

Bulletin 2021-27

July 9, 2021

Oil Sands Exploration Application Variance Form and Updated Guidance

On January 8, 2021, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) updated the *Master Schedule of Standards and Conditions* (MSSC), which introduced new standards, conditions, desired outcomes, and best management practices for oil sands exploration (OSE) activities the AER administers.

If applicants are unable to meet MSSC approval standards, sufficient rationale and mitigation measures should be provided for review with the OSE application. To that end, the AER has developed a new [Oil Sands Exploration Application Variance Form](#) for applicants to submit with their application. The form is available on our [Oil Sands Exploration webpage](#). Completing the form will allow for a more efficient review of your application.

Furthermore, the caribou range approval standards and conditions in the MSSC now apply to OSE programs and overlap with the caribou protection plans outlined in *Manual 008: Oil Sands and Coal Exploration Application Guide*; as a result, the submission of caribou protection plans outlined in *Manual 008* is no longer required for OSE programs. This change does not lessen caribou protections. The MSSC caribou range standards fully align with and support existing provincial caribou policy.

Applicants should continue to follow *Manual 008* together with the guidance given in this bulletin and the [Oil Sands Exploration webpage](#) until a full review of and updates to *Manual 008* can be completed. If you have any questions, contact our Customer Contact Centre by phone at 1-855-297-8311 or by email at inquiries@aer.ca.