

Based on amount of materials, categories of experience, and images, nature-tourism is by far the dominant type of tourism promoted in the Fort McMurray area, with the two main experiences being some kind of outdoor adventure (especially fishing) or the viewing of wildlife. Thirty-seven of the sixty constructs in the sample were specifically for a nature-tourism experience, with only twelve being for heritage-tourism. While heritage-tourism media only had five different categories of experience, and a total of fifteen promotions for them, nature-tourism media had thirteen separate categories of experience and over fifty promotions for those experiences.

Images from nature-tourism media also dominate the landscape and had the highest number of images in each of the construct categories with the exception of guidebooks. Nearly 1500 images out of the 1918 total images were from nature-tourism constructs, and most of these depicted scenery or outdoor human activities.

Heritage-tourism seems to be limited in the promotional media, and the most advertised experiences are those involving the oil sands, such as bus or aerial tours. Almost two thousands images were recorded from the constructs, yet only seventy-one of

those images came from heritage-tourism only media, further limiting its potential influence on tourists.

The amount of nature-tourism material establishes this type of tourism as the most frequently found in the promotional literature found in the Fort McMurray area during the summer season of 2010. Fishing lakes, rivers, and lodges are the most common type of experiences offered in the municipality. The high numbers of constructs and categories of experience are the result of more varied options and opportunities.

Despite the lopsidedness in representation between nature-tourism and heritage-tourism, both types utilize environmental images and experiences as attractors. Of the heritage-tourism only media, several photos depicted scenery and human interaction with nature. Mixed constructs advertising both types of tourism also made use of fifty-eight images of scenery or wildlife and one hundred and fifty images of outdoor activities.

The wide use of images included in the Human Interaction category emphasizes human enjoyment and participation in natural settings. Behavior promoted in these images includes engaging in outdoor activities, responsible use of resources (many fishing lodges are catch and release), protection and conservation of the environment in which the activities take place.

Anti-oil sands images

Images from anti-oil sands campaigns connected to the Rethink Alberta organization focus primarily on scenes of mining operations themselves, especially that of the tailings ponds. Thirty of the seventy-five images recorded featured one or more tailings ponds and ranged from panoramic views at ground level to aerial photos. At time of writing, only one image that could be considered wildlife was found directly tied to the

oil sands and was of a small duck trapped in an oil slick that appears on the surface of

tailings ponds. This particular image was used in reference to the afore-mentioned flock

of migrating ducks that died when they landed on a tailings pond in 2008. Most images

fell under the category of Human Only, because they contained no element of the natural

environment, and were split between those featuring the surface mines or equipment or

the upgrading and processing plants were the bitumen is turned into crude oil. Only one

image portrayed any type of human and environment interaction similar to those used by

nature-tourism materials and featured an aboriginal man with a natural landscape behind

him. One image and one b-roll animation depicted the network of pipelines across

Canada and down the United States; both were categorized as Educational. Totals are

summarized in Table 10.

Table 10. Images recorded from anti-oil sands campaigns.

Scenery Only		Wildlife Only		Human Only		Human Interaction with Environment	Education/ Convenience	Total
Tailings Pond	Forests	Alive	Dying	Mines/ Machinery	Upgrading/ Processing Plants			
30	3	0	1	22	16	-	-	
33		1		38		1	2	75

In summary, the sheer number of tourism images greatly outnumbers the images

used in anti-oil sands campaigns at the time of writing. Of those images used in tourism

materials, the vast majority depicted people engaging with the environment, as in pictures

of fishing, hiking, or wildlife-viewing. The promotional material for tourism experiences

used different forms of media, from printed brochures and guidebooks, to online

websites, and could be categorized into either nature-tourism or heritage-tourism (nature-

tourism being the dominant form in the region). Images from anti-oil sands campaigns came only from websites and featured mainly pictures of oil sands operations, such as tailings ponds and active mining. Further differences between tourism and anti-oil sands campaigns are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 6
CONCLUSIONS

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from this analysis. First, a visual content analysis of images used in tourism promotions for experiences in the oil sands region and in anti-oil sands campaigns revealed several important differences in regards to their means of distribution, environmental emphasis, and geographical focus. Second, there are marked differences between tourism and anti-oil sands campaign goals that are reflected in that imagery. Third, the evidence from the oil sands region adds to current models of oil and nature-tourism relationships by demonstrating that an unintentional consequence of nature-tourism promotion is to play a part in the continuation of oil sands mining.

Differences in Means of Distribution, Environmental Emphasis, and Geographical Focus

Tourism of the oil sands region and anti-oil sands campaigns are utilizing different means of distribution. Tourism promotional material can be found readily in printed form, such as brochures and guidebooks, and as digital media online. Anti-oil sands campaign material is almost exclusively online, but does encompass a wider range of media forms including video clips and editorial cartoons along with photographs. These campaigns are also making use of social networking sites such as Facebook and may be relying on the internet for several reasons such as low cost and ease of information distribution.

Second, each side takes a different approach in how they choose to portray the environment of the oil sands region. Nature-tourism is the dominant type of tourism found in the municipality and therefore most experiences offered by the tourism industry involve being in the outdoors. The images used in promotional materials reflect this and

the vast majority of images feature people enjoying and interacting with nature, such as fishing, hiking and camping, or watching for wildlife. Also common are photographs of plants or animals and scenic views of the landscape. These images depict the entire region as being consistently environmentally responsible and pristine. Anti-oil sands campaigns highlight only the ecological casualties associated with the mining of the oil sands: loss of forests and the appearance of surface mines, machinery, processing plants, and tailings ponds. Online anti-oil campaigns and websites generally do not have their genesis with one particular organization, but instead entail dozens of coalitions such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, the Polaris Institute, and the Indigenous Environmental Network, and several others.

Lastly, there are marked differences in geographical scale between tourism promotions and anti-oil sands promotions. Tourism experiences from across the region can be found in the promotional material, spanning from those located in Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan to Wood Buffalo National Park in the northernmost regions of the municipality. Activist campaigns center only on the oil sands mining regions themselves, which are located just north of Fort McMurray.

Differences in goals of the tourism industry and of anti-oil sands campaigns

Advertised activities and imagery used in the tourism material from the oil sands region span the entire municipality of Wood Buffalo and encompass a wide range of experiences, from isolated fishing lodges to tours of the oil sands themselves. The content of the images are just as varied, though most of the images fall in the general category of Human Interaction with the Environment. This broad range of experiences and images reflects the goal of the tourism industry: to bring visitors to the region.

Tourism can play multiple roles in a community, especially as way to diversify the economy to prevent dependence on one segment and strengthen the overall system. This applies to the community of Fort McMurray and the rest of Wood Buffalo municipality. Aside from economic goals and the desire to attract more visitors to the region, another objective emerged in the interviews held with tourism representatives: to enhance the destination image of the oil sands region. Connected to the push for economic diversification is the desire by community leaders to replace the common impression of Fort McMurray as an industrial boomtown fraught with social and environmental ills with one more family-oriented and ecologically sound. This rebranding would utilize enterprises such as nature and heritage-tourism to improve the region's image. It is here that we can see the power of tourism and its associated imagery. By promoting the availability of outdoor experiences through advertisements for such activities and wide use of visual images featuring aspects of nature, the region may be countering anti-oil sands campaign groups' allegations of wanton ecological destruction and unsustainability. In the oil sands, we see a much higher number of total images, most of which show human recreational activity in nature. By promoting images of intact and functioning ecosystems providing unique recreational activities, the tourism industry is implying that the oil sands operations are not affecting the environment to such an extent that would harm such nature-tourism enterprises.

The unambiguous goal of anti-oil sands agendas like that of the Rethink Alberta campaign is to shut the oil sands operations down. If the tourism promotional material can be thought of as utilizing a broad range of experiences and activities to attract visitors, then anti-oil sands campaigns can be thought of as employing a narrow range of

44

images to build their argument against the oil sands. All of the images recorded from the anti-oil sands websites focus specifically on the mining operations and its immediate effects on the environment and, unlike tourism promotions, generally does not show imagery from other parts of the municipality.

In the case of Rethink Alberta campaign, images and descriptions of oil sands mining is accompanied by a call to boycott tourism to the province until mining was halted and alternative energy solutions endorsed by the government. Effectiveness of this tactic appears to be somewhat mixed; there was no significant drop in tourist visitation, but it did serve to bring more awareness to the oil sands. Shortly after the campaign was launched, an Angus Reid Public Opinion poll revealed that those polled in the United States and Britain were substantially less inclined to visit Alberta after viewing the video prepared by the campaign. For example, before viewing, 20% of those polled in the United States said they would "definitely consider travelling to Alberta," and this number dropped to 9% after watching the video (Angus Reid, 2010, p. 3).

However, according to the Post-Summer 2010 Alberta Tourism Operator Survey report, both Banff and Jasper National Parks did not experience any decline in visitation, and actually saw a slight increase from 2009 (Brooks Jobb and Associates, 2010). The report also states that northern Alberta tourism operators had an increased summer occupancy and activity rate that was expected to continue through the rest of the year. In terms of tourism, in at least one instance the Rethink Alberta campaign had the opposite of its intended effect. One Fort McMurray operator reported "that the U.S.-initiated oil sands boycott campaign appeared to work to his advantage as his property benefited from several American group tours with people wanting to see the oil sands for

themselves…With activity in the oil patch heating up, fall bookings are strong and the trend is expected to carry forward into 2011" (Brooks Jobb and Associates, 2010, p. 9). However, it has also been reported that Corporate Ethics International, one of the main groups behind the Rethink Alberta campaign, will be continuing their efforts to alter people's choices of destination (Gerein, 2011).

Oil extraction and nature-tourism relationships: An expansion of current models

Nature-tourism and oil extraction in the oil sands region of Alberta demonstrates several things in regards to current models. First, while evidence is still limited, Widener's four-step model of oil-induced nature-tourism growth may yet still be applicable to the oil sands controversy. As discussed in the previous section the Rethink Alberta campaign used media outlets to try and discourage tourism to Alberta, and appears to be ineffective in its efforts to stem actual visitor numbers. It has, however, generated the kind of media awareness seen in Widener's research that is thought to cause an increase in visitation. The true effect of the Rethink Alberta campaign, whether it succeeds in its goal of reducing tourism or serves to increase tourism in accordance with Widener's model in spite of the campaign's intentions, remains to be seen. Further studies of tourism in the oil sands region may serve to further support the oil-induced, nature-tourism models.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, tourism, especially nature-tourism, can no longer be seen only as a tool to prevent or slow the expansion of oil operations. In other models, tourism used as a strategy against the spread of oil extraction, but as shown in the case of the oil sands, we must now consider the possibility that tourism can act to allow and even justify the spread of oil extraction. Not only is there no mention of oil sands

mining and its effects on the environment in the nature-tourism material, but the pictures used form an uncorrupted vision of the ecological setting of the region. Because the images used by the tourism industry depict the viability of the natural environment and the expected continuance of its capability to support outdoor activities, an impression is made that mining of the oil sands has not made an environmental impact and thus may allow the mining of the oil sands to persist. This observation does not mean that if oil sands mining continues or ceases it will be exclusively because of tourism, but it does mean that tourism appears to be playing a much more important and unexpected role in the controversy over mining.

There are several implications for both visual and environmental anthropologists, as well as for the anthropology of tourism as a whole. Environmental anthropology is increasingly finding itself in the middle of environmental issues, where training in human behavior and interactions with ecosystems is valuable in finding solutions. Examination of images being utilized in such situations can be another tool in the anthropologists' toolbox. Environmental anthropologists can engage in an analysis of visual images to gain insight surrounding conservation or ecological issue, of the people involved, and the goals or intent of those people. Visual images of the environment can have powerful influence on human decisions, and in the oil sands region visual images are being used by two distinct entities to create two different impressions of the oil sands region: one is of an enterprising community that is environmentally responsible enough to support the kinds of nature-tourism activities so heavily advertised, and the other is of heavy, unsustainable extraction that is devastating the environment and its people.

Tourism is often overlooked as an area of study within anthropology, but is clearly important to social and environmental issues. Tourism, and the visual images associated with it, is a top generator of revenue on a variety of scales and locations, and as shown here, also critical in setting political agendas and in battles over the use of natural resources. At present, the tourism industry in the oil sands is generating substantially more images promoting an environmentally stable area than anti-oil sands campaigns' online media, though the latter is serving to increase awareness of environmental concerns. Tourism in the oil sands region is playing a considerable part in determining the fate of the oil sands and, as long as we are dependent upon oil, it deserves our attention.

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