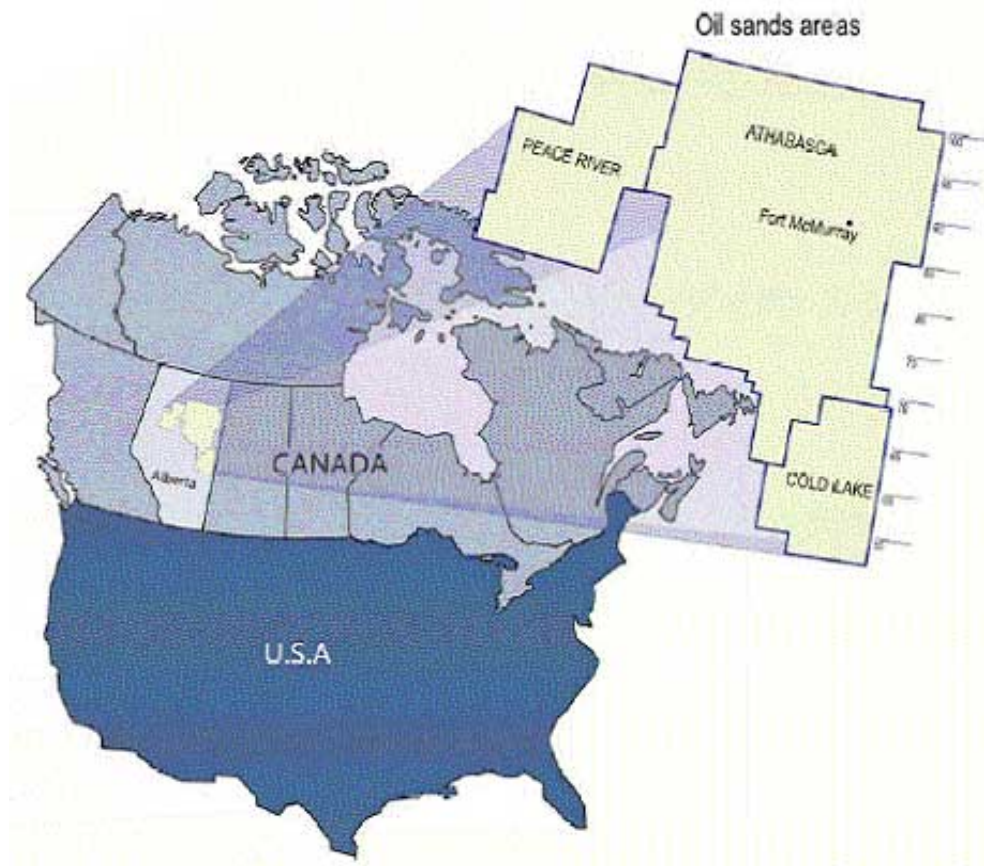


INFORMATION SHEET NO. 1

TAR SANDS: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND THE GIGA PROJECT

"The river used to be blue. Now it's brown. Nobody can fish or drink from it. The air is bad. This has all happened so fast," said Elsie Fabian, 63, an elder in a Native community along the Athabasca River.



Tar Sands Giga Project

"If we don't have land and we don't have anywhere to carry out our traditional lifestyles, we lose who we are as a people. So, if there's no land, then its equivalent in our estimation to genocide of a people." George Poitras, Mikisew Cree First Nation

The public in Canada and the U.S. are not aware of what is going on in the tar sands development "sacrifice" zone of northern Alberta. The public does not know most of the populations being negatively affected are Indigenous First Nations communities. *Dene* and *Cree First Nations and Métis* live close to and in the midst of these tar sand deposits, along the Athabasca River water basin area. These are the communities of *Mikisew Cree First Nation* and the *Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation at Fort Chipewyan, Fort McMurray First Nation, Fort McKay First Nation*, and to the south, the *Chipewyan Prairie First Nation*. They are all members of the *Athabasca Tribal Council*.

The tar sands development around Fort McMurray and Fort McKay are located upstream along the Athabasca River basin. Current tar sands development have completely altered the Athabasca delta and watershed landscape, with deforestation of the boreal forests, open pit mining, de-watering of water systems and watersheds, toxic contamination, disruption of habitat and biodiversity and disruption to the indigenous *Dene*, *Cree* and *Métis* trap-line cultures.

What is Tar Sands [aka] Oil Sands

In northern Alberta, beneath 4.3 million hectares (10.6 million acres), an area the size of Florida, are tar sands that are a mixture of sand, clay and a heavy crude oil, or tarry substance called bitumen. To get the oil out of the ground, the tar is superheated in "cookers" with steam to make the oil flow. For each barrel of oil produced from the tar sands, between 2 and 4.5 barrels of water is required. In 2007, Alberta approved withdrawal of 119.5 billion gallons of water for tar sands extraction. An estimated 82% of this water comes from the Athabasca River. The extracted bitumen is later processed in industrial facilities called up graders into synthetic crude oil to be piped to the U.S. for refining. These up grader facilities look like "refinery cities" with smoke stacks bellowing polluting emissions and wastewater emptied into toxic tailing ponds. Lately, *in-situ* technology is being used to pump steam under the earth making the bitumen to flow through wells using steam or solvents. By 2010, the industry is projected to generate 8 billion tons of waste sand and 1 billion cubic meters of wastewater – enough to fill 400,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools. Some of these toxic-tailing ponds are located next to the Athabasca River, a major tributary in northern Alberta. Emissions from the tar sands are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions and a major contributor to climate change and global warming.

The tar sands lay beneath more than 141,000 square kilometers (54,000 square miles) of northern Alberta forest. In 2003, 30 square kilometers (160 square miles) of land had been disturbed by tar sands development. By the summer of 2006, that number has grown to 2,000 square kilometers (772 square miles), almost five-fold within three years.

These tar sands are the second largest oil deposit in the world, bigger than Iraq, Iran or Russia; exceeded only by Saudi Arabia. As mentioned above, an area the size of Vancouver Island is already being exploited for tar sands oil. If development expansion plans succeed, 3,400 square kilometers (1,312 square miles) will be stripped-mined if current approved projects go forward. This would be a total area as large as the State of Florida that would be destroyed.

Currently processing of 2.7 million barrels per day of oil is estimated to increase by 2030 to 6 million barrels per day. Current and future high oil prices make the extraction and processing of bitumen very profitable.

The oil from the tar sands is going south. The U.S. needs the tar sands oil to meet its energy needs. The U.S. has reorganized their long-term plans for petroleum energy by setting a goal to get up to 25 percent of their daily oil from tar sands operations. The U.S. Department of Energy began declaring tar sand reserves as part of their calculations of oil imported from Canada. This will include massive pipeline construction and expansions going from northern Alberta down through Minnesota to refineries in Wisconsin and Chicago and through North Dakota, South Dakota down to Oklahoma and Texas to be refined. Pipelines will also go through British Columbia to be shipped overseas.

As noted by the 1996 Canadian federal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Aboriginal peoples in Canada are being, "pushed....to economic, cultural and political extinction."

The Problem – An Environmental Justice Issue

The tar sands development has completely outstripped the ability of the corporations and provincial and federal governments to provide environmental management and protection. In the perspective of many concerned First Nations and citizens of northern Alberta, the government has given the responsibility of environmental monitoring and enforcement to the corporations.

A recent health study commissioned by *Nunee Health Board Society of Fort Chipewyan* has demonstrated evidence that the governments of Alberta and Canada have been ignoring evidence of toxic contamination on downstream indigenous communities. People most at risk of health effects are those who eat food from the land and water. These *Dene*, *Cree* and *Métis* communities still maintain a subsistence diet of fish and wild game.

The remote *Fort Chipewyan* community has an 80% subsistence diet. The tar sands mining as the cause of toxins in the water and the recent upturn in diseases and cancer is the conclusion of many *Fort Chipewyan* residents.

INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK



Despite the concerns of the indigenous First Nations, the governments of Alberta and Canada aren't listening. The areas of concern are under Aboriginal Treaties 8 and 11. These are treaties that ensure that lands of First Nations should not be taken away from them by massive uncontrolled development that threatens their culture and traditional way of life. The de-watering of rivers and streams to support the tar sands operations is a threat to the cultural survival of these Indigenous peoples. The battle over the tar sands mining comes down to the fundamental right to exist as Indigenous peoples.

“...Aboriginal peoples have had great difficulty maintaining their lands and livelihoods in the face of massive encroachment. This encroachment is not ancient history. In addition to the devastating impact of settlement and development on traditional land-use areas, the actual reserve or community land base of Aboriginal people has shrunk by almost two-thirds since Confederation, and on-reserve resources have largely vanished..... Canadian Federal Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996)

The Stakes are High

The Alberta and Canadian governments have dispossessed Indigenous lands and territories for resource exploitation (forestry, mining, non-indigenous hunting and trapping and in other Providences, hydro-electricity). This wholesale encroachment and displacement of Indigenous First Nations peoples continues to this day, often disguised as economic development. Decades ago, the Alberta government enticed First Nations council leadership to lease their treaty reserve lands to the tar sands industry as a means for economic development and jobs. This allowed the first tier of tar sands operations in the 1960's and 1970's to come into a region mostly inhabited by *Dene*, *Cree* and *Métis* with rapid population expansion during the 1960's of approximately 1,200 people to the current population of 80,000.

The tar sands industry with the blessings of Alberta government are expanding even further. With an anticipated \$25-billion dollar expansion of the Athabasca tar sands underway, First Nations leadership and community members are feeling pressured by Alberta, the federal government of Canada, and the industry to support the expansion of what has been called the “greatest environmental and climate crime in history.” Some of these giant developers are Mobil Oil, Shell, Syncrude Canada, Petro-Canada and Suncor Energy. These companies have well funded public relations campaigns coming into the First Nation communities, schools, and senior citizen facilities campaigning on how tar sand expansion would be good for the *Dene*, *Cree* and *Métis* people.

Indigenous Treaty Rights Issue

IEN is working with Indigenous grassroots and concerned elected leadership of both *Métis* and First Nations in the region with the position that effective organizing on the Alberta tar sands must involve working with the First Nation and *Métis* communities. Aboriginal title encompasses large areas of land throughout Canada. It is a legal term that recognizes Aboriginal interest in the land. First Nations are not mere stakeholders or the public, but are political and legal entities that have treaty rights with Canada.

IEN has launched a CANADIAN INDIGENOUS TAR SANDS CAMPAIGN to work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters and environmental organizations for a coordinated and collective response led by concerned First Nations and Métis opposing the expansion of the tar sands.



Figure 1 Suncor Energy, Inc. Upgrader Facility, Fort McMurray, Canada

Take Action!

- **Respect our Original Instructions, traditions and responsibility to protect the sacredness of our Mother Earth.**
- **Demand the Alberta government halt tar sands expansion, address environmental damages and remediation and address human health issues impacting the First Nations, as a result of tar sands operations.**
- **Demand the Canadian federal government recognize Aboriginal Treaty 8 and 11 obligations of the concerns of the First Nations pertaining to the treaty and human rights abuses, the human and ecological health crisis, the climate change impacts, the damages to water and air quality and the recognition of First Nations sovereign rights to implement their own environmental and health infrastructure to regulate and enforce their own laws within their lands and territories.**
- **Demand Canada meets its Kyoto Protocol commitments and halt all subsidies and end all support of the tar sands.**
- **DEMAND the national and international financial and banking institutions immediately DIVEST in the tar sands expansion and operations.**

For more information:

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