

Global Warming Ground Zero

Visiting the Largest Fossil Fuel Project on Earth – The Tar Sands

“In its desperate search for oil and gas, Alberta is destroying itself. As the world teeters on the edge of catastrophic climate change, Alberta plunges ahead with uncontrolled development of its fossil fuels, leveling its northern Boreal forest to get at the oil sands and carpetbombing its southern half with tens of thousands of gas wells. In so doing, it is running out of water, destroying its range land, wiping out its forests and wildlife and spewing huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, adding to global warming at a rate that is unrivalled in Canada or almost anywhere else in the world.” **Author and award winning crime reporter Willam Marsden in *Stupid to the Last Drop***



The Opportunity

ForestEthics is coordinating a tour of the Alberta tar sands in order to raise the profile of the issue in Canada and internationally. The tour will include helicopter flyovers over the mines, refineries, pristine Boreal forests and some of the wildest river systems left on earth as well as meetings with First Nations leaders, scientists and engineers. ForestEthics is currently short-listing three to five well-known actors and musicians who would like to tour the tar sands to help mitigate this global warming disaster. ForestEthics

Executive Director Todd Paglia and ForestEthics Co-founder and well know Canadian environmentalist Tzeporah Berman will be conducting the tour.

The Background

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's 2007 report, compiled by several hundred climate scientists, has unequivocally concluded that our climate is warming rapidly primarily due to human activities. The amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere now far exceeds the natural range of the past 650,000 years, and it is rising very quickly due to human activity. If this trend is not halted soon, many millions of people will be at risk from extreme events such as heat waves, drought, floods and storms, and



rising sea levels. Also many ecosystems, plants and animal species will be in serious danger of extinction.

In Bali this year at the United Nations Conference on Climate Change, 190 countries agreed that reducing our carbon emissions is a global priority. However, due primarily to opposition from the United States and Canada, international agreements reached in Bali did not include emissions reduction targets. Both countries have been reticent to make these agreements due to their continued reliance on fossil fuels. While Canada is a Kyoto Protocol signatory, the current Canadian government has stated that the emission reduction targets are ‘unrealistic’ and ‘unachievable’. This is due in large part to the planned expansion of the Canadian tar sands for US consumption which it is estimated to *increase Canada’s emissions by three-fold in the next ten years.*

The oil and gas industry and the government of Canada are, at the encouragement of the US government, projecting a five-fold expansion of the tar sands. Production is already over one million barrels of oil a day with the far majority being piped south for US consumption. Canada’s tar sands, which lay beneath Alberta’s Boreal forests, are now the single largest and most destructive fossil fuel project in the world. Every day 600 million cubic feet of natural gas is burned during the extensive extraction process required to produce tar sands oil. Oil from the tar sands requires three times as much energy per barrel to produce than conventional oil.

- An area of northern Boreal forest the size of Florida is being cleared

for open-pit mining and drilling. Caribou and other sentinel species are already in decline.

- Several proposed pipelines to supply the tar sands with natural gas threaten to further destroy pristine wilderness from the vast, intact Mackenzie Valley to the Canadian Rockies and Coastal forests to Alaska. Northern rivers and residents are being poisoned as a slow-motion oil spill contaminates the entire river system from the Athabasca through to the Mackenzie River Delta.

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- Northern rivers are being bled dry by the demand for water to process tar sands into oil. The existing operations are already drawing 349 million cubic meters of water per year, and this number will rise dramatically if the planned expansions proceed.
- 90% of this water ends up in “acutely toxic” tailings ponds that today cover more than 50 square kilometres – toxic dumps in the heart of Canada’s Boreal Forest that can be seen from space. The dykes holding the tailings ponds are already the largest earthen structures on the planet and rival even China’s

Three Gorges Dam as the largest volume dams anywhere in the world. Local residents are hired to rake the dead birds off the surface.

- The tar sands have been exempted from federal air emissions regulations because smog and acid rain causing nitrogen and sulphur oxide pollution levels are already so high.
- Annual emissions from the tar sands now exceed the annual emissions from 145 countries

The Logistics

Dates: Targeted for April or May, pending participants’ schedules.

Time required: Touring the tar sands by helicopter takes a minimum of two hours from Fort McMurray <http://www.fortmcmurrayairport.com/>. There are scheduled flights from Edmonton (2h) or Calgary (1h 20min) to Fort McMurray. There is also a private airstrip and many charter companies. ForestEthics will coordinate all logistics. Ideally the group will meet in Fort McMurray for an issue briefing with scientists and engineers, fly over the tar sands, fly over pristine wilderness, land in Fort Chipewyan to meet with indigenous leaders and health professionals, and then fly back to Calgary or Edmonton for press briefing. Schedule is flexible depending on interests and concerns of confirmed participants.

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