

# Speakers tell tales and trials of tarsands

Jack Woodward, Chief Al Lameman, Alan Bibby and James Hoggan keep issue in the news

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A large group of Salt Spring Islanders received a wake-up call last Saturday night at the Truth, Trials and Tarsands event taking place at ArtSpring.

Sponsored by I-SEA, RAVEN (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs) and the DeSmogBlog, the evening featured presentations by four Canadians making a difference in the fight against climate change: James Hoggan, PR executive and author of the book *Climate Cover-up*; Alan Bibby, a local documentary filmmaker; Jack Woodward, the pre-eminent authority in Aboriginal law; and special guest Chief Al Lameman of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation.

At a time when Canada is mopping up its shame after an embarrassing display of broken promises at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen, Canadians are at a critical junction when it comes to climate change action. Hoggan got right to the point. "Climate change is a story of public relations and the most widespread mis-information campaign . . . This is a story about greed and irresponsibility on an epic scale, deception and widespread media manipulation."

Hoggan described the creation of an entire industry responsible for creating climate change confusion — one with full PR plans created by such industry giants as the American Petroleum Institute, Philip Morris and Western Fuels Association (a coal-fired electrical industry consortium).

Not surprisingly, North Americans have become paralyzed by this public relations spin and confused about the science surrounding climate change studies. "When you look into this further, I hope you find a sense of outrage," Hoggan said. "And after



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A tarsands mine site.

you get angry, I hope you will get active."

Local filmmaker Alan Bibby showed production excerpts from his fascinating documentary *Liquid Truth*, which follows a hypothetical droplet of water from Mount Snowdome, along the Athabasca River, to the communities in the shadow of northern Alberta's tarsands. In one of many impassioned speeches in the film, an elder of the Mikisew Cree Nation talks about the ensuing destruction of their traditional way of life saying, "Money can't buy your health. You can't drink oil to survive."

"Your way of making a living is our way of dying," says another to a tarsands spokesperson, describing the illnesses that have plagued their people since the development of the tar sands area.

Chief Al Lameman echoed this sentiment on stage and described with heartbreaking honesty how his people can no longer make a traditional way of life in their home terri-

tory. "Sometimes you lie awake at night and you think about it . . . you think this is the end," Chief Lameman said in a voice heavy with emotion. "We used to be able to drink water directly from Beaver Lake and it didn't hurt us . . . it helped us. But not anymore."

The Beaver Lake Cree recently decided that enough is enough and this is where lawyer Jack Woodward comes in. His law firm currently represents this small nation in a lawsuit against the Crown, claiming, "The cumulative impacts of tar sands developments are destroying their treaty rights."

In the 1870s, the people of the Beaver Lake area signed Treaty 6, giving up their traditional land in return for the promise that they could continue to live off the land as they had always done. According to Woodward, the Canadian and Alberta governments are currently breaking this promise.

He went on to describe the imminent threat of the massive expansion of the tar-

sands, saying that if such expansion continues, the tar sands developments (currently the size of Florida) will wreak destruction on the once pristine northern boreal forest.

Currently the Alberta tarsands are the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and the greatest obstacle to Canada meeting its global climate change responsibilities. In Trinidad, at the Commonwealth Summit, it was even suggested that Canada be expelled from the commonwealth for its lack of commitment to reducing carbon emissions.

Woodward claims that climate change — the moral challenge of our generation — can only be solved legally, through dealing with aboriginal treaty rights that are protected under the Constitution. Perhaps surprisingly (and perhaps not) the Canadian and Alberta governments are "fighting this lawsuit tooth and nail."

"It is disgraceful," said Woodward.

Should the tiny Beaver Lake Cree Nation of 900 people prove victorious, tarsands expansion projects will be forced to a halt. In addition, as explained in presentation notes, "the government would have to reduce the level of development in the Beaver Lake Cree territory so that it is no longer threatening these people's treaty rights, or the health of the natural systems, waters and forests that are required to sustain those rights forever.

"Only the indigenous treaty peoples of Alberta have the legal power to curtail the reckless behaviour of the wealthiest, most powerful industry on the planet."

For further information on the Beaver Lake Cree Nation lawsuit, visit [www.raven-trust.com](http://www.raven-trust.com). The charitable organization is currently supporting the Beaver Lake Cree's fight against big oil and is looking for financial contributions to help the cause.

Bibby's documentary is still a work in progress and additional funding is required to get this worthwhile project completed. Contact him at 250-537-8813 if you would like to donate, or email [bibby@media-group.com](mailto:bibby@media-group.com).