

# THE MOCCASIN FLATS EVICTIONS:

## Métis Home, Forced Relocation, and Resilience in Fort McMurray, Alberta



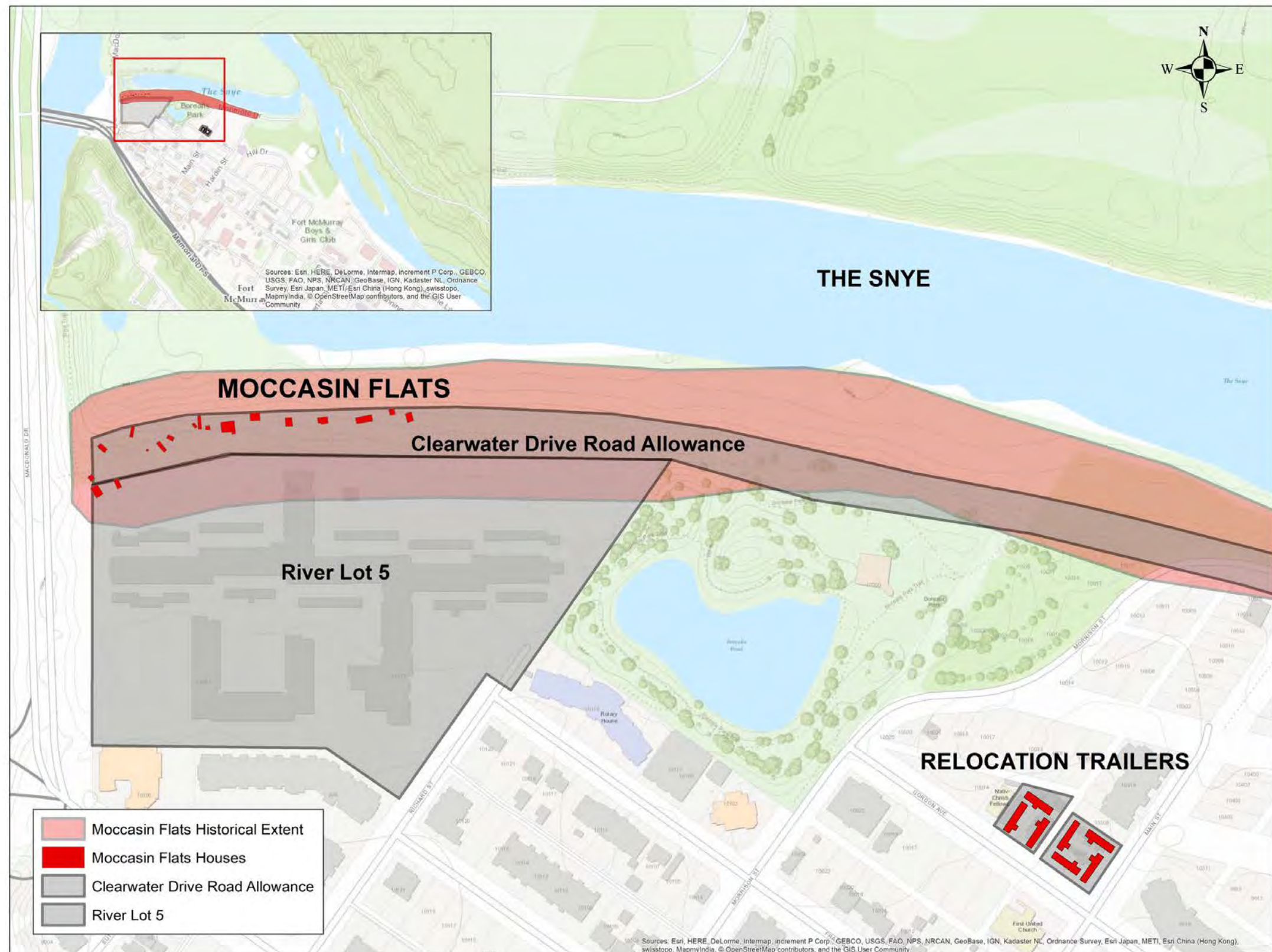
Hereward Longley, BA, MA, PhD (ABD)  
Tara L. Joly, BAS, PhD  
September 2018

## **Main Findings:**

- A culturally important Métis settlement with deep historical roots. However, this does not preclude that Treaty people also called the place home.
- Between 1975 and 1981, The New Town of Fort McMurray collaborated with Northward Developments Ltd. (Syncrude-owned) to evict the Moccasin Flats families to build the River Park Glen housing complex.
- By calling the Moccasin Flats residents “squatters,” the Town used property law to justify their eviction, and ignored the Indigenous identity, history, and rights of the Moccasin Flats residents.
- The evictions fragmented the Moccasin Flats community. It disrupted relationships to the land, had cultural and socio-economic impacts, and has been a source of intergenerational trauma.



# Moccasin Flats was a Road Allowance Community



Author: Hereward Longley

Moccasin Flats Settlement and Relocation Trailers, 1970s

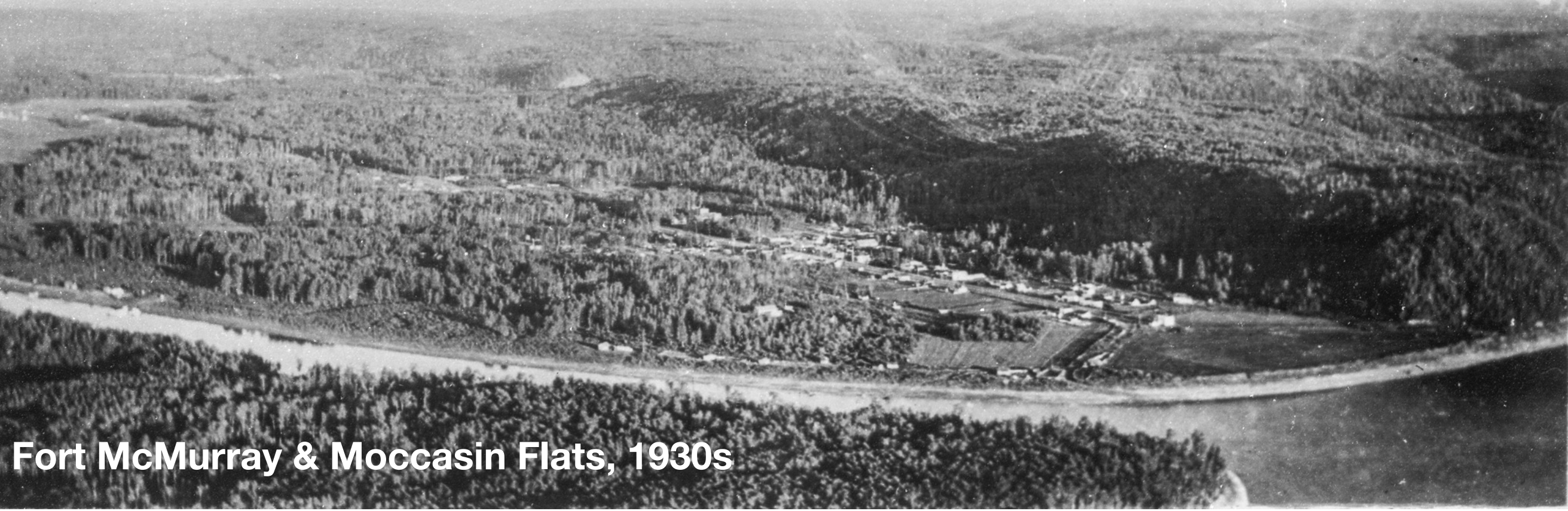
100 50 0 100 Meters  
1:3,000



## Moccasin Flats as a Home

You'd see maybe 15, maybe 20 tents [at Moccasin Flats]. And then there was the people that had their wooden structures uh, their small shacks, or whatever you want to call them: houses. **To them it was their home. I kind of felt that about my tent.** I was thinking, I parked my tent beside Uncle Pat [Shott]'s house, **my little home.** And I owned a piece of that riverbank too.

- Neils Langevin



Fort McMurray & Moccasin Flats, 1930s



H.B. Post at McMurray. (13)



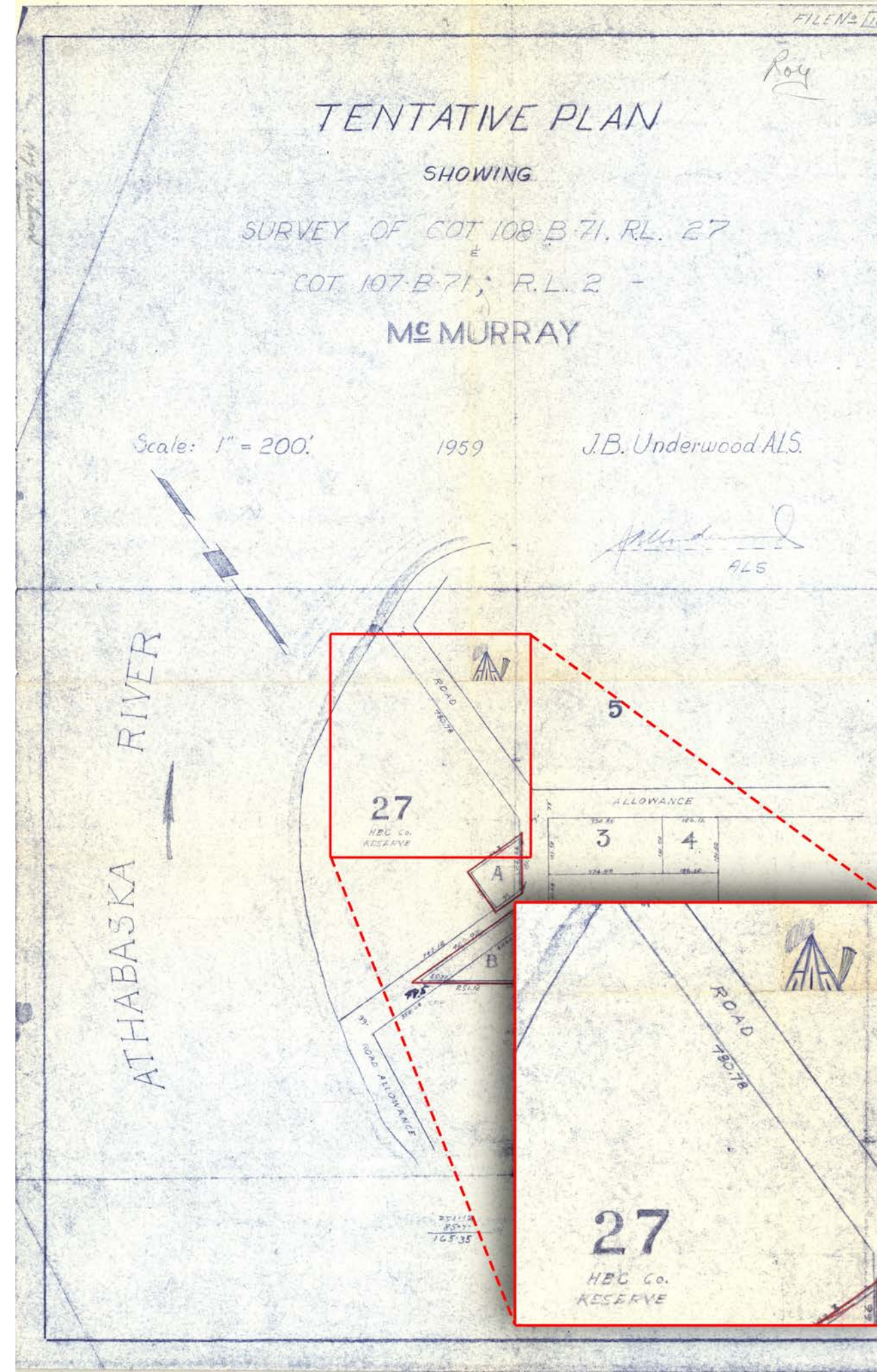
Fort McMurray in 1914.



## Occupancy at Moccasin Flats

“Well like I said my grandfather, great grandfather came [to MacDonald Island] in the 1800s...And **already then we were talking about Moccasin Flats of being settled**, you know? People lived there like I said in the summer time. **Some people stayed all year long.** The majority of people stayed there summer time and moved away in the winter to go trapping. You know? Come back in the spring time to work for the boats or railroads.”

- Cameron MacDonald



**Table 4: Heads of Household and Families Residing at Moccasin Flats, as recorded from oral history and by Fort McMurray Board of Administrators in 1978**

|                     |   |                            |
|---------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Pat and Maria Shott | Ben Powder                                    | Cameron MacDonald          |
| Ron Currie          | Walter Malcom                                 | Fred Kreutzer              |
| Arthur Boucher      | Bob Armit                                     | Michell Gladu              |
| Baxter Gillingham   | Peter, Loretta, Jeff, and Maryanne Sluchinski | Mickey Patterson           |
| Julie Lindstrom     | Harriet Folley                                | Ed Cooper and Celina Harpe |
| Desjarlais          | Catherine Boucher                             | Tourangeau                 |
| Freddie Boucher     | Harvey Boucher                                | Campre                     |
| Pauline             | Cardinal                                      | & more...                  |



“You know where the dike is? Used to be tents from there all the way to Waterways. People used to live along the river in summer time.”

- Anonymous



P2007.164.1 - Fort McMurray, circa 1930. Credit Fort McMurray Historical Society.



**“[W]here you met a lot of people, a lot of Elders. They had stories to tell, just like everybody else, and they got along. I mean when they got along well was when they came up and they’d visit other people. My mother and father knew quite a few of those people and they all seemed to get along very well. They'd come together as one big bunch, happy families. But those days are gone.”**

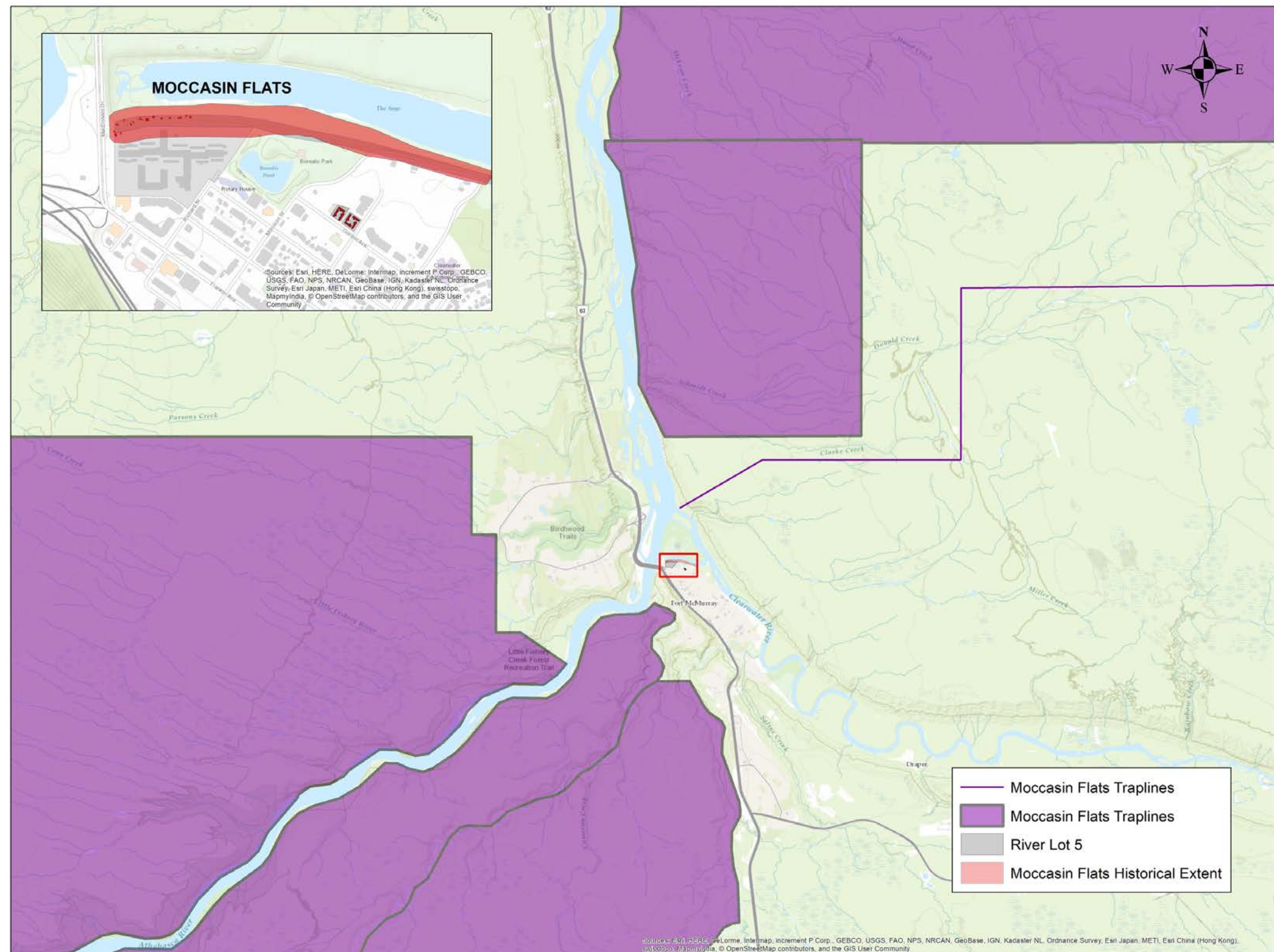
**- Almer Waniandy**



Lola, David, and Almer growing up at Moccasin Flats, 1950s



Moccasin Flats was a place where families could maintain and renew their cultural way of life that relied on living off the land.



Author: Hereward Longley

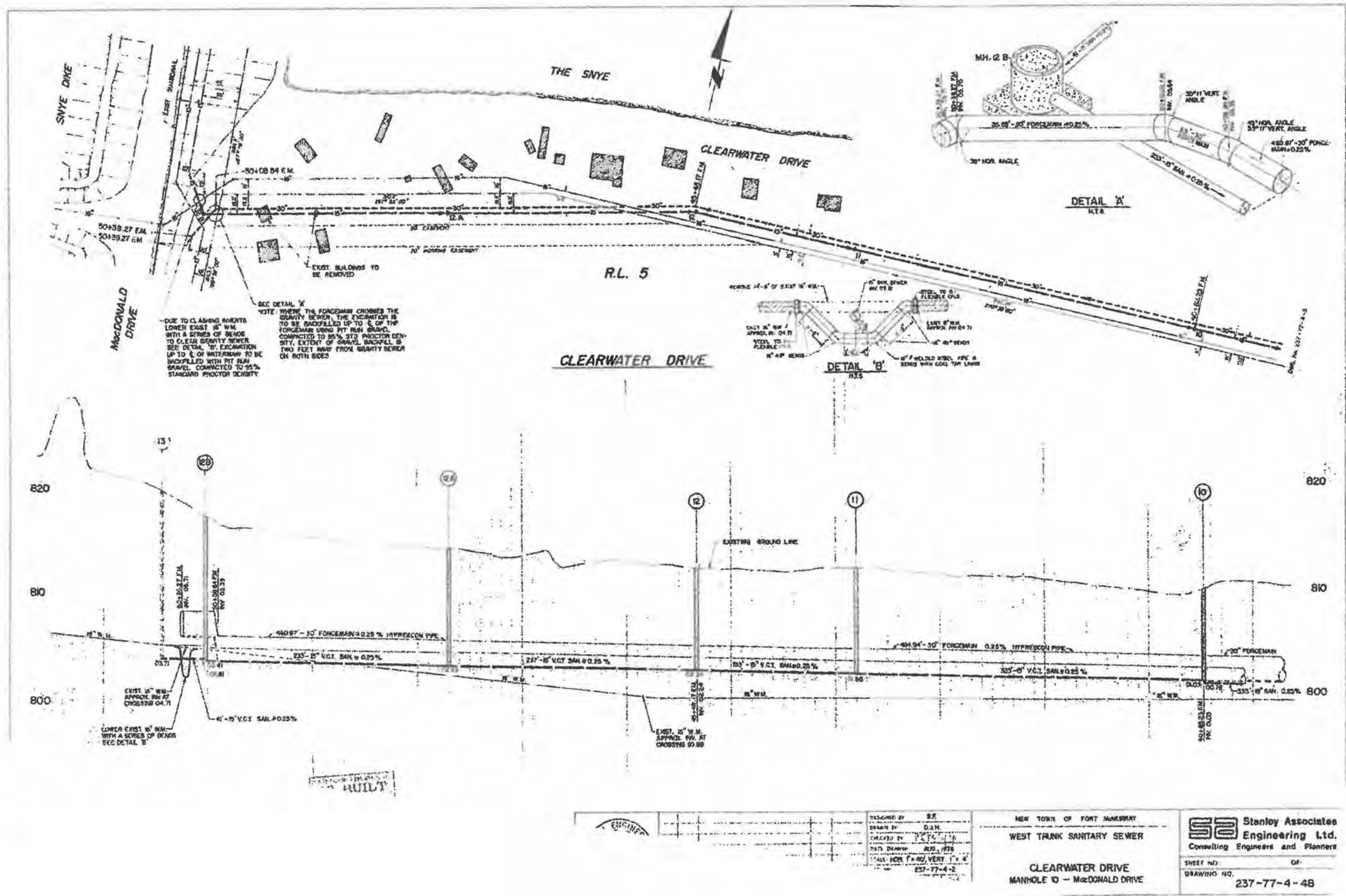
## Historical Traplines Held by Moccasin Flats Residents

5 2.5 0 5 Kilometers

1:150,000



# Sewer Line proposal and negotiations with the Métis Association of Alberta, 1975





February 25, 1976

# February 1976, Northward requests the eviction of Moccasin Flats families.

The Honourable Mr. B. Bogle  
Minister Responsible for  
Native Affairs  
229 Legislative Building  
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear Mr. Bogle:

Re: Squatters - Syne River  
Fort McMurray, Alberta

As Northward Developments Ltd., we have acquired an option to purchase River Lot 5 in Fort McMurray which adjoins the Syne and the Athabasca Rivers. Our interests in River Lot 5 is in its potential for the development of a major residential urban complex. While our concept is only in the very preliminary design phase, one of the keys to its economical and practical success will be our ability to have free unrestricted access to the Syne River.

Obviously, therefore, we are very concerned to receive the attached letter from Brownlee Fryett, Barristers and Solicitors, advising us that the town of Fort McMurray would be initiating expropriation proceedings to obtain an easement through River Lot 5 for the construction of a sanitary sewer. This easement is necessitated by the inability of the town to solve the problem of the squatters. We would particularly draw your attention to Paragraph #2 of the attached letter.

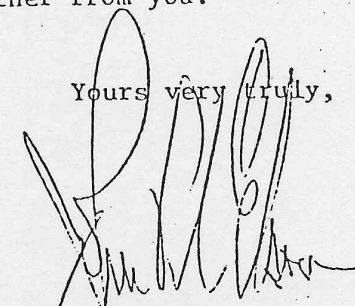
As Northward Developments we have, and will continue to, cooperate with the town of Fort McMurray in every reasonable way. We feel in this instance, however, the major problem is not the location of the sanitary sewer, but rather the inability to solve the problem of the squatters. We feel that if the town succeeds in its expropriation, a major incentive to deal with the problem will have been removed.

We urgently solicit the cooperation and support of your department in dealing with the problem. We would be pleased to meet with you and the town to discuss this further if appropriate.

We have taken the liberty of providing a copy of this letter and the letter from Brownlee Fryett to your cabinet colleagues Messrs. Johnston and Yurko; the Chairman of the New Town Board of Fort McMurray, Mr. Chuck Knight; and Mr. Mowers of the Federal Department of Indian Affairs.

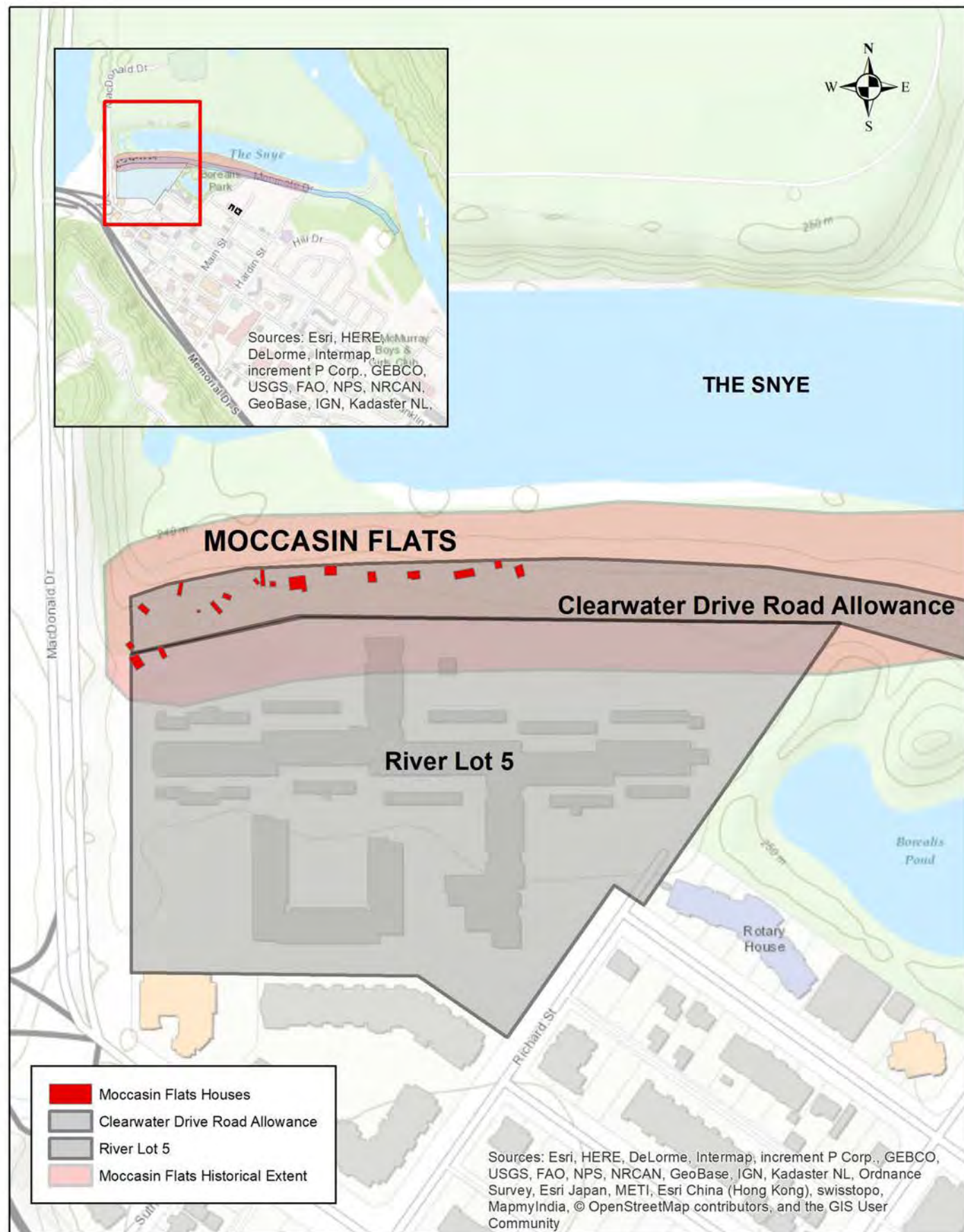
We look forward to hearing further from you.

Yours very truly,



J.P.C. Elson  
Vice-President





Author: Hereward Longley

## Moccasin Flats in the 1970s

80 40 0 80 Meters

1:5,000



## **Northwards Development Agreement Includes Condition to Buy Moccasin Flats After evicting the Families:**

“That upon the New Town of Fort McMurray being able to provide clear title to and clear and unobstructed possession to approximately 4.3 acres situated between River Lot 5 and the Snye River, that the New Town of Fort McMurray will sell, transfer and convey and Northward developments Ltd. will purchase the same from the New Town of Fort McMurray at and for a total consideration of ONE THOUSAND (\$1,000.00) DOLLARS per acre...”



# Fenced Out

**GEST**  
The cool weather moving into Alberta is reducing the number of fires in the province. The 625 fires now being reported by the provincial fire department are down from 1,000 in the same period last year. Page 2.

**Sask. (CP) —** A fire had prevented six firefighters from entering National Park yesterday after firefighters agreed to wait for reinforcements with the fire. Page 2.

**Canada**  
Senators on Thursday rejected Trudeau's proposal to merge with the Liberals and Conservatives to form a new party. The move would have ended the current coalition government. Page 3.

**Confirmed polio**  
remained at six in Alberta and Ontario and continued to be reported in other provinces. Page 3.

**World**  
The price of oil today that the world will remain in a state of uncertainty, until a few more barrels are produced. Page 5.

**S**  
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**... page 3**  
... page 7  
... page 8  
... page 10  
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... SCENE  
... page 14  
... page 2  
... page 5



**MEET VS MIGHTY--**Alice Armit has been living on the south bank of the Snye for many years. She said she has been harassed by residents of the highrise apartment seen behind her. She is holding a chrome strip ripped off a vehicle which ran into her home several nights ago.

## Apartment dwellers' animosity angers Moccasin Flats residents

By DOUG SMITH

Animosity shown them by residents of the River Park Glen project has angered squatters living in nearby Moccasin Flats. The mainly-native inhabitants of the shanty-town community sitting in the shadow of the 1,094-unit Syncrude employee development feel they are being slowly squeezed from their homes on the banks of the Snye.

Recently some River Park Glen residents complained to the town board of administrators about intoxicated natives on Northward property and an incident involving a young man and a four-year-old girl.

Spokesman for the Snye squatters Alice Armit yesterday questioned whether the people of River Park Glen are sure the natives allegedly annoying them are in fact Moccasin Flats residents.

There are a lot of people passing through the small strip of land adjacent to the high rises and not all are residents, she claimed, indicating the drunks and would-be child molesters may not be residents of Moccasin Flats.

She said she and her husband have always lived near the Snye and return there each spring after wintering on their trapline north of Fort McMurray.

**OWN COMPLAINTS**

Mrs. Armit said natives of the area have complaints of their own that, until this time, have gone unaddressed.

She said about one year ago when the highrise complex was under construction workers threw pieces of cement and iron rod at the Snye settlement. Many pieces hit the roof of her shack, causing considerable damage.

She and her husband approached Bergman Structures Ltd., the prime contractor for the Northward project, with the evidence and were promised all damage would be repaired; it never was, she said.

Mrs. Armit claims she and other residents of the area have suffered continual verbal abuse from highrise dwellers, and many times she has gone outside only to be met with jeers and name calling, but the people yelling never show themselves.

"I am fed up with it," she said.

To make matters worse, workers recently installed some utility pipe at the drive-in entrance to Moccasin Flats near the Snye dyke. The work done has made it nearly impossible to gain entry to the squatter settlement and the road is now very steep.

Mrs. Armit said the way the road is now the firetrucks could not enter the area if there were a fire, town garbage trucks cannot manoeuvre the narrow rutted trail and so bagged garbage is mounting.

Many of the residents of Moccasin Flats are elderly, do not own or drive vehicles and because of the state the road is in taxi drivers have refused to provide door-to-door service.

Yet another complaint now brought into the open is the continual noise from the apartment dwellers. Mrs. Armit said some of the people living there must be partially deaf because stereo record players are cranked up to excessive volumes.

Mrs. Armit said the highrise dwellers have no more right to make a lot of noise than the native people living below them do.

Of the recent talks of relocation Mrs. Armit said it would be good to relocate the squatters providing the natives receive a fair deal. The town and the province have been considering alternative sites for the squatters.

A relocation site near the town water treatment plant on Morrison Street has been identified, the money is available, but nothing is being done to make it possible.

She said the seven families to be relocated have no small children, they are all old age pensioners or trappers and would like to stay together.

REGINA (CP) — Constitutional reform proposals drawn up by Prime Minister Trudeau as the potential basis for a re-election campaign were formally rejected by the country's 10 provincial premiers Thursday as incomplete, unworkable and a threat to parliamentary democracy.

The 10 set aside ideological differences and concluded closed sessions at their 19th annual meeting here with common assaults against Trudeau's plans to rewrite the country's underlying law and against his handling of the economy.

Even Quebec Premier Rene Levesque, who has said he will not consider any constitutional discussions except those based on his proposals for a sovereign Quebec associated economically with Canada, shifted ground and closed ranks with his fellow premiers.

He served notice that, like the other premiers, he will work to squeeze what he can for his province out of future constitutional bargaining sessions despite his continuing commitment to Quebec independence.

As they left, some for home, others for a holiday at the northern Saskatchewan resort of Waskesiu, the provincial leaders endorsed what they described as a need for constitutional reform and said they looked forward to a suggested October constitutional summit with the prime minister.

**AGAINST RENOVATIONS**

But they united against the recent Trudeau call for two-stage renovations of the 1867 British North America Act, the British statute that serves as the country's constitution.

Trudeau introduced legislation last June under which he proposed to alter the Supreme Court of Canada, the Senate and the role of the monarchy during the next year, followed by talks on federal-provincial power sharing in the subsequent two years.

But the premiers rejected those suggestions in a final communique, arguing that the two stages must go hand in hand.

At the same time, the 10 leaders described Trudeau's plans to transform the Senate into a so-called house of the federation as unworkable. The new body would be appointed, in part, by the provinces.

And they said a proposal to make the governor-general the formal head of state whenever the Queen is not in Canada was a threat to parliamentary democracy.

Ultimate authority in the country, they said, should remain with the monarch and not with a governor-general who could be replaced at the whim of the federal cabinet.

Provincial agreement against Trudeau's constitutional proposals had been expected throughout the two-day conference, and the final communique contained few surprises.

**RAISES EYEBROWS**

Levesque, however, raised some eyebrows by inserting a paragraph in the document that said Quebec believes only minimal changes are required to make the federal system "a serious alternative in the forthcoming Quebec referendum."

## Workers to vote soon on MIOW-GCOS talks

The membership of the McMurray Independent Oil Workers (MIOW) union will soon be asked to vote on the results of discussions now going on with Great Canadian Oil Sands (GCOS), said union president Don Marchand.

Mr. Marchand claimed yesterday GCOS has been telling people that negotiations have been "going very well."

"I'm not saying negotiations are going good or bad," he said. "I'm just saying let the membership decide in a vote."

Mr. Marchand would say nothing beyond this.

Don Smith, a public relations spokesman for GCOS, said he knew of no reason why Mr. Marchand should make a remark of this nature at a time when negotiations were progressing smoothly.

According to Mr. Smith, a general meeting of the MIOW membership has been called for Wednesday but it is a regularly-scheduled proceeding.

Mr. Smith said about the only thing he could say about the negotiations at this stage was that Mr. Marchand had no package settlement he could present to MIOW members.

"Thus far there have been no real issues or conflicts," he said. "Discussions are proceeding as well as can be expected."

Contract negotiations have been in progress since April. In June talks broke off over the deferment of an article relating to an extra statutory holiday for the union membership.

A conciliator from the labor relations board was brought in to work with the groups but failed to bring about a solution.

Negotiations between GCOS and the union have been complicated because both wages and articles are being considered.

MIOW was given approval several weeks ago to hold a government-operated strike vote. The union membership approved strike action at that time.

If the union should decide to go on strike, or GCOS decide on a lockout, each must give the other 48 hours notice of the action.

## CRTC feared precedent regarding cable FM bid

The Alberta Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has been refused permission to add four United States FM signals to its Fort McMurray and area cable service.

The president of ABC, Bob Lamb, said the company was turned down because the CRTC is hiding behind its policy of not broadcasting American stations over Canadian airwaves and feared allowing the ABC request might set a precedent.

While in Fort McMurray yesterday, Mr. Lamb said there was no other reason he could think of which would cause the Canadian Radiotelevision Telecommunication Commission (CRTC) to rule against Fort McMurray being plugged into four FM signals which are already being sent to the microwave tower just outside town.

Mr. Lamb said the cable service the town of Fort McMurray receives was the same as that being broadcast in over Canadian stations and in this case they hid behind that policy," he said. "If they are going to have a policy like this, why can Calgary and Edmonton residents still receive these signals?"

A good percentage of the people living in Fort McMurray come from Calgary and Edmonton and are used to receiving the service and would like to continue to use it, said Mr. Lamb.

Mr. Lamb was commenting on a ruling made by the CRTC on the public hearing held in Calgary on May 8, 1978 when ABC presented an application to amend its cable television broadcasting license for Fort McMurray and surrounding communities.

The CRTC denied the application because it "is not consistent with Commission policy, as set forth in its Public announcement of March 8, 1977."

Mr. Lamb said he was disappointed in the results after going through "a good hearing" which saw chairman of the



# Relocation Program: Relocated families must sign away rights to Moccasin Flats

of Fort McMurray, in the Province of Alberta, do for ~~myself~~/ourselves, ~~my~~/our heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, hereby quit claim all ~~my~~/our right, title and interest of every nature and kind whatsoever and without restricting the generality of the foregoing, including all rights, mineral rights, rights under any lease or agreement, rights of or by occupancy, squatter's rights and tenant's rights; in all or any part of the property located at Clearwater Drive between Richard Street and MacDonald Drive, and in the house presently owned by ~~me~~/us and located on or near the said property, and I/we do further hereby release, acquit and forever discharge by these presents for ~~myself~~/ourselves, ~~my~~/our heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, release and forever discharge The New Town of Fort McMurray and any other person, firm or corporation charged or chargeable with responsibility or liability, its heirs, representatives, officers, administrators, successors and assigns, from all and all claims and demands, damages or costs or suits or actions with respect to the aforementioned lands and the house located



December 11, 1978

## Ted Mason asks residents to leave the Snye

### WITHOUT PREJUDICE

As you are no doubt aware, the occupation of the land along the Snye has been an issue for some time. The Town has made a commitment to clear the Snye area of occupants, and in order to meet that commitment, we have made provision for the relocation of seven family units identified through consultation and agreement in 1975. No provision has been made for an alternative for any other occupant, and I am not empowered to make any provision for such an alternative.

In view of the foregoing, I would very much appreciate it if you could make arrangements to move as soon as possible. Your co-operation would be very much appreciated.

Yours truly,

*Original signed  
by W.E. Mason*

W.E. MASON,  
Chairman,  
Board of Administrators

*Hand Delivered*





# May 14, 1981, Sheriff John Easton and Bylaw Officer Brian Irvine Evict Remaining Moccasin Flats Families



Supporters of the three families evicted from their homes beside the Snye inlet last week marked the first time in Fort McMurray history that force has been used to settle land rights. But Patrick Shott and the members of three families living in their riverside huts were not the last squatters in the city.

## Forced eviction a local first

City clerk Jerry Bussieres refused to rule out the possibility that the situation could occur again.

"This is the first time we've ever had to go to such an extreme to move somebody," he said. "But you never can tell what the future will bring. It's unfortunate when it has to happen that way."

Mr. Shott was arrested by RCMP officers last Thursday when he tried to resist eviction. Hours later, his 20-year-old home and four nearby structures were bulldozed by city maintenance crews.

Mr. Bussieres said the Shott home was built on land reserved for Clearwater Drive. Another home near the Snye — now occupied by longtime resident Walter MacDonald — was left intact despite the fact it also rests on the road right-of-way.

Mr. MacDonald, a resident of the Fort McMurray area for more than 60 years, has frequently moved his shack along the inlet, hampering city efforts to relocate him.

Mr. Bussieres said the city's legal consultants are in the process of preparing eviction notices and soon may turn the case over to the sheriff's office.

However, the destruction of the Shott home may have "scared off" Mr. MacDonald, the clerk said.

"I had heard that he changed his mind and was thinking about leaving after seeing what happened to the Shott place," Mr. Bussieres said.

In Waterways, another cabin rests illegally on privately owned land and is the subject of city attention.

The owner, Simone Goodwin, died late last year. Since then, friends and relatives reportedly have been using the shelter.

The home was built long before a subdivision plan was developed for Waterways, and city officials had decided to leave Mrs. Goodwin alone. But they now have undertaken a search for her beneficiaries in an effort to have the shack moved or destroyed.

Other illegal shelters are built periodically around the city, Mr. Bussieres said, though legal complexities make it impossible for officials to remove them quickly.

"In the spring, the odd squatter will come in off his trap lines and throw a house up somewhere," he said. "They move around so much that there's not much we can do about it in the short run."



In this 1980 Today file photo, a bulldozer destroys a home belonging to a resident of Moccasin Flats near the Snye.



**Joe Blyan, MAA vice president at the time, said,**

“It wasn’t one particular group of people who made this country, it was all of us. We just want you, the mayor and the others gathered here to know that we want to be treated like the rest of you. No man should have the right to take another man’s land away, especially if it is his home; and that’s the issue here, a man’s home was destroyed yesterday.”

**Ray Djuff, “Families on Snye evicted,” *Fort McMurray Today*, May 15, 1981.**





# Impacts of the Evictions, as Recorded in Interviews

1. Cultural and way of life

2. Socio-economic





## Cultural Impacts: Social Fragmentation

**“[W]e're all neighbours and everybody knew each other, eh. Kids played with each other and, you know. So then once the [homes] were taken away, well, we moved here, and the others moved there. You know, everybody separated.”**

- Anonymous

## Cultural Impacts: Relationships to the land were disrupted

“[A]fter thinking there, it didn’t affect me as **it did affect**, I’d say, **my mom the most. Because of her way of life.** You know, she grew up in the woods, traplines and this and that. And in between the house and the shed that was her little area for her cooking. We used to make moose hides every fall there, the traditional way. And **that got all affected when you move up to Beacon Hill, because you can’t even start a fire in your backyard. So, you know, it was like two thirds of your life were taken away when that happened. That’s** who it really affected the most.”



## **Cultural Impacts: Intergenerational Effects**

**“Intergenerational effects include disconnection to land as well as never having time or healthy resources to heal...I always imagine what it would be like to be able to feel a part of a land base with roots and a community of family and friends, but the legacy of relocation and instability lingered into my life...I would love to move back and feel a sense of community and family but the cost of living and lack of land base leaves me wondering if I will ever return.”**

**- Anonymous**



## Socio-Economic Impacts: Housing Insecurity, Finances, and Homelessness

**“low-standard”** dwellings, compared to other houses being developed at that time in Fort McMurray.

- Anonymous

**“After they kicked us out of there we went through real hard times, you know? I think they owe us. Other people got trailers and we didn’t, and we had two children going to school...We struggled to find another place and we slept in MacDonald Island sometimes.”**

- Anonymous

# **Avenues to Reconciliation**

- **Compensation for Families  
(land, monetary, remaining trailer)**
- **Monument**
- **Métis (Indigenous) Cultural Centre**
- **Land Transfer – McMurray Métis**
- **Reconstruct Snye Dike to Allow Water Flow**
- **Cultural Competency Education**
- **Further Research: archaeology, genealogy,  
other evictions, municipal bylaw review**
- **Apology**



# **Thank you**

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