

EVERYONE'S DOWNSTREAM

The tar sands infrastructure straddles North America, and is fed by finance from all over the world. But its global reach is provoking global resistance.

'Legal action is the only way'

When the ancestors of the Beaver Lake Cree signed a treaty with Canada in 1876, they ceded vast tracts of land in Alberta in exchange for continued rights to hunt, fish and gather plants and medicines, as they had always done. In recent years, the large-scale deforestation, wildlife disturbance and pollution resulting from tar sands developments have been eroding these treaty rights and now threaten the community's traditional way of life.

So in 2008, they launched a legal challenge aimed at halting the wholesale destruction of their ancestral lands. It cites 17,000 infringements by oil companies of the Beaver Lake Cree's constitutionally protected treaty rights and seeks injunctions against new developments.

Chief Al Lameman (left) is determined: 'The governments of Canada and Alberta have made a lot of promises to our people and we intend to see those promises kept. Governments and industry ignore our concerns. This is our home. This is where we live. We have a responsibility to our children to see that these lands remain inhabitable. A legal action is the only way to make our voices heard.'

This could have huge implications for Shell, BP, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips and Total, all of which have actual or planned developments within the Beaver Lake Cree's ancestral lands. But if successful, all new tar sands projects could be brought to a halt. The case, which is financially supported by the Co-operative, is being led by lawyer Jack Woodward. He believes that: 'Canada's aboriginal people will be the ones that rescue Canada from international embarrassment, and rescue all the people of the world from the worst effects of tar sands exploitation.'



Find out more, and donate to the Beaver Lake Cree's legal challenge:

www.raventrust.com/projects/beaverlakecree.html

www.co-operativecampaigns.co.uk/toxicfuels/beavercreenation.php



In the pipeline

The next phase of tar sands expansion will require piping the oil 1,170 km to the west coast of Canada and shipping it to China. But the 60 First Nations that live on the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline route have other ideas.

The Gitga'at of Hartley Bay are among them. A tiny town of just 160 people, they have challenged the pipeline planning process at every step. David Benton, who manages environmental projects for the community, explains: 'Our chiefs have said 'no' and 'never' to this project. There's no amount of money you can offer us - nothing. Our food will be lost, our territory will be destroyed. We will be destroyed as a people. It's not going to happen.'

Their remote, pristine coastal territory is part of an abundant but finely balanced ecosystem. 'We have the rare white spirit bear in our forest (right), and so many different species of whale,' explains Ha'eis Clare Hill, Eagle Clan Chief-in-waiting. The community relies heavily on the land for its food: 'salmon, clams, cockles, halibut, seaweed - those are huge parts of our diet. We have local food at least five or six times a week.'

Enbridge's plans would ruin all this. The port, just along the coastline, is expected to service supertankers up to



twice the size of the Exxon Valdez 225 days a year. 'It's so huge, I can't even think about it,' says Clare. 'Food-wise it would be horrendous. The ships will create huge waves, taking away the sands on the shore so our clam beds and all the shellfish will be affected. Ballast dumping will mean invasive plants. It will scare off the whales. And that's even before there's an accident.'

Enbridge sent its President to 'consult' with the community. 'It was hilarious, actually,' recounts Clare. 'Enbridge came in with the argument that it would create jobs in Hartley Bay. We would be on-call and trained in case there's a disaster. So we would be the garbage clean-up people! Of course, the people who cleaned up the Exxon Valdez spill are now sick and dying as a result... We had our chiefs there, we had elders, and everyone who got up said "no, we don't want this".'

So the Gitga'at will keep fighting. 'Every year at the AGM we'll be putting forward resolutions to stop it. The message to shareholders is one of legal uncertainty, because we will take legal action against the project if it's approved.'

www.gitgaat.net