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THERE'S HOPE YET FOR AT LEAST SOME LAID-OFF OIL WORKERS

The country's minister of natural resources was asked Friday whether Ottawa would consider Saskatchewan's request for aid to clean up abandoned oil wells, a move that could create hundreds of jobs – or more – for laid-off oil workers.

The minister's response: a firm maybe.

"There are [oil] producing provinces that are having a tough time with job losses in the sector," Canadian Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr said at a news conference in Winnipeg.

"So we will consider these requests by the government of Saskatchewan."

On Monday, Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall proposed the scheme, which would stimulate employment in the hard-hit energy sector by accelerating cleanup of wells no longer capable of production.

If undertaken, the plan would speed up decommissioning and reclamation of hundreds of non-producing wells over the next two years while sustaining 1,200 new jobs, Wall said.

The technical nature of the work would likely necessitate the hiring of unemployed energy workers who are familiar with oil-and-gas production and procedures.

"These are the professionals who are best suited to well cleanup," Wall said.

Saskatchewan's proposal calls for \$156 million in federal funding. Finding private-sector funds to pay for the clean-up could prove difficult if not impossible — many abandoned wells have no owner because the company has gone bankrupt.

WATCH: The Natural Resources Minister says he'd consider a proposal to help job creation in energy-producing provinces. As Gary Bobrovitz reports, it could help boost jobs and clean up the environment.

In Alberta, where inactive wells are numerous, such a proposal would likely be well received by the thousands of workers who've been laid off in the past year.

The province had more than 700 abandoned wells in 2015, a figure that's surged fourfold from the previous

year as more junior oil companies cut production amid oil's plunge.

Job losses in province's vaunted energy sector have been the steepest in the country.

Alberta lost another 10,000 positions across all sectors last month, Statscan said last week, pushing up the jobless rate above the national average for the first time in 28 years.

'LIKE WALKING IN A GHOST TOWN': GROUP WORRIED ABOUT ABANDONED OIL, GAS SITES IN B.C.

An environmental group is raising concerns about pipes, wellheads, pump jacks and even entire buildings left abandoned in the British Columbia backcountry from oil and gas developments.

"We found that very, very few of all the wells we looked at had been what we consider properly restored," said John Werring, science adviser for the David Suzuki Foundation.

"Wellheads had been removed but all the casings were there. The ponds to collect process water were still on site. There were pump jacks - entire pump jacks - left in the field and had been there for 30 or 40 years."

Last August, Werring headed out to northeastern British Columbia in the Fort St. John region to assess how industry was cleaning up after itself. The team covered 4,000 kilometres of back roads in 10 days and assessed 35 sites, both well pads and facilities such as compressor stations.

According to information from the British Columbia Oil and Gas Commission, the sites had been dormant for an average of 14 years - although their ages varied from months to 41 years.

The commission has listed all the sites as either "abandoned" or "suspended" - designations that normally require significant cleanup.

Werring said only two of the sites - less than six per cent - appeared to have been cleaned up at all. In six of the sites, investigators discovered releases of poisonous hydrogen sulphide gas, either through its characteristic rotten-egg smell or by readings on gas monitors.



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One gas plant seemed to have been left almost entirely intact.

"All the buildings, all the compressors, flare stacks, first aid shacks," Werring said. "It was essentially like walking into a ghost town, like somebody had turned off the switch and walked away and had done nothing to do any kind of site rehabilitation."

One investigator walked through an open gate into a building on a compressor station site that had been suspended since 2000.

"There was a coffee pot sitting there on a timer. The coffee pot was warm."

The oil and gas commission took issue with some of the report. Spokesman Alan Clay responded in an email that some of the wells the group visited weren't dormant, but were actually still producing.

Clay also said the commission took action in November 2013 on one of the wells referenced in the report.

"Remediation is ongoing and the responsible party is working to address the residual environmental concerns," Clay said in the email.

Provincial regulations require operators to reclaim sites before they are designated abandoned or suspended. But Werring notes the regulator may waive those requirements if they are judged not "reasonably practicable."

There are about 10,000 wells in British Columbia that are considered either abandoned or suspended.

But un-remediated well sites are a problem throughout the energy-producing provinces.

In Alberta, the provincial regulator estimated in October there are nearly 21,000 inactive wells that

don't meet cleanup guidelines.

In Saskatchewan, Premier Brad Wall recently asked for \$156 million from the federal government to clean up old wells in the province, as well as put unemployed energy industry workers back on a payroll.

The B.C. commission has also clarified up its own rules. Last September, it broadened the definition of what equipment must be removed from dormant well sites.

B.C. LNG INVESTMENT WILL YIELD LONG-TERM PROFITS SAYS ENERGY ANALYST

Global climate change commitments mean countries will buy LNG to clean energy supply says analyst

The B.C. government made the right decision putting their eggs in the LNG basket, because the move will yield long-term profits, says one energy analyst.

The B.C. Liberals are putting \$100 million of taxpayers' money into a LNG prosperity fund and say more money will be added when the LNG industry takes off in B.C.

But the industry itself is warning that with oil prices falling the window of opportunity is rapidly closing. Some economists, however, maintain the future is bright for the natural gas industry because of climate change agreements.

"It is a very long term industry and there is significant demand ... which is motivated by the Paris agreement and the commitments that Asian countries made to clean their energy systems, said Mary Hemmingsen, Global Head of LNG at KPMG in Canada



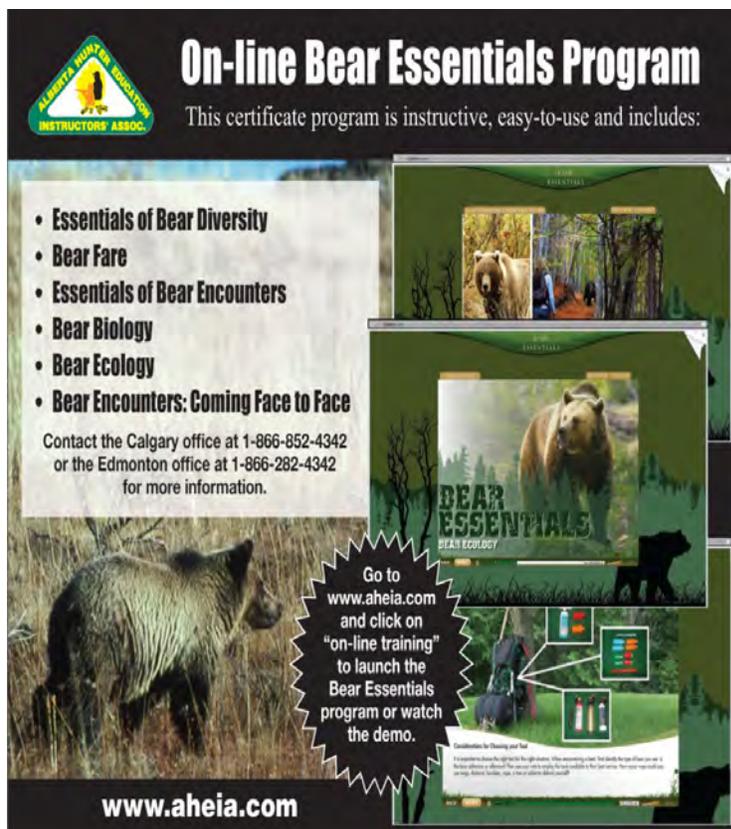
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She admits it is too late for B.C. to cash in on current demand, but there is still a chance for Canada to be the world's North American supplier of LNG. "We have an approval process that provides 40-year supply and it sets us apart in terms of a long-term secure supply for buyers of LNG globally." Hemmingsen says the B.C. government will have to wait and see

whether their prosperity fund pays off. "As [Finance] Minister de Jong said, hopefully it's not if but when, and it'll be keyed-off of the decisions that some of the leading projects make this year."

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