Canada’s Oil Sands
Scales and Perspectives
by Jeff Powers & Byron White

The ubiquity of Oil Sands coverage in the media today attempts to compress one of the largest industrial endeavours undertaken by man into sound bites and quotes. We are bombarded with politicized snippets of information from environmental impacts to economic drivers. Many people are well aware of the plethora of arguments that surround the project, but an aspect that remains elusive is the sheer magnitude of scale that the Oil Sands encompass. The following is an effort to gain some form of perspective of the Oil Sands, attempting in simple terms, to contextualize scales of land area, volume of oil, water and the economic reach into a wide-angle snapshot of the sprawling nature of the project.

1.7 TRILLION barrels of oil in the Oil Sands
(or 2700 km³)

8x The estimate reserves of Saudi Arabia

Suncor Board of Directors and Other Corporate Affiliations
That is, with current production methods, between 2–4.5 m³ of water is required for every 1 m³ of crude extracted. To extract the total oil sands reserves at this rate it would require using 12,160 km³ of water—or 50% of the total volume in the Great Lakes or 10% of the Earth’s total surface freshwater reserves.

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Possible affected spill area.

Statistics Canada Values the Oil Sands at $342 Billion of Canada’s Worth

Other Estimates Put it Closer to $1482 Billion of Canada’s Worth

Andrew Sharpe. The Valuation of the Alberta Oil Sands, 2008

50% of the water in the Great Lakes would be required... or 4/5 of the Great Lakes