

ENBRIDGE THREATENS OUR RIVERS  
WATER: LIFEBLOOD of OUR COMMUNITIES

# BREAKING GROUND

Women, Oil and Climate Change in Alberta and British Columbia



Advocating for peace, justice & equality

# About us

The Nobel Women's Initiative uses the prestige of the Nobel Peace Prize and courageous women Peace Laureates to magnify the power and visibility of women working in countries around the world for peace, justice and equality. The Initiative is led by Nobel Peace Laureates Jody Williams, Shirin Ebadi, Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Leymah Gbowee, Tawakkol Karman and Mairead Maguire.

## Our advocacy is organized around three main pillars:

**Women Forging Peace**—The inclusion of women in peace making and supporting nonviolence and other alternatives to war and militarism.

**Women Achieving Justice**—Accountability for crimes committed against women and an end to widespread impunity.

**Women Advancing Equality and Human Rights**—Support for human rights defenders, those working for women's equality and those on the frontlines of civil society--including those addressing climate change.

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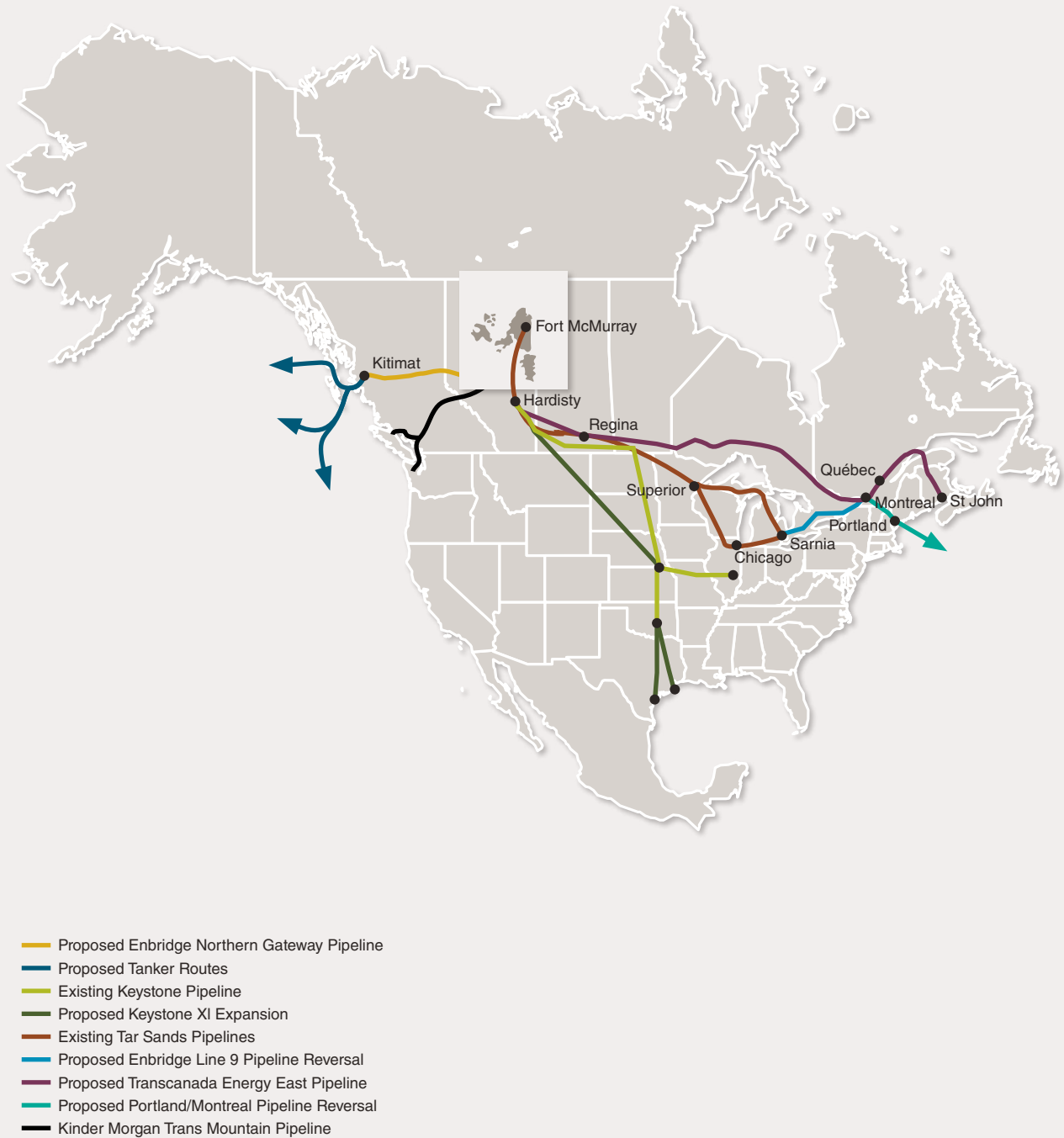
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# HOW OIL FLOWS FROM ALBERTA



The information within this map is intended for general reference purposes only.





# 1

## **INTRODUCTION: Bearing witness to oil sands industry expansion**

The extraction and export of energy from Canada's oil sands deposits in northern Alberta constitute one of the world's largest industrial undertakings.

Expansion of the oil sands industry lies at the heart of a debate within and beyond Canada's borders: Do the short-term economic benefits—jobs and government revenues—make up for its potentially devastating impacts on the environment and health of surrounding communities, and its contributions to global warming? This question, alongside concerns that government is cutting environmental oversight and limiting citizen input, has moved to the front and centre in Canadian politics. It also underlies a recent, unprecedented wave of First Nations protest over lack of respect for treaty rights and environmental regulation.

From October 8 to 16, 2012, a women's rights fact-finding mission explored these issues, travelling

to the oil sands region of Alberta and along the proposed route of the Northern Gateway pipeline into British Columbia. The delegation was organized by the Nobel Women's Initiative.

### **Why we undertook this journey**

The purpose of our trip was to meet with grassroots women leaders as well as government and industry officials to uncover the interrelated impacts of oil sands industry expansion on women, their communities and the environment. As delegation leader Jody Williams notes, little has been done to document the unique experiences of women affected by oil sands developments:

“While people look at the environment and climate change—the health of our planet overall—very few look at it from the perspective of women. And as with many crises the world over, it’s the women and children who suffer the most when their environment is destroyed.” Jody Williams

engaged in the struggle to protect their land and communities, the Nobel Women’s Initiative aims to amplify their local efforts. We hope to focus Canadian and international attention on their concerns about the potential consequences of further oil sands development for current and future generations.

Dene and Cree First Nations and Métis populations live in or close to the region affected by oil sands developments, mainly along the Athabasca River basin area. These include the indigenous communities of Fort McMurray, Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan.<sup>1</sup> Within these and other Aboriginal communities, women play a key role in both leadership and resistance. Like their non-Aboriginal counterparts in many other communities throughout western Canada, they are gravely concerned with the well-being of their families and the long-term health of their environment.

In addition to its dramatic ecological impacts, development of the oil sands industry has created economic winners and losers—providing stable jobs and income to some, but impoverishing others by driving housing and other prices through the roof. Those at the lower end of the income scale are disproportionately women, for whom the “boom” has created the bleak reality of living as some of Canada’s poorest alongside some of the country’s wealthiest.<sup>2</sup>

Invited by women in affected communities, the Nobel Women’s Initiative delegation drew from and built upon the extensive knowledge and networks that women leaders have established throughout the region. By gathering, documenting and sharing the experiences of those most directly affected and

## A groundswell of women’s voices

Over the course of nine days, our delegation met with more than 200 women, gathering evidence and hearing testimony on the social, environmental and health impacts of oil sands industry expansion. Several women we spoke with are direct descendants of First Nations people who survived Canada’s dark residential school era, when the government attempted to systematically erase native culture and language. For those recovering from decades of institutional abuse, neglect and racism, much of what is happening around oil sands industry expansion stirs up memories of colonial land appropriation and cultural assimilation.

In non-Aboriginal communities, women also came out in force to express their concerns over the proliferation of oil sands developments. Many have joined local grassroots organizations to channel their concerns. From mothers and environmentalists to artists and scientists, the women we met are employing powerful and creative strategies in their struggle to be heard despite enormous pressure from both government and industry to stay silent. They were eager to speak out about the impact oil sands industry expansion is having. This report testifies to the groundbreaking work they are doing to defend their environment, communities and values.

<sup>1</sup> Clayton Thomas-Müller, “Tar sands: environmental justice and Native rights,” *Canadian Dimension*, March 25, 2008. Accessed at <http://oilsandstruth.org/index.php?q=tar-sands-environmental-justice-and-native-rights>.

<sup>2</sup> Alberta’s top one percent of income earners have among the highest proportion of concentrated wealth in the country, but the province also has the greatest poverty intensity in Canada, with the poor falling further below the poverty line here than in any other province. Source: Tony Clarke, Jim Stanford et al., *The Bitumen Cliff: Lessons and Challenges of Bitumen Mega-Developments for Canada’s Economy in an Age of Climate Change*, p. 51. (The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Polaris Institute, Feb 21, 2013)

## About this report

In this report, you will read the words and see the faces of many women who came to our delegation to testify. (In some cases, women asked that we not reveal their identity, and we have respected their preferences.) First, we have grouped our findings into sections addressing each of the major areas of concern we heard—impacts on the environment, on people’s health and on the social fabric. These are followed by sections outlining women’s experiences dealing with industry and government officials, and their strategies of resistance. Finally, we present conclusions that flow from the experiences and viewpoints we bore witness to, and the values these women so powerfully defend.

## The oil sands: fuelling an “energy superpower”

The development of Canada’s oil sands deposits represents one of the largest industrial projects of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The economic and political pressures behind the exploitation of these immense deposits have fueled a pace of development that even some proponents fear is unsustainable. Championed by the province of Alberta and the government of Canada, a rapidly expanding oil sands industry is the centerpiece of an resource development strategy that is reshaping the country’s economy. Many Canadians say they have had no voice in the development of this strategy, despite its significant repercussions for the national economy, the environment and lives of First Nations people.

Oil sands deposits—or “tar sands,” as they are often called—lie buried

under some 140,000 square kilometres of boreal forest in northeastern Alberta, an area roughly the size of Florida. As of July 2012, the government of Alberta had leased nearly 92,000 square kilometres of this land to oil companies for development.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike conventional crude oil, which is liquid and can be pumped without processing or dilution, the bitumen that oil companies extract from oil sands is a tar-like substance, found mixed with water, sand, heavy metals and clay. Extracting bitumen and turning it into synthetic crude oil is a resource-intensive and expensive process that consumes huge quantities of water and energy.

About 20 percent of bitumen reserves in Alberta are recovered through open-pit mining—a process that involves stripping away layers of forest, soil and surface water to access shallow deposits. The majority of deposits—some 80 percent<sup>4</sup>—lies in

## Nobel Laureates behind Breaking Ground

Motivated by her passion for justice, peace and real human security, Jody Williams led Breaking Ground, our 2012 fact-finding mission on women and the oil sands. Ms. Williams received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for her work through the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which shared the Peace Prize with her that year. She chairs the Nobel Women’s Initiative, which she co-founded in 2006.

Our focus on the connections between peace, the environment and human dignity are also inspired by the late laureate Wangari Maathai, who is remembered around the world for her pioneering work on Kenya’s Green Belt Movement and her passionate pursuit of climate justice.

<sup>3</sup> Alberta Energy, “Alberta’s Leased Oilsands Area (2012).” Accessed via The Pembina Institute at [http://www.pembina.org/oil-sands/os101/alberta#footnote7\\_ccqk4jk](http://www.pembina.org/oil-sands/os101/alberta#footnote7_ccqk4jk).

<sup>4</sup> According to the Oil Sands Developers Group, 20 percent of Alberta’s total oil sands reserves are deemed to be mineable; the remaining 80 percent can be accessed through *in-situ* techniques. See “Extracting Oil Sands – In-Situ and Mining Methods Fact Sheet,” October 2009. (<http://www.oilsandsdevelopers.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/Extraction-Fact-Sheet-October-2009.pdf>)

deeper reserves and must be extracted using *in situ* techniques.<sup>5</sup> This energy-intensive process involves drilling horizontal or vertical wells hundreds of feet into the ground and injecting steam, air or solvents to heat the thick bitumen and facilitate its extraction from the ground.<sup>6</sup> To be transported by pipelines to refineries, bitumen must be diluted with lighter hydrocarbons, such as natural-gas condensate.<sup>7</sup> The bitumen is further upgraded before ultimately being refined to lighter, more useful products.<sup>8</sup>

This complex extraction and upgrading process renders makes the oil sands industry the fastest-growing single source of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.<sup>9</sup> As of 2012, it accounted for 6.9 percent of the country's total greenhouse gas emissions<sup>10</sup>—a staggering proportion for a single energy source in one industrial sector. In spite of advances that have decreased carbon dioxide emissions per barrel of production, total emissions from oil sands upgrading and processing in Canada nearly tripled between 1990 and 2010, and government projections show emissions are likely to double again between 2010 and 2020.<sup>11</sup> Analysts have suggested that projected emissions from the oil sands industry alone will outweigh emissions reductions achieved through other industrial sectors to meet the country's international climate change commitments. By the

end of this decade, for example, oil sands emissions are expected to surpass those of other major categories such as *all* passenger transportation or *all* electricity generation in Canada.<sup>12</sup>

Following a decade of rapid expansion, oil sands development in Alberta is currently made up of 94 projects led by 24 different companies in three separate bitumen deposits—Athabasca, Peace River, and Cold Lake.<sup>13</sup> According to the International Energy Agency,<sup>14</sup> Canada's total oil reserves are estimated at 173 billion barrels—97 percent of these reserves are in the oil sands—making it the third largest oil reserves of any country, behind only Saudi Arabia's 265 billion barrels and Venezuela's 298 billion barrels. Canada in fact overtook Saudi Arabia as the main foreign supplier of oil to the United States by 2004.<sup>15</sup>

Based on this vast reserve of bitumen, in 2006, Canada's prime minister pronounced the country's emergence as an “energy superpower.” The federal and Alberta governments, along with industry, are betting heavily on even more intensive oil sands production in coming years. They are also engaged in a global public relations effort to re-brand Canada's oil sands as a source of “ethical oil,” rather than the world's dirtiest energy source.

<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers compares the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of various methods of *in situ* extraction and processing in *Air Emissions in Canada's Oil Sands*, p. 4 – 5, June 2012. (<http://www.capp.ca/getdoc.aspx?DocId=193748&DT=NTV>)

<sup>6</sup> Wood Buffalo Labour Market News, “In-situ oil sands jobs,” Fort McMurray Labour Market News, December 2009. (<http://www.woodbuffalo.net/LMNMain122009.html>)

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Energy Pipeline Association, About pipelines: Diluted bitumen in pipelines. ([http://www.cepa.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CEPA\\_Diluted-Bitumen3.pdf](http://www.cepa.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CEPA_Diluted-Bitumen3.pdf))

<sup>8</sup> Source: Greenpeace. “Overview,” October 20, 2012. (<http://www.greenpeace.org/canada/en/campaigns/Energy/tarsands/Resources/Fact-sheets/Overview/>)

<sup>9</sup> Pembina Institute, Oil Sands 101: Climate Impacts. ([http://www.cepa.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CEPA\\_Diluted-Bitumen3.pdf](http://www.cepa.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/CEPA_Diluted-Bitumen3.pdf))

<sup>10</sup> Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> The Pembina Institute, “Beneath the Surface: Oil Sands Facts,” January 2013, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> From “Canada's Emissions Trends (2012),” cited by The Pembina Institute in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> *Royal Society of Canada Oil Sands Expert Panel Reply 2012*; Alberta, Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, “Oil Sands Information Portal” interactive map. (<http://environment.alberta.ca/apps/osip/>)

<sup>14</sup> International Energy Agency (IEA), *Oil and Gas Security: Canada Update 2010*, p. 5. (<http://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/name,3943,en.html>) and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, “What are Oil Sands,” (<http://www.oilsandstoday.ca/whatare oilsands/Pages/WhatareOilSands.aspx>)

<sup>15</sup> Clarke, Stanford et al., op. cit., p. 19.



The greatest challenge to industry growth is the difficulty of getting this resource to market. Further expansion depends on developing new pipelines to reach American and Asian markets, as well as additional upgrading infrastructure needed to make bitumen transportable.<sup>16</sup>

While proponents point to the employment and investment benefits of oil sands development, a growing number of analysts, including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),<sup>17</sup> are questioning the effect that oil sands industry expansion is having on other Canadian regions and economic sectors. According to research conducted by some think tanks, such as the Pembina Institute, rapid oil sands expansion drives up the value of the dollar and inflates manufacturing costs.<sup>18</sup> More recently, there are growing signs that the “bitumen bubble” may burst, as Canada’s major market, the United States, has identified significant new domestic energy sources that could undercut demand for Canadian oil imports. In some areas, such as the American Midwest, demand remains strong, but there is not enough processing capacity to handle increased bitumen imports, effectively creating a market bottleneck.<sup>19</sup>

As pressure mounts for the industry to diversify markets, the battle over major new pipeline projects has become an epic political struggle. Of particular concern to those living in British Columbia and Alberta is the Northern Gateway project, a proposal by Enbridge Inc. to construct pipelines running 1,175 km from Edmonton, Alberta to a new marine terminal near Kitimat on the British Columbia coastline.<sup>20</sup> The terminal would



significantly increase tanker traffic carrying crude oil to Asian and American markets, with ships passing through some of the most turbulent and unpredictable waters in the eastern Pacific. The proposed route would take tankers directly through the culturally and ecologically rich islands of Haida Gwaii and along the edge of the Great Bear Rainforest, the world’s largest coastal stretch of temperate rainforest.

For industry proponents, pipelines are an essential lifeline to new markets. For First Nations and many others affected by the proposed pipeline routes, they represent tentacles of the oil sands industry, intensifying development pressure and spreading the risk of oil spills to yet more fragile ecosystems.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> “OECD sees signs of Dutch disease in Canada,” *Canadian Press*, June 13, 2012. (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/story/2012/06/13/oecd-canada-outlook.html>)

<sup>18</sup> In the Shadow of the Boom: how oil sands development is reshaping Canada’s economy, *Pembina Institute*, May 30, 2012. (<http://www.pembina.org/pub/2345>)

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, *Crude Oil Forecast, Markets and Pipelines 2012*, p. ii. (<http://www.capp.ca/getdoc.aspx?DocId=209546&DT=NTV>)

<sup>20</sup> IEA, op. cit., p. 9.



## WOMEN BREAKING GROUND: Jackie, Geraldine and Jasmine Thomas

“My grandmother used to say, ‘You never take out of greed, you take out of need’.” Geraldine Thomas

### The backbone of First Nations resistance

Pipeline development—accompanied by government moves to loosen environmental oversight—has provoked First Nations resistance across Canada. But the fight cuts closest to home for those in British Columbia, whose Aboriginal and treaty rights are threatened.

Jackie, Geraldine and Jasmine Thomas are members of the Saik'uz First Nation who we met in nearby Vanderhoof, British Columbia. Together, the three have campaigned around the world and have helped form a powerful First Nations alliance to stop the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline.

Jackie, elected Chief of the Saik'uz Nation, told our delegation that Enbridge first came to their community in 2006. The community, whose traditional lands and the rivers from which they fish lie in the path of the proposed pipeline, did their research into the science and social impacts of the project and decided to use the law to force Enbridge off their land.

“We knew they were going to come back with more money to try and divide our people,” said Jackie’s cousin Geraldine.

When Enbridge did return in 2009, the women had already started building ties with other First Nations in

British Columbia, eventually resulting in the Yinka Dene Alliance.<sup>21</sup> The alliance consists of six First Nations in northern British Columbia that have united in banning the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipelines through their traditional territory. Alliance members are drawing on Canadian, international and indigenous law to prevent oil sands industry expansion, and have organized campaigns to raise awareness of the devastating impacts of oil sands extraction.

Spearheaded by the alliance, over 160 First Nations and allied American Indian groups have now signed on to the Save the Fraser Declaration, which bans Enbridge and oil sands pipelines from traditional territories in the Fraser River watershed. They have lobbied financial institutions to support their treaty rights, submitted complaints to the United Nations, met with European Union policymakers, and participated in the World Peoples Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth Conference in Bolivia and the Cancun Climate Change Conference in 2010.

But it's not just First Nations working together. “This is the very first time in my life and in the history of Canada that you see so many First Nations and non-First Nations working together. It's never happened, not to the extent it is now. It's a good feeling. You don't feel like you are alone,” said Geraldine. Her daughter

Jasmine added, “As much as they're trying to ruin our relationships, it's just bringing us closer together. And that is the strength of this campaign.”

The women have seen the impacts of oil spills first-hand, participating in the annual Tar Sands Healing Walk in Alberta, and visiting members of the Houma Nation on Louisiana's Gulf Coast in the aftermath of the 2010 British Petroleum oil spill. Their activism has opened their eyes to a world of injustice, particularly against indigenous people around the world, and allowed them to share their stories and strategies.

“It would help us if you would tell our story, our fight, what we're trying to protect,” Geraldine told the delegation. “It gives it credibility and the world has to take notice. I really believe our poor earth is on its last leg. I think we're going to extinct ourselves with our greed and stupidity and arrogance, and the earth will breathe a sigh of relief.”

Jackie and Geraldine were raised by their grandmother, a resilient woman, traditional healer and long-time activist who has resisted the incursions of the logging industry. Now Jackie, Geraldine and Geraldine's daughter Jasmine carry on the struggle to defend their land and people.

<sup>21</sup> Read more at [www.yinkadene.ca](http://www.yinkadene.ca).



# 2

## Women speak out on the environment

Some 20 percent of Alberta's land mass is available to be leased for oil sands development.<sup>22</sup>

The extraction and processing of bitumen has an enormous impact on the surrounding environment, directly affecting air, water, forests and wildlife. The industry also has global consequences through its contribution to climate change, as one of Canada's fastest-growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions and the primary reason Canada will miss its international climate target. Many women spoke to us about the very personal sense of loss they feel seeing their land and resources affected by industrial exploitation; others are equally concerned with the global impact of oil sands developments.

### Forests, air, water and wildlife

Unlike conventional oil, the bitumen embedded in oil sands deposits cannot be extracted simply

by drilling wells. It is either accessed by mining or, where reserves are too deep, forced out with high-pressure steam using *in situ* techniques.

Surface mining peels back huge swaths of land, and up to 100 meters of "overburden"—the industry term for the forest and earth that sit atop the lucrative oil sands—is removed.

While surface mining creates a greater ground level disturbance, *in situ* extraction using current technologies produces more air pollution, with emissions including sulphur dioxide and greenhouse gases. According to Jennifer Grant, director of the Pembina Institute's oil sands programme, Canada's oil sands industry emits 40 megatonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per year—a number

<sup>22</sup> The Pembina Institute, "Oilsands101: Alberta's Oilsands." (<http://www.pembina.org/oil-sands/os101/alberta>)



that could grow to 104 megatonnes by 2020 as the Canadian government and industry continue to ramp up oil production. Even at the present rate, Canada is among the top emitters in the world.

Compounding this dire ecological situation, northeastern Alberta's boreal forest is the last intact large forest ecosystem and the world's largest terrestrial carbon sink. The deforestation resulting from oil sands development is a double negative for the environment: as the industry grows, it drives up emissions while removing the very trees that could absorb some of the rising carbon dioxide levels.

*In situ* projects also fragment wilderness areas, even though these projects do not involve the same degree of land and forest disturbance as a surface mine site.<sup>23</sup> Among the species most at risk from this fragmentation is the woodland caribou, a threatened species. A 2008 study by Environment Canada concluded that all woodland caribou herds will likely be lost from northeastern Alberta because of excessive habitat disturbances within their ranges.<sup>24</sup>

The industry also has tremendous impacts on water resources, consuming huge quantities of fresh water for extraction and processing while producing toxic waste. For every barrel of oil produced, 12 barrels of water are needed to separate the bitumen from the sand, clay and heavy metals. According to Jennifer Grant, nearly 90 percent of the water waste thus created is not recyclable. What's left is stored in tailing "ponds,"—large settling basins that are designed to hold this toxic waste and ensure it does not divert to local watersheds. There are currently over 170 square

kilometres of tailing ponds in Alberta.<sup>25</sup> The waste stored in these open ponds has frequently proven a danger to birds and wildlife. In April 2008, more than 1,600 birds landed in Syncrude's tailings containment area at the Aurora North mine, and subsequently died due to exposure and ingestion of bitumen.<sup>26</sup>

## Women's connections with the land

The women we met with, many of who are indigenous, expressed strong connections to the land and a sense of personal heartbreak as they watch it being destroyed.

"I go as often as I can to the water, my nation's lake specifically - Beaver Lake and put tobacco down," said Crystal Lameman of Beaver Lake Cree Nation.

“As women, we are keepers of the water. That's our obligation. It's not by chance that our children are carried in water in our wombs. Water is the one thing that connects every single person in this world, and that's our responsibility. If we don't have water, we lose who we are as a people.”

Crystal Lameman of Beaver Lake Cree Nation

Many indigenous communities maintain a direct relationship with the land, hunting and growing food for their families and looking to the land for spiritual growth and healing.

"What the industry calls overburden, I like to call trees, life, muskeg, plants and medicine," said Melina Laboucan-Massimo, a Lubicon Cree First Nation member and Energy and Climate Campaigner with Greenpeace Canada.

<sup>23</sup> The Pembina Institute, "Mining vs In situ: What is the highest environmental impact oil?" May 27, 2010. (<http://www.pembina.org/pub/2017>)

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Alberta Energy, "Oil sands tailings fact sheet," June 2012. ([http://www.oilsands.alberta.ca/FactSheets/Tailings\\_FSht\\_June\\_2012\\_Online.pdf](http://www.oilsands.alberta.ca/FactSheets/Tailings_FSht_June_2012_Online.pdf))

<sup>26</sup> World Wildlife Federation Canada, "Conservation v. industrial development: The Syncrude duck trial (Part 1 of 2)," May 26, 2010. (<http://blog.wwf.ca/blog/2010/05/26/conservation-v-industrial-development-the-syncrude-duck-trial-part-1-of-2/>)





After five decades of industrial development of the oil sands, maintaining a traditional lifestyle has become increasingly difficult for indigenous women. From Alberta to British Columbia, we heard direct testimonials of declining wildlife populations due to habitat erosion and extreme pollution, with some species, such as the iconic woodland caribou, nearing extinction. Animals that have survived habitat displacement are often so contaminated they are not fit to eat. Fish are turning up with noticeable tumours.

The impact on human and wildlife populations in the region is immense. Where Elders like Celina Harpe of Fort McKay in Alberta used to hunt and fish, danger signs now dot the landscape. “Our livelihood, our traditional way of life has been taken away from us. We can’t use the river water, we can’t eat the fish, we can’t go hunting anymore,” she explained.

According to Melissa Blake, mayor of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, which includes Fort McMurray and a number of other communities at the epicentre of the oil sands projects, 686 square kilometres of land has already been disturbed by mining, with another “100 years left in the oil sands.” In contrast, just over one square kilometre has been reclaimed.

“Our spirits are woven very much into this land and this land is woven very much into our spirits, and the water too,” said Aleila Miller of Smithers, British Columbia. “If there’s destruction in one, it’s in the other. It’s connected, not separate.”

Where pipelines are concerned, the environmental impacts are equally troublesome. Many pipelines run above ground, disrupting wildlife migration and cutting through thousands of kilometres of pristine forest. Even when pipelines run underground, their construction disrupts forests, streams and lakes. Bitumen is highly corrosive, leading to pipeline erosion and posing risk to watersheds and the surrounding ecosystems. Underground pipeline blowouts send strips of forest hurtling in every direction, creating giant craters on the earth’s surface. The resulting oil spills are difficult and costly to clean, leaving permanent environmental damage.



So far, explosions along pipelines carrying bitumen in Canada have been limited to areas uninhabited by humans, and the wildlife and ecosystem impacts have been understudied and underreported. But the women we met with fear the scenario would be different if an explosion were to happen in their backyard, and that’s not a risk they’re willing to take.

“It’s inevitable they will spill,” said Tanya Stump of the Nadleh Whut’en First Nation. “It’s not if, but when. When it happens, our kids won’t have the ability to fish. The moose that the guys bring in already, they’re so sick, it’s disgusting. This is what we live off.”

We heard women from all walks of life asking who is accountable for the environment—an area in which they feel the government and industry has failed them. As guardians of their families, communities and cultures, women are taking the lead in raising these difficult issues and ensuring the beauty and bounty of the land for generations to come.

As Crystal Lameman said, “Women are the keepers of the land and water on behalf of our ancestors and our future generations. We have an obligation as mothers, but most of all for our one true mother, so that we may always be able to practice our traditional way of life.”

## Fears for a changing climate

For years, scientists have been sounding the alarm on climate change, urging governments to take measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help mitigate the impacts. But instead of taking action, the Canadian federal government has abandoned many

of its climate change commitments and cut funding for critical research. In 2011, Canada became the only signatory to the Kyoto Protocol to withdraw from its international commitments. Under the first phase of Kyoto, Canada had committed to decreasing emissions by 6 percent from 1990 levels by 2012. As of 2011, emissions had instead risen by over 30 percent. The government's revised target is to reduce emissions to 17 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.<sup>27</sup> While provinces have made promising attempts in line with the targets, there is little evidence that their policies are strong enough to compensate for weak or absent federal greenhouse gas reduction policies.

The key regulation currently governing greenhouse gas emissions from oil sands projects is Alberta's Specified Gas Emitters Regulation. It requires all facilities emitting more than 100,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year to reduce their emissions intensities (emissions per barrel) by up to 12 percent—or, alternately, emitters can comply by paying into a climate change fund at a rate of \$15 per tonne of emissions. At this low price, oil sands producers have little incentive to invest in emissions reduction technologies, which can cost significantly more than \$15 per tonne.

The industry did reduce per-barrel emissions by 29 percent from 1990 to 2009, but between 2009 and 2010, emissions intensity rose by two percent. With the most affordable emissions reduction measures already implemented, and a growing trend towards more *in situ* extraction, this trend of rising emissions intensity is likely to continue. And, in spite of intensity reductions, the rapid expansion of oil sands projects caused the industry's total emissions to triple between 1990 and 2010. They are expected to double again by 2020.<sup>28</sup>

The effects of climate change are already having an impact on livelihoods and ecosystems around the world. They are felt most keenly by the poor in the global South, whose survival depends on farming,

fishing and other activities that are highly sensitive to weather and climate patterns. Women are especially vulnerable for a number of reasons, including their greater dependence on rain-fed agriculture, their limited access to capital and credit to diversify their incomes, and their relative lack of decision-making power—from the household to political levels. While women in Canada are, so far, affected less acutely than their southern counterparts by the impacts of climate change, we heard concerns from women in many communities about how climate change will affect their food sources, health and livelihoods.

Perhaps the most tangible climate change effect experienced by women in British Columbia is the explosion in populations of pine beetles, which have flourished due to milder winters. The beetles have devastated the province's logging industry and have been linked to recent deadly sawmill explosions, such as one in Burns Lake which killed two workers and injured another nineteen in January 2012. (The damage caused by the beetle creates a fine, powdery wood dust. When infected trees are processed, over time, wood dust build-up in sawmills creates ideal conditions for combustion.)

Hilary Crowley of Summit Lake recounted how the downstream effects of the pine beetle infestation are clogging waterways in her area of central British Columbia:

"Bear Lake used to be totally pine and now there are very few trees left. The dead trees fall down and many have fallen into the Crooked River. The sponge has also been lost from the forest floor so much silt finds its way into the river. Canoe navigation has become much more difficult as many log jams have formed, blocking the main river and causing it to split into several narrow channels. Last summer I was drawn into one of these log jams and lost my kayak and nearly lost my life.... We have since put up a sign advising that this stretch of river is no longer navigable."

<sup>27</sup> "Canada formally abandons Kyoto Protocol on climate change," *Globe and Mail*, Dec 12, 2011.

(<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/canada-formally-abandons-kyoto-protocol-on-climate-change/article4180809/>)

<sup>28</sup> Industry emissions data sourced from the Pembina Institute, *Clearing the air on oilsands emissions*, p. 4 – 7, November 2012.

Many of the women we met with are also looking beyond their own communities. As one woman told us, “It’s more than the local impact I’m afraid of. It’s the global impact, starting with the tar sands.”

Emily McGiffin of Smithers, British Columbia has worked in developing countries. She told us, “Climate change is on everyone’s lips. It’s changing how they’re able to farm, catch fish, live their lives. They’re already living in tenuous situations and when you add having to adapt to climate change, it’s extremely disempowering for a lot of people. It’s incumbent on us to start demanding that things be done differently.”

“We have a right and a need to stand up for our own back yards as well as others,” we heard from Dr. Zoë Meletis, a professor at the University of Northern British Columbia. “As oil sands development accelerates, everyone’s back yard is being destroyed. We have a global connection. If we don’t stand up for this, who will?”

“Every year, 300,000 people die as a result of climate change, and millions more are made vulnerable by extreme weather,” said Melina Laboucan-Massimo, quoting former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. “Here in the oil sands we are contributing to the global problem. Why are we not taking responsibility for that?” she asked.



## WOMEN BREAKING GROUND: Melina Laboucan Massimo

“Why do I do this work? Because the destruction happening here will happen in other areas if we continue to allow this to happen.” Melina Laboucan Massimo

### Highlighting oil sands impacts on Lubicon territory

Melina Laboucan Massimo is a long-time environmental activist. A Lubicon Lake Cree from northern Alberta, Melina has witnessed first-hand the impacts of oil sands development on her nation’s people, culture and land. As an energy and climate campaigner for Greenpeace Canada since 2009, she spends most of her days travelling within Canada and around the world, sharing the experiences of her people with a larger audience.

“Since 1978, over 14 billion dollars have been taken out of our traditional

territory, yet my family still goes without running water,” Melina told our delegation. “More than 2,600 oil wells on Lubicon territory make it difficult to live a healthy, traditional and sustainable lifestyle.”

Melina showed aerial shots of the mines and their impact in and around the Lubicon Lake Cree territory. Almost 1,400 square kilometers of leases have been granted for *in situ* oil sands development on this land, and almost 70 percent of the territory has been leased for future development. These developments have taken place without consent of the Lubicon people, in violation of their treaty and international human rights. In 2005,

the United Nations Human Rights Committee urged Canada to negotiate with the Lubicon Lake Band to ensure it respected the band’s rights, consistent with Canada’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

For the last three years, the Lubicon people have taken part in an annual “healing walk.” Every summer, they join with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Elders and community members to walk side by side for the healing of the land and their sacred waters. This action aims to raise awareness about the impacts of oil sands development on people, land and water, and to express their continued opposition.

# 3

## Witnessing the health impacts of oil sands development

What many women worry about most with the expansion of oil sands development are the consequences for human health.

For decades, communities in the affected regions have been calling for action—and for honest information—to address the health effects of the toxic chemicals that oil sands development is unleashing into their air, water and food sources.

### Looking the other way

Sadly, those concerned about oil sands industry effects on health have been ignored, and some even outright defamed, by industry and government officials. Perhaps most famously, in 2003, local doctor John O'Connor reported seeing higher

rates of several rare cancers in Fort Chipewyan, a remote indigenous community downstream from the epicentre of oil sands development, than he saw in his practice in Fort McMurray, a city upstream from major developments. In response to his report, Health Canada filed several misconduct charges against Dr. O'Connor, forcing him to leave his practice in Fort Chipewyan. In 2009, after he'd spent years fighting the charges and living with a tarnished reputation, his findings were confirmed by a state-sponsored study.<sup>29</sup> While it is difficult to determine whether the government intentionally

<sup>29</sup> "Doctor cleared over suggested link between cancer, oil sands," *Edmonton Journal*, November 7, 2009. (<http://www2.canada.com/edmontonjournal/news/cityplus/story.html?id=6951e2e4-76fc-4bd1-b32e-8a6e045be0c1>)



defamed Dr. O'Connor, many wonder why his reports weren't taken seriously in the first place.

Some of the government's own scientists have been silenced in reporting harmful consequences of oil sands development. In 2011, Environment Canada scientists discovered contaminants in snow and precipitation in the oil sands region,<sup>30</sup> confirming earlier findings by University of Alberta scientists David Schindler and Erin Kelly. These findings were presented at a November 2011 conference in Boston, but the scientists were given strict orders to follow a script and refrain from engaging with media.<sup>31</sup>

Even more disturbing, our delegation heard of incidents where people suspected of having cancer in Fort Chipewyan were taken out of the community for diagnosis so they would not be counted in local statistics. In British Columbia, similar stories were reported by Ben West, who worked as a Healthy Communities Campaigner for the Wilderness Committee, and is now with Forest Ethics Advocacy: "We have been told that people who are affected are given money and asked to sign non-disclosure agreements," explained West. "Even as far away as Burnaby—over 1,500 km from the oil sands—people are being put into the position to sign non-disclosure agreements. Some are beginning to speak out, but these information blocks are preventing awareness."

Of the few studies conducted into possible health impacts of oil sands projects in Alberta, a minority have conclusively connected the dots between disease and environmental contamination. In 2009, the Alberta Cancer Board released a report concluding that between 1995 and 2006 the occurrence of cancer in Fort Chipewyan was higher than average for all cancers.<sup>32</sup> The study noted that the

increased cancer rate could be due to an increased risk in the community, but it did not specifically investigate the association between cancer and environmental exposures. It did acknowledge the need for more holistic investigation into the health history of residents over a longer time span.

This situation has left women in the affected communities frustrated with government and increasingly doubtful that there will ever be a proper investigation. All too often, the onus to demonstrate health effects is placed upon communities that lack the resources and funding to investigate. First-hand reports of illness are dismissed as unscientific, leaving the communities feeling not just victimized, but ridiculed.

## Witnessing sickness and loss

Regardless of scientific data, people are directly witnessing unusually high rates of deadly disease among their families and neighbours. In Fort McKay, we heard emotional testimony from one woman who told us, "I've lost my mother to cancer. I've lost my dad to cancer. I know seven people [in this community] who have died from cancer. I'm 48 years old and in my lifetime I have seen the difference. I grew up in the bush, but my kids, my grandkids... what will come out of this in their future? I've been diagnosed with cancer and two weeks ago my sister was diagnosed as well."

Geraldine Thomas-Flurer of the Saik'uz First Nation does not mince her words: "What's going on is genocide," she said. "When a company kills people, causes cancer, poisons our food and water supplies—it's genocide." Women are seeing, feeling and fearing the effects on their bodies as the environment is sacrificed to industry. In many

<sup>30</sup> "Federal scientists uncover evidence that oil sands contaminants travel further than expected," *Calgary Herald*, November 13, 2012. (<http://www.calgaryherald.com/business/Federal+scientists+uncover+evidence+that+oilsands+contaminants+travel+further+than+expected/7542920/story.html#ixzz2NALCm3Lw>)

<sup>31</sup> "Scientists discouraged from commenting on oilsands contaminant study," Postmedia/Canada.com, November 4, 2012 (<http://o.canada.com/2012/11/04/feds-discouraged-scientists-from-commenting-on-contaminants-in-oilsands-region/#.UTzceBwpzOY>)

<sup>32</sup> Alberta Cancer Board, *Cancer Incidence in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta 1995-2006*, February 2009. (<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/rls/ne-rls-2009-02-06-fort-chipewyan-study.pdf>)

communities, warning signs are now posted throughout traditional territories where indigenous people used to hunt and fish. These areas are now afflicted by acid rain, due to sulphur and nitrogen oxide emissions from industry.

Melina Laboucan-Massimo told the delegation that respiratory illnesses due to noxious gases released into air and water are on the rise in her Lubicon Cree community of northern Alberta.

Doctor John O'Connor, who served both the Fort Chipewyan and Fort McMurray communities for over a decade, told the delegation that he heard concerns from many women he treated—especially pregnant women—about the short- and long-term effects of oil sands projects on their children and communities.

“Our children are sick with breathing problems from all the pollution coming out of the stacks,” said Celina Harpe, an elder of Fort McKay First Nation in northern Alberta. “I grew up on a trapline,” she said. “Everything seemed okay, we lived okay. Once in a while, people got sick, but not like today—everyone’s sick today.”

Last year, her community had to import bottled water for five consecutive months because their local supply was contaminated with industry pollutants. “We couldn’t drink the water, wash dishes or even take a bath,” said Colette Slater of the Fort McKay Family Support Centre. “How are people supposed to live like that? It made the community anxious and depressed.”

“They try to say we’re the richest band because we have economic opportunities living in the oil sands,” said another Fort McKay First Nation band member. “But everyone is sick and dying out here. What do we really have?”

With frequent water bans and visible pollution seeping from smoke stacks and tailings ponds, the women we met with fear that their health is

“I’d like to see the industry and government come out here, live in our shoes, walk in our shoes. I’d like them to bring their families, live like us, see what we go through. They’d never make it.”  
Fort McKay First Nation band member

being sacrificed for profit. In many cases, the links between pollution and illness are immediate. Crystal Lameman of Beaver Lake Cree Nation told the delegation of “a little baby that kept getting sick with fever and convulsions. They later found out she drank contaminated water on the reserve.”

Whether or not industry air and water pollution is responsible for increased rates of cancer, respiratory illness and other health problems, we heard troubling reports that the government is failing to address communities’ genuine concerns and is employing a variety of tactics to avoid taking responsibility and silence opposition.





## WOMEN BREAKING GROUND: Crystal Lameman

“ I didn’t choose this work. It’s an obligation and it chose me.” Crystal Lameman

### Standing up for the Beaver Lake Cree

Crystal Lameman and her young daughter woke up at the crack of dawn and traveled three hours on Highway 63, also known as “Alberta’s deadliest highway,” to bring her story to the delegation. The academic-turned-activist is a member of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation of Alberta—a nation completely surrounded by oil sands developments.

Crystal was the first woman in her family to receive two university degrees. While she has all the credentials to make a living as a teacher, Crystal feels it is her obligation as a mother to devote her work to protecting her land and culture for her children and future generations. She now spends most of her days speaking out about the exploitation of the oil sands, of her people and their land, and trying to hold the Government of Canada accountable.

“We have come to a point where we have to not be afraid of

holding the Canadian government accountable for our treaty rights,” she exclaims. But she is a lone voice in her community. “Nobody wants to speak about it because they are scared. They say ‘carry our message but don’t use my name’.”

One of the reasons for their reluctance to be identified is that many people in the community work in the oil sands, and would lose their jobs if they were to publicly speak out. She explains that people in her community don’t have a choice: they either work for the industry or live in poverty. “It should never be right that you have to decide between your morals and values—who you are as an indigenous person—over feeding your family,” says Lameman.

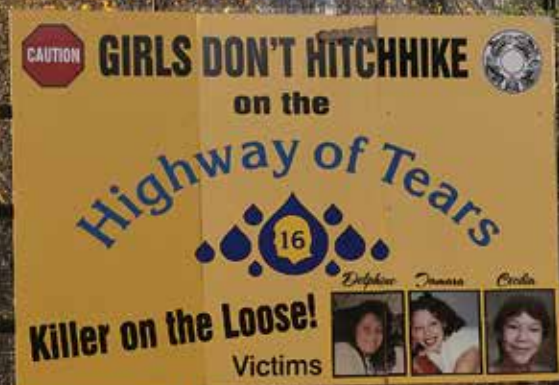
Although members of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation have the right to hunt and fish on their land for eternity—a right enshrined in Treaty 6—their land is being usurped by the oil sands industry, which destroys the very habitat of the animals and fish they depend on. But the resistance efforts of Crystal and her community

have borne some fruit. In May 2008, the Beaver Lake Cree Nation filed a statement of claim in Alberta’s Court of Queen’s Bench, taking the Government of Canada to court for over 17,000 treaty violations related to their approval of oil sands projects on the First Nation’s territory. In doing so, they are establishing an important precedent. Both the provincial and federal government attempted to have the case thrown out, appealing a March 2012 court ruling that the case could proceed to trial. In April 2013, Alberta’s Court of Appeal upheld the lower court judgment, and the trial is expected to begin later this year.

Crystal is confident that the case is winnable. But one barrier to justice is the high cost of the legal system. The First Nation has had to raise \$250,000 for the legal team to file their reply to the government’s statement of defence, prepare document discovery and attend critical case management hearings. Crystal and her community press forward knowing that “after we win this case, so many other nations will come forward.”



# 4



## **BREAKING SPIRITS: The social impacts of oil sands expansion**

In discussions with women from communities near major oil sands projects and along the route of the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline, we heard evidence of the social impacts of oil sands development.

Women spoke to us of feeling impoverished by the rapidly expanding industry, despite the economic wealth it is supposed to generate. They addressed the fear of violence they endure, amplified by an increasingly mobile population of temporary oil sands workers. And they told us how development was dividing their communities and also pitting natives against non-natives.

### **Communities divided**

In almost every community we visited, the delegation heard testimony of the divisiveness of the bitumen boom. While many communities are very clear about their opposition to oil sands development, others

support it. Even within communities, families and spouses are forced to make difficult choices between their values and their ability to make ends meet.

Crystal Lameman of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation told the delegation that within her immediate family, the dominance of the oil sands industry has created tension. Her husband chose to quit his job as an electrician in the industry in order to respect his values as an indigenous person. But with few other opportunities in the region and no hope of returning to a traditional way of life, that decision put his family at risk of poverty. After months of unemployment, Lameman's husband was forced to return to the oil



sands industry to provide for their young family. “He had to give up who he is as an indigenous person so he can feed his family, while I stand here and tell you how wrong it is. This is the reality of the oil sands.”

Others are experiencing divisions at the community level. Melody Lepine of the Mikisew Cree First Nation explained, “Our nation is torn. Elders see change happening so quickly and there’s nothing they can do to stop it. They hope the young generation will reap the benefits of being trained and employed, but want them to keep somewhat of the cultural identity, of who they are, so they are never lost. It’s possible. It’s just... How do you find that balance?”

Another witness from Fort McKay faced criticism from her own family for being a strong voice of opposition against oil sands development. But it’s not her ideology they disagree with: they are afraid of the physical, economic and social repercussions of her activism, she says.

In Burns Lake, British Columbia, one woman told the delegation: “It’s a very difficult time. I don’t know if we [as a community] are for or against the pipeline and it’s really hard for me.” The woman felt that those who spoke out against the pipeline faced isolation and social segregation.

Another Burns Lake resident who wished to remain anonymous reported divisions between native and non-native communities. “Right now, being in this town is a struggle,” she said. “There are a lot of opinionated people who still believe First Nations aren’t capable of making decisions and when it comes to money and native land, there’s no consultation.”

“ I’m feeling frustrated. To me, indigenous people are people of the land. We come from this land, and for people to not understand that is very hard. Once it’s gone it will never come back. Living here, we still have a long way to go, to build these relationships with everyone who lives here.” Burns Lake resident

Even across provincial lines, there is a sense of misunderstanding. As British Columbian Ali Howard remarked, “We hear over and over jokes about Alberta, but how do we convey our values rather than polarizing and creating a sense of ‘us against them’?”

Many see the divisions as resulting from strategies undertaken by government and industry to ensure proposed oil sands projects come to fruition. Where project proponents succeed in instilling fear about job losses, or even violence, members of the community are less likely to seek out the like-minded and stand up in opposition. As Lisa King of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation noted, “The divide and conquer strategy has really worked in many communities.”

## Indigenous and impoverished

One of the more perplexing concerns we heard was of widespread poverty within the oil sands region. In our first delegation meeting, we learned from Melissa Blake, mayor of the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, that Alberta oil sands projects are anticipated to contribute \$2.1 trillion to the Canadian economy over the next 25 years. With such an impressive amount of money flowing out of the oil sands, we wondered how poverty could be an issue for neighbouring communities.

As we listened to testimony from numerous women living near the oil sands, it became clear that indigenous populations are disproportionately impoverished. Oil sands development has devoured traditional hunting territory and poisoned lakes and rivers from which they used to drink and fish. With

strong ties to the land and greater dependence on its food and water resources, indigenous people suffer more directly the effects of environmental decimation. And because of this, they are forced to work for the industry in order to feed and provide for

their families. Meanwhile, they told us they face barriers in access to oil sands jobs, and in some cases, are being displaced by land appropriation.

First Nations' right to the land and right to be consulted on land use are enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. Much of the land being destroyed for oil sands profit is unceded First Nations territory, for which formal complaints with the Canadian government are still unresolved. Several nations have taken their land grievances to the Supreme Court of Canada. But communities must pay the costs of legal services, limiting access to justice for some, and further impoverishing those who carry on the struggle.

Melina Laboucan-Massimo of the Lubicon Cree First Nation explained that “our way of life as indigenous people has been overshadowed by industry and poverty, resulting in problematic dependence on social services. Our people used to be self-sufficient. We’d get clean water from the rivers, medicines from plants and berries in the boreal forest. Now families are unable to sustain themselves in a healthy and safe environment.”

Dale Hyde of Fort McKay First Nation told us, “It’s not that we don’t appreciate what we’ve gotten. We are gathered in this beautiful band hall that we didn’t have before. There’ve been some good things. But really... it was either poverty or work in the oil sands.”

## Violence against women

Amidst poverty, loss of land and communities divided, women in the path of oil sands expansion are experiencing another dimension of loss—of their sense of personal safety. We heard disturbing evidence of increasing violence against women, which witnesses believe is correlated with oil sands industry expansion.

In 1995, Fort McMurray—the town at the heart of Alberta’s largest oil sands developments—had a population of 35,000. Since then, that number has more than doubled to 81,000 people. “The biggest increase is what we call a ‘shadow population,’” Mayor Blake told the delegation. “Those are people who come in and out for work and reside in work camps. At last count, about 40,000 were doing that commute.”

Many oil sands employees work on a “fly-in, fly-out” basis. Residents are seeing growing numbers of workers spending weeks on end in isolated areas and passing their off-days in neighbouring communities. The exponential growth in unfamiliar faces is contributing to a climate of fear for women.

It’s not just those coming in from outside who pose a threat. Alberta, together with Saskatchewan, leads the country in reported cases of spousal abuse. For indigenous women, abuse is endemic: “Growing up as an Aboriginal woman, you’re already a statistic,” said Geraldine Thomas-Flurer of the Saik’uz First Nation.

“You’re more likely to be a victim of violence and sexual assault. It’s scary raising daughters and being afraid, hoping that they’re not like that three-quarters of Aboriginal women who have to grow up with that. And these statistics only go up as development goes up.” Geraldine Thomas-Flurer of the Saik’uz First Nation

Colette Slater, who works at the Fort McKay Family Support Centre, is busy with counselling. “We’re finding that people are grieving the loss of their culture, of their education. Our client base is hurting: they’re sick, they’re anxious, they can’t sleep. Their coping mechanism is taking pills, drugs, alcohol.” This behaviour also contributes to higher rates of violence against women and domestic violence.

Women in British Columbia communities facing pipeline construction shared similar fears. Kitimat resident Tracy Petley told the delegation, “Our walkways are away from roadways to protect pedestrians. Now with workers coming in and out we have crime there. Walkways are no longer safe for our residents.”

Women feel that local and provincial governments are ill-equipped to manage transient populations of such scale, and aren’t doing enough to ensure the safety of local residents. In Vanderhoof, a women’s shelter worker explained, “With increasing development there is the pressure of more people coming in, but no one takes over the social factors. There’s no support for people coming in—mostly transient men who don’t feel responsible to the land, the people, the community.”

“Women’s lives are in danger when hitchhiking,” she added. “It’s not uncommon for them to have dog food thrown at them. We want to move forward. We stand against violence against women, but when a government says we don’t care about your voices, when violence is top down, how do you change attitudes in the community?”

Affordable housing and shelter spaces are scarce in and around the oil sands region. With dwindling opportunities on reserves, and lacking resources, skills and training, many indigenous women flee to urban centres and find themselves working in survival economies related to the sex and drug trades. There, women are extremely vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Urban centres are overwhelmed with the results. Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside—known as “Canada’s poorest postal code”—is notorious for sexual assault and its high number of missing and murdered women. “Violence against women is an epidemic,” said a shelter worker. “The Downtown Eastside of

Vancouver is the epicentre of violence against women, and indigenous women are overrepresented in the statistics. Over 3,000 women are living on the streets. It’s so common to see women who trace back to Alberta and have been displaced by the oil sands. These women are ending up there as a direct result of what’s happening to their land.”

“Most of the solutions are not holistic,” she said. “They’ll look at welfare rates, housing, etc., but no one is looking at where these women are coming from or why we’re seeing more and more Aboriginal women in these positions. There are a lot of band-aid approaches.”

## Treaty rights: drawing a line on oil sands development?

Treaties are agreements between the Canadian government (originally the British Crown) and the indigenous peoples who occupied the land prior to colonization. Owing to the diversity of the thousands of distinct indigenous societies—each with their own laws, customs, economies and languages—every treaty is unique. However, treaties generally guarantee First Nations inherent rights to the land and outline mutual obligations concerning land and resources. Treaties are protected under the Canadian Constitution.

For many First Nations, treaty rights are a first line of defence against invasive development on their traditional lands. But they do not provide iron-clad protection. In October 2012, for example, the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) and the Métis Nation of Alberta announced they would launch a constitutional challenge to Shell Oil Canada’s expansion of the Jackpine Mine oil sands project. They claim the expansion threatens their right to sustain themselves on the land as protected under Treaty 8, which the ACFN signed in 1899. Their case was dismissed by the Alberta Court of Appeal in November 2012, adding fuel to the frustration of native groups who feel their right to be consulted on development has been ignored by successive levels of government.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> “First Nations upset after Alberta appeal court rejects argument over Shell’s Jackpine Mine,” *Calgary Herald*, November 26, 2012



## WOMEN BREAKING GROUND: Marie (Incara) Adams

“There’s no end to our story, no end to our history... It’s still rolling.” Marie (Incara) Adams

### Passing on her passions

Marie Adams is old hat when it comes to protecting land and traditional ways of life. At 74, she is a proud matriarch of four daughters, eight granddaughters and ten great-grandchildren.

Born Dene, with the Dene name Incara, she is now a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and a long-time resident of Fort McMurray. She moved to Alberta in 1971, leaving behind an abusive husband, only to be met with a land abused by industry and government.

Marie has long been active in preserving her land and culture and takes pride in setting a strong example for her children. She instilled in her daughters a passion for the natural world, prompting her youngest to pursue a master’s degree in environmental science.

Throughout her life, she’s served on a board of Elders whose traditional values inform their position as keepers of the water. She’s also served at the local Friendship Centre, an indigenous organization that

provides resources and services to First Nations members. She says ties to the community and the natural environment are dissolving. “It’s a busy place here, it’s very expensive.” Marie is one of few who still speak her traditional language.

Through her activism, Marie has met with environmental leaders such as David Suzuki, raising critical questions about the direction of her community in the face of the oil sands industry. “Where do we draw the line?” she asked.

The struggle with the oil industry is all too familiar. Growing up in Saskatchewan, she witnessed indigenous struggles with major companies over uranium mines. “One of the biggest mines, El Dorado, took over my dad’s trapline. In those days people didn’t fight. You couldn’t sell your trapline or claim anything. Eventually the entire community had to move, and from then on, our life, our environment changed a lot.”

“It’s often difficult not to look back at the past with longing. Most of my life we lived on a trapline. We’d come to the village every now and

then, and from what I can remember, my environment and the non-native environment were totally different—day and night,” she explained. “Environment-wise, so much has changed. You can tell by the trees, the water. In Fort McKay, you see how far out the sand bar is? That should tell you how low the water is.”

“We can’t go back to trapping, that’s a thing of the past. My grandmother taught me how to set a rabbit snare. Can you still set a rabbit snare?” she asked. “It’s sad: I’ll never live to teach my little ones how to set a rabbit snare like my grandmother did.”

Ultimately, Marie has always tried to find stability for herself and her community. “I can’t say I’m against the industry and I can’t say I’m for it,” she told the delegation. “I’m in between. I’m trying to balance it. We all have to live and have a job in order to survive. But the expansion bothers me. Why take more when you have enough?”

As one of the few Elders of her age left, she’s concerned about leaving her language, culture and traditions for future generations. But at 74 years of age and counting, she’s still hopeful.





5

## **GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY: Are they listening?**

For many of the women we met with, whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by oil sands industry expansion, standing up for their rights and needs constitutes a struggle against a seemingly united front of government and industry.

The Canadian government and the oil industry appear to be failing women and their communities by placing a higher value on profit than the well-being and safety of those affected by oil sands projects, and by failing to properly investigate concerns about health and environmental impacts. Aboriginals are disproportionately affected by oil sands industry expansion, experiencing displacement, marginalization and increasing rates of violence. And as government expedites oil sands projects and cuts funding for environmental monitoring and research, many worry that Canada is experiencing an erosion of democracy. We heard from several

women who, after standing up in opposition to oil sands projects and pipeline development, have found themselves excluded from environmental hearings, labelled “radicals” and in some cases singled out by police and government officials.

### **Profit over people**

Canada's federal government champions the oil sands industry as key to safeguarding Canada's economy and creating jobs. Prime Minister Harper has stated: “The need for this energy is just overwhelming. This is one of the sectors that creates some of the most jobs, not just in

the oil patch, but around the country in terms of manufacturing and support services, and this government will continue to do everything to promote the Canadian energy sector.”<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, many communities have faced pressure from oil and pipeline companies to accept deals that would nullify any future claims against them. In Vanderhoof, British Columbia, Jasmine Thomas told us that “Enbridge has been trying to force us to sign an equity agreements for over a billion dollars which would have to be borrowed and paid back to the company.” The pipeline company first approached the Saik’uz Nation in 2006. Despite being rejected several times, “they keep coming back with more and more money to try and divide our people,” Geraldine Thomas-Flurer testified. “They think they’re going to break our [Save the Fraser] declaration. We said no. No amount of money is going to make us sell our land.”

### Forsaking human health and environment obligations

The *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (1999) provides the country’s national framework for environmental regulation. It is intended to contribute to sustainable development through pollution prevention. It states that “the protection of the environment is essential to the well-being of Canadians.” Specific duties of the federal government under the act include using its powers in ways that protect the environment and human health, applying the precautionary principle such that “where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.”

Among its obligations, the act also requires the government to protect the environment when making social and economic decisions; encourage

Canadians to participate in decision-making on issues that affect the environment; inform Canadians about the state of the environment; use traditional Aboriginal knowledge, among other sources, in addressing environmental problems; and protect the environment—including biological diversity and human health—from the risks of toxic pollutants.<sup>35</sup>

These provisions have clear application to oil sands development. Numerous scientists and health officials have voiced concerns over the environmental and health impacts of oil sands projects, questioning claims that the oil industry practices sustainable development. Yet, instead of meeting its obligation to investigate impacts on health and the environment, the government routinely denies reports from environmental scientists and health officials.

Moreover, our delegation heard evidence that activists face intimidation rather than being encouraged to participate in public deliberations over environmental decisions.

In addition to responsibilities outlined in the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act*, federal and provincial governments in Canada have a legal obligation under the Canadian Constitution to consult indigenous people where land management and resource development decisions may adversely impact their constitutional rights.

The province of Alberta prides itself on being one of the first to implement a First Nations consultation policy, brought into effect in 2006. Yet Lisa King, who works for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in government and industry relations, told the delegation that her band “struggles working with the federal and provincial governments to protect wildlife.” Despite declining wildlife populations and repeated complaints from First Nations communities, there are few governmental policies in place to protect the buffalo and caribou, forcing the bands to take

<sup>34</sup> “Oil sands critics are misinformed, Harper says,” Toronto Star, December 16, 2011. ([http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2011/12/16/oil\\_sands\\_critics\\_are\\_misinformed\\_harper\\_says.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2011/12/16/oil_sands_critics_are_misinformed_harper_says.html))

<sup>35</sup> Canadian Environmental Protection Act, 1999, accessed through Environment Canada web site: <http://www.ec.gc.ca/lcpe-cepa/default.asp?lang=En&n=24374285-1&offset=1&toc=hide>

these initiatives upon themselves. Essentially, they feel that the government claims to be consulting them, without actually following up on the critical concerns, recommendations or needs they express.

In communities directly affected by the oil sands, the government appears to be creating roadblocks in order to defer answering questions about public health impacts. While working in government and industry relations for the Mikisew Cree First Nation, Melody Lepine has filed numerous grievances covering health issues such as elevated rates of cancer, cumulative effects on the environment, and treaty and constitutional issues such as the lack of consultation. But the government response, she said, is always the same. “They say, ‘these issues will be dealt with. We want to know what specific issues you have with which specific project.’” Government and industry will make small changes to mitigate the harm, but fail to address the broader issues arising from oil sands production.

In Fort McKay, Dale Hyde pleaded, “If you can talk to [Provincial Premier Alison] Redford, ask her why they don’t take into consideration the cumulative effects of the oil sands. When they look at pollution of the existing companies, they look at them as individual entities operating on specific tracts of land, rather than looking at the cumulative effects they’re having on the area as a whole.”

The industry perspective is that they are in fact taking measures to mitigate environmental damage, by offsetting harm done in one area by protecting another. Janet Holder is Executive Vice President for Western Access with the energy distribution company Enbridge, lead proponent of the Northern Gateway pipeline project. “We’re Canada’s biggest renewable energy company,” she told the delegation. “We have the largest solar farm in Canada and produce enough renewable power for 300,000 homes. If we take a tree down, we plant a tree. If we need power to generate a pump station,

we ensure we generate enough renewables to power that pump station. If we utilize an acre of land, we’ll preserve an acre somewhere else.”

“We’re ensuring we’re dealing with all the environmental aspects,” she told us. Holder believes that the pipeline is in fact the answer to an existing environmental problem: “We are shipping this oil to another part of the world that is using an awful lot of coal, so in our mind, this is to replace coal. If the pipeline doesn’t get built, the Canadian oil will not make it to Asia and they’ll continue to use coal, or oil from other countries with worse environmental or human rights standards.”

Local people are not reassured by the process of offsetting. They do not see the benefits of trees planted or wildlife protected elsewhere as compensating for the damage to their land and rivers and the loss of the boreal forest.

“They call this the sacrifice zone. They say there’s a lot of caribou in Canada. And what about us? Are we being sacrificed too?”

Lisa King of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation

Industry and government leaders are similarly failing to take responsibility for the widening area of potential impact represented by pipeline expansion. Janet Holder of Enbridge told the delegation, “We are in the pipelining industry. We don’t address oil sands. We are just a facilitator without any regulatory control over the oil sands. We could do what we do by railcar but that’s not the most efficient or environmental way of doing it.”

Bev Ketlo of the Nadleh Whut’en First Nation said women from her community want to see more accountability. “This pipeline is having cumulative effects on the land, the water, the animals, the air, and yet the government only looks at narrow terms of reference when assessing the impacts. For us, this project is too dangerous to allow on our land. The government needs to be more accountable for that.”





Ben West, formerly of British Columbia's Wilderness Committee, told us of people's concern with how little preparation there appears to be for a pipeline-related disaster. For example, he highlighted that government and industry are not prepared for the effects of an earthquake. What's more, the federal government moved to close the Kitsilano Coast Guard Facility and reduced the national oil spill response team from twenty-two units to nine. "How are they responding to our concerns when laying off people with oil spill expertise?" he asked. Even Canada's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development has warned that the federal government is unprepared to deal with an oil spill.<sup>36</sup>

## Opposition to pipeline underestimated

We heard starkly different testimony from industry representatives about their dealings with Aboriginal communities than we heard from First Nations representatives themselves.

Enbridge's Janet Holder told the delegation, "In sixty percent of the First Nations who are impacted, we have one hundred percent support on reserve land. We've been having extensive consultation. We've listed all their concerns and what we've done to address those concerns. Sixty percent of First Nations have signed on for equity agreements. There isn't a huge amount of opposition. There is some, and I get it, they want to deal with this as a rights and treaty issue. There are some who want more. There are some who supported and now oppose, and vice versa. Depending on elections, that can change. I don't think First Nations are an issue for us."

The First Nations women we met with told a different story. Lisa King, of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, told the delegation, "We are independently documenting what resources are necessary for us to sustain ourselves—moose, caribou, water fowl, fish, berries, etc.—but no one from industry or government is collecting that information. Why should the projects go forward when they're not addressing these concerns?"

Marie Adams, also from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, told us, "I've gone to meetings with industry people—they don't see anything but dollar signs. They don't see the trees, bumble bees, any of the things I grew up with. What [the government] says goes, just like when they took our treaty rights away; we had no say. We didn't write the treaty or sign the treaty; it was forced onto us." "It's hard to take on the industry because the government is backing them up."

Women of the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation also reported that they are not friendly to pipeline agreements. Anne Ketlo told the delegation, "We haven't signed any agreements and we don't intend to."

<sup>36</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada, "Government not ready to respond to a major oil spill," December 7 2010. ([http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/mr\\_20101207\\_e\\_34442.html](http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/mr_20101207_e_34442.html))



The United Nations Human Rights Committee has on three occasions documented the federal government's failure to protect treaty rights of the Lubicon Lake Cree, and yet the Government of Alberta has issued industry leases covering nearly 70 percent of their territory.

Lisa King calls the government's approach to consultation a smoke screen. "The government said it would include First Nations in world-class monitoring programs meant to address our concerns. We've been talking to them for two years, but we haven't seen any monitoring programs or acknowledgement of our traditional knowledge and the species important to us."

Many women we met reported that the concerns of indigenous people are dismissed as unscientific despite their thousands of years of traditional knowledge. This was echoed by Saik'uz First Nation Chief Jackie Thomas, who pointed out, "The federal Crown has an obligation to consult with us. They have to provide us with the capacity to do a proper assessment on a level playing field. So far, their strategy has been to overwhelm us. Sometimes they get lucky, and sometimes they don't. They wouldn't do that to a non-native community. Why treat us any different?"

In September 2011, Canada's Natural Resources Minister Joe Oliver told the press: "Oil sands land, which only represents one-thousandth of our boreal forest, is uninhabitable by human beings. No community is being disrupted." The thousands of people living in the region beg to differ. "What used to be the boreal forest now is the Sahara desert," said Crystal Lameman, who lives on the Beaver Lake Cree reserve in northern Alberta.

## Undermining democracy in Canada

In Fort McMurray, Mayor Melissa Blake reminded us, "Canada has always relied on natural resources. Individuals are the ones who will shift demand." But the women we met with felt that shifting demand is becoming increasingly difficult because of secretive, closed-door policies and strategic efforts to stifle opposition to oil sands development. Their testimony adds to a mounting body of evidence that pressures to develop the oil sands are undermining democracy in Canada.

Women told us that industry and government have teamed up to push oil sands projects, ignoring democratic processes, employing fear-tactics and rewriting history to silence the outspoken. In the past year, the Canadian government has been accused of "muzzling" federal scientists by restricting their ability to speak with media. Specific policies have restricted scientists working on oil sands-related research from speaking publicly about their findings, despite a federal obligation under the *Environmental Protection Act* to provide information and encourage public participation in matters of the environment. Most recently, two groups have asked Canada's Federal Information Commissioner to investigate systemic government efforts to restrict media's access to federal research scientists.<sup>37</sup>

The federal government has also been actively dismantling environmental laws and cancelling research and monitoring programs that deal with climate change and the environmental and health effects of resource development. In December 2012, Bill C-45 —the *Jobs and Growth Act*—was passed, igniting a nationwide wave of protest under the

“ We live there. Our hunting grounds are there. Is the Canadian government saying indigenous people don't exist? No, we're still here. We're still surviving this oppression and genocide.”  
Crystal Lameman of Beaver Lake Cree Nation

<sup>37</sup> "Muzzling' of Canadian government scientists sent before Information Commissioner Suzanne Legault," *Toronto Star*, March 15, 2013. ([http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/03/15/muzzling\\_of\\_canadian\\_government\\_scientists\\_sent\\_before\\_information\\_commissioner\\_suzanne\\_legault.html](http://www.thestar.com/news/world/2013/03/15/muzzling_of_canadian_government_scientists_sent_before_information_commissioner_suzanne_legault.html))

“Idle No More” banner, which has yet to subside. This omnibus bill, a follow-up to the 2012 federal budget, brought in a range of cuts to environmental oversight regulations, infuriating First Nations and others concerned with protecting Canada’s natural resources. In addition to changing the *Indian Act*, the Bill made changes—without consultation—to the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, the *Fisheries Act* and the *Navigable Waters Act*. Among other things, these changes reduce regulatory barriers to pipeline construction and other resource development activities that may affect hundreds of Canadian rivers and the fish they sustain.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, many women described having their rights violated by government and law enforcement officials. Saik’uz First Nation Chief Jackie Thomas told us she found herself under surveillance by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) as a result of her peaceful activist work with the Yinka Dene Alliance.

Some women have met with violence for speaking out against oil sands projects. Sonja Ostertag of Prince George, British Columbia, a member of the Sea to Sands Conservation Alliance, reported being verbally and physically attacked while distributing information critical of oil sands development. As the victim of an unprovoked assault, she was shocked when the police officers that responded to the incident treated her as a criminal. Ostertag was interrogated for her involvement with the environmental group while the attacks on her were ignored. She also told us she was prevented from renting public space due to her affiliation with an environmental group.

“We are the epitome of good citizens. We raised our kids, pay taxes, hold down jobs, but the first reaction of the government was to trash us as ‘radical environmentalists,’” said Liz Thorne of Kitimat. “‘Irresponsible and ignorant’—that’s what our elected representatives say about us. But for the oil companies, it’s business as usual. It would make you sick. I thought it couldn’t happen in North America, but it does.”

A disturbing picture emerged from the testimony we heard: women and their communities feel their concerns are ignored, or worse, they are deemed enemies of the state, facing violence and ostracism for asking difficult questions about oil sands development and the impact of the proposed pipeline.



<sup>38</sup> The full text of Bill C-45 can be found at: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=5942521>. See also “22 changes in the budget bill fine print,” *CBC News*, October 26, 2012. (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2012/10/19/pol-list-2nd-omnibus-bill.htm>).



## WOMEN BREAKING GROUND: Melody Lepine

“ I worry that we’re going to face a generation in 40 years asking ‘why did you stand back and do nothing?’ Our leadership has to make those deliberations, has to make hard decisions for the future. I’ll keep collecting information and help them make those decisions.” Melody Lepine

### Helping First Nations deal with government and industry

For Melody Lepine, forming relationships with government is the key to making positive change in policy and decision-making. Melody, a proud member of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, grew up downstream from large-scale oil sands developments.

As a youth, Melody saw many of her high school classmates recruited to high-paying jobs in the oil industry. But growing up under the influence of her grandparents, Melody felt a strong, natural connection to the environment. Despite being a young mother, she took the path less travelled through seven gruelling years of university, eventually earning a degree in environmental conservation science.

Bright, inquisitive and engaged, Melody was once again targeted for recruitment by the oil industry while attending information sessions

at the University of Alberta. But members of her nation also recognized her talent and passion, and instead recruited her to work for the band’s Government and Industry Relations (GIR) department.

“We’re the middle group between an industry project, the government and our people. From seismic exploration to mining to constructing a highway, anything that will trigger an impact on our community, [the industry] has to do a consultation,” said Melody.

She’s been working for GIR for nearly ten years, and recently became director after her boss stepped down. Melody understands the importance of making informed decisions: “We make [companies] do more than conduct a simple meeting—we need community meetings, independent research and studies, assessments and traditional knowledge in order to determine the potential impacts.”

GIR now has a staff of about ten people and represents the community on everything from

forestry to mining. The First Nation—the largest in the region—has members in places ranging from Fort McMurray to Edmonton to Fort Smith to Fort Chipewyan.

“We hold meetings in all four locations, and everywhere the concerns are the same: lack of jobs and training, impacts on the environment, loss of culture and lack of government responsibility in honouring our Treaty of 1899.”

Overwhelmed with industry applications—over 200 each year—Melody admits to burnout and frustration. Often, GIR acts only as a speed bump on the road to project approval, which poor government regulation and the drive for profit have made inevitable. So what keeps her going? “Each time we learn something new and change our tactics,” she says. After years of attending hearings and opposing projects just to see them approved anyway—all at the expense of the First Nation—she and her colleagues are starting to make headway and learning how to navigate the system.



# 6

## Strategies for change

Despite overwhelming development pressures, lack of respect for peaceful protest, and the erosion of democratic values, women are standing up in growing numbers to resist industrial expansion in their communities and to demand a brighter future.

We heard from mothers, daughters, grandmothers, women in wheelchairs, women in positions of leadership, women in construction, retired women—women from all walks of life—who are employing an astonishing diversity of strategies to tackle oil sands industry expansion. They are drawing on their individual strengths and uniting in a concerted effort, finding creative ways to shift public consciousness.

### Speaking up, reaching out

Across the board, groups are networking like never before. From the grassroots to national and international levels, organizations are banding together

and sharing strategies and resources in a united front against further development of the oil sands.

In Alberta and British Columbia, the delegation witnessed the power of communication in bringing people together. “We open our doors to children from outside the community to create a bridge with our neighbours and non-native families,” said Tanya Stump, who works for the Nadleh Whut’en Childcare Centre. “Otherwise we would never know them. They trust us with their children, we get to talking about these projects, [and] we know people are not just concerned for their own children, but for your children and grandchildren too.”





In indigenous communities, women have been at the forefront of unprecedented countrywide initiatives such as the Freedom Train and Save the Fraser Declaration. These have brought people together to oppose both the Northern Gateway and Keystone XL pipelines, working collaboratively and drawing strength in numbers.

Where government and industry fail to recognize their concerns, women are willing to put their lives on the line to protect their environment and communities.

“For us, [this pipeline] is just not going to happen. If they do come and try to put it up I guarantee we will be standing in front of those machines and equipment.”

Beverly Ketlo of the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation

Other women, such as Eriel Derranger of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Jasmine Thomas of the Saik'uz First Nation, are heading abroad to speak with European governments and international bodies about the devastation of the oil sands industry, looking to develop allies in a shift to cleaner energy sources.

In Fort McKay, Feather McDonald is speaking out on behalf of the youth in her community. She told the delegation, “These projects affect and upset me. It hurts to see our youth suffering from all of these losses, and seeing our Elders hurt. We feel really small, like we don't have a voice. I believe if we all come together we can do something about this. I'm scared for our community, but I believe that the youth can make a difference.”

In British Columbia, town meetings are springing up along the proposed pipeline routes, brimming with energy and overflowing with people wanting to have their voices heard. In many cases, women are playing a key role in organizing these meetings and ensuring community participation in critical

decisions. Pat Moss, Executive Director of the Northwest Institute for Bioregional Research in Smithers, B.C. told the delegation that in information sessions and town meetings, “usually more than 50 percent of attendees are women. Since the 1970s, women have really been the backbone of the opposition to a range of industrial projects that they've seen as threatening the environment and their way of life. We hang in there over time.”

## Demonstrating alternative pathways

In Vancouver, Andrea Reimer told the delegation, “I'm disappointed in the lack of imagination from the industry.” As a city councillor and council lead on the award-winning Greenest City Action Plan, she's helping to show there are clean energy alternatives available to power the future. Vancouver is on track to become the world's “greenest city” by 2020. What's more, they're dedicated to setting an example for the rest of the world. “We're putting energy and time into implementing our 2020 vision, but we also want to be messengers. Over 1,600 cities worldwide have contacted us. It brings groups together in a cross-pollination of purpose.”

Reimer is also proud of her city's efforts to bring women's voices to the forefront. “We have a gender equality strategy and a women's advisory committee,” she said. “We're also trying to link our initiatives. For example, we're trying to reconcile Aboriginal title and rights, and engage cultural groups, and use education to try to get women more involved.”

In Vancouver, Kamel Gupta is urging others to get to the financial core of the matter: “We hear about the counter arguments; environmental aspects are well published and more recently Aboriginal land rights issues are surfacing. But the economic foundation is never challenged. It's time to challenge the assumption that the oil sands are the only way to grow. It doesn't have to be one or the other.”



### Strengthening native stewardship

Women like Lisa King of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Melody Lepine of the Mikisew Cree First Nation are seeking out higher education and returning to their communities to work in government and industry relations. They're gathering evidence on the impacts of industrial projects and engaging entire communities in the process. And when the federal and provincial governments fail to protect the environment and wildlife such as buffalo and caribou, they're taking a stand, using their own resources and traditional knowledge to protect the animals that they depend on. The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation has created bison and caribou stewardship protection plans that monitor populations and protect against extinction. "It's exciting working for our nation," said King. "We're not stuck in the cycle of struggle. We're doing things differently; we're getting creative."

In Alberta, communities affected by the oil sands gather annually for a healing walk. The walk is led by the Keepers of the Athabasca, a coalition of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, environmentalists and allies working together for the protection of the water, land, air, people and wildlife in the Athabasca River watershed."

"We have a society that's strong enough to sustain ourselves," said Geraldine Thomas-Flurer, a Saik'uz First Nation woman who draws on the strength and wisdom that her Elders have instilled in her. "When someone gives birth, gets married [or] dies, our clan is there as a support system. Our extended family is really important to us."

Understanding the gendered impacts of oil sands industry expansion, women are also creating ways to heal from decades of violence and oppression. Members of the Fort McKay community have donated traplines and cabins to create women's retreat centres where they can reconnect with land and culture.



### Connecting through the arts

In Smithers, British Columbia, Dorothy Giesbrecht of the Driftwood Foundation told the delegation, "We're using culture, music and the arts to unite the community around these issues. One of our initiatives is the 4,000 Reasons Project.<sup>39</sup> The main thing is the feeling of community strength."

Another Smithers resident, Valerie Laub, harnessed her talents as a playwright, using comedic writing to rally the public. "Using comedy slips under people's defences and conveys the moral reasons to support pipeline opposition," she says.

In 2009, Ali Howard of British Columbia embarked on an incredible 600-kilometre swim of the Skeena River, from the headwaters to the mouth at the Pacific Ocean. Her efforts, documented in the film *Awakening the Skeena*, raised awareness

<sup>39</sup> The 4,000 Reasons Festival was held in Smithers in June 2012 to celebrate the beauty of the land along the route of the proposed Enbridge pipeline and to thank the 4,000 people who spoke out in defense of it before the Joint Review Panel.

about coal-bed methane and its effect on the environment. The success of the creative campaign to protect the headwaters of the Skeena River from coal-bed fracking has inspired those similarly struggling against oil sands industry expansion.

“There’s incredible diversity here, and that is our strength,” said Pat Moss. “We don’t all do the same things, but we’re all applying our strengths in opposing these projects.”

### Finding strength in unity

Our delegation heard that in Fort Chipewyan, Elders voted to oppose oil sands industry expansion because of the impact it would have on their brothers and sisters in British Columbia—a decision that attendees called “symbolically amazing.”

In many ways, the unity displayed by the women of Alberta and British Columbia is what gives them confidence that their struggle against oil giants will prevail. “One thing that’s been really successful is that they haven’t divided us,” said Geraldine Thomas-Flurer.

“Before, the industry targeted individuals in the community, but we’ve made it clear: you have to deal with us as a collective. Doors are being opened. A lot of stereotypes, misinformation about our people are dissolving. It’s a good feeling. You don’t feel like you are alone.”

Many spoke of a sense that the struggle against oil sands development is creating a united front. “This issue has presented powerful opportunities for community building,” an organizer told us. “At the hearings, I’ve been amazed at the diversity of people from all different backgrounds. No matter what vantage point they spoke from, they were amazingly well researched, articulate, impassioned talks. It’s really inspirational.”

“In 2010 we got going, organizing events, films, collaborating with other groups in northern British Columbia, attending the joint panel hearings in town, calling for meetings with local politicians. We’ve gone from being a small group of people really overwhelmed with trying to stop this project to being a small group of organizers who really *are* going to stop this project.”

Sonja Ostertag of the Sea to Sands Conservation Alliance echoed this confidence: “I do believe that this project won’t go forward. I see that we’re this vast network of people from various backgrounds, working together so we can have a future we all believe in. It’s incredible to be part of this group at this table and march along with everyone here in Prince George.”

“There’s a real opportunity here. We’re going through a crisis; the whole system is shaking at its foundation. But it’s an incredible opportunity for visionaries to come forward and make real change.” Kamel Gupta in Vancouver

“It’s not only indigenous people sending messages of support,” said Jasmine Thomas of the Saik’uz First Nation, “but people from across Canada and all over the world. Together, I know this project is dead in the water. I’m looking forward to our future.”





## **CONCLUSION:** Bringing the debate home to Canadians

The number, strength and diversity of women we heard from in the course of our travels was inspiring and a tremendous source of hope.

But the response to our delegation also signalled a growing frustration among ordinary Canadians, a sense that their voices are not being heard when it comes to oil sands development. Their presence at meetings and their eagerness to speak suggests that many are wondering, “Is anyone listening?”

As nations around the world struggle to reach a consensus on how to avoid dangerous levels of climate change, Canadians need room for a healthy debate on the country’s energy and environment. As oil sands advocates argue, Canada is indeed rich in energy resources and the immediate benefits of jobs and revenues are hard for industry and governments to ignore. At the same time, continued

expansion of the oil sands industry is undermining efforts in other provinces and sectors to reduce Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions. Countries such as China, Germany and the United States are investing heavily in renewable energy, which the International Energy Agency predicts will fill a growing proportion of our future energy needs. And many living closest to oil sands developments are either clearly not benefiting from today’s boom, or feel they are being asked to sacrifice much more precious intangibles—clean air and water, good health, their traditions—for short-term profit. Still others enjoy the benefits that jobs and royalties have brought to their communities, but wonder about the appropriate pace and scale of the development.



A number of the women we spoke with have sought out organizations they can work through to create space for such debate. But they face an uphill battle to bring attention to their concerns through formal channels. With recent legislative changes, they face an ever-tightening set of rules that limit citizen input on resource development issues.

Since our delegation visited Alberta and British Columbia in October 2012, new restrictions have been introduced to limit public participation in National Energy Board hearings on pipeline expansion. In order to testify, in-person or simply by written submission, citizens must first complete a nine-page application form,<sup>40</sup> provide supporting documentation and identify the source of their expertise. The board will then only hear testimony from those it considers to be “directly affected” by a given proposal, and will not consider “upstream activities, the development of oil sands, or the downstream use of the oil transported.”

By reducing debate and decision-making around oil sands industry expansion to a series of piecemeal project approvals, these rules preclude any honest and open discussion of the broad, cumulative effects of the development. They also effectively deny most Canadians the opportunity to express their fears and concerns for the future, or a forum to propose alternatives.

At the same time, with growing pressure for more pipeline infrastructure to accommodate the resource development industry, never have the voices of Canadians—and their concerns—been so vital. Concerns we heard over the course of the delegation will become more pronounced and reach eastern Canada, as major oil sands pipeline projects such as Enbridge’s Line 9 and TransCanada’s Energy East are proposed to carry oil across the country, bringing new communities and impacts into the discussion. Meanwhile, the safety and lasting environmental

impact of the oil sands continues to be called into question with major spills, most recently in Alberta’s Cold Lake. One million litres of bitumen has leaked into the boreal forest where a major spill began in May 2013. Four months later, the oil company has admitted it is unknown when the leak will stop.<sup>41</sup>

Aboriginal Canadians who remain on the land have the most at stake. As some have pointed out, once the local forests have been cleared, the water and air polluted, and the energy extracted, they cannot simply pack up and go home. Canada’s obligations to respect First Nations’ Aboriginal and treaty rights to enjoy traditional uses of their lands are enshrined in the Constitution. Consultation with First Nations must go beyond token consultation or overwhelming pressure to accept buyouts. It includes respecting their right to say “no” to development.

Our contribution to supporting debate on oil sands development has been to share with you the hopes, fears and concerns expressed by the women our delegation met with in Alberta and British Columbia. Their courage and honesty may encourage you to look deeper into how decisions are being made on oil sands projects and related pipeline expansion, and to question how the rapid growth of this one industrial sector is affecting Canada’s economy, local environments and the global climate. To echo the words of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation’s Crystal Lameman: “We are the keepers and stewards of the land.... One thing we still have and you will all walk away from this journey carrying is the truth.”

There are many citizen-led organizations and initiatives you can look to for answers. Some have been cited in this report, and more are listed on the next page. We encourage you to inform yourself, look for opportunities to share your views with family and friends, and ask your elected officials about their vision for Canada’s environment and energy pathways.

<sup>40</sup> A sample application form to participate in the review of changes to Enbridge’s pipeline 9b can be found at <http://www.neb-one.gc.ca/clf-nsi/rthnb/pplctnsbfrthnb/nbrdgl9brvrsi/frm/pplctnprtpt-eng.pdf>. This is the first review to which the new application rules have been applied.

<sup>41</sup> “Bitumen leak cleanup underway near Cold Lake, Alberta,” *CBC News*, Aug. 9, 2013. (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/story/2013/08/09/edmonton-cnrl-tours-leaksites.html?cmp=rss>)



# 8

## Resources

For further reading on the oil sands industry and related pipeline developments and their impacts, we suggest the following Canadian and international sources, which include government, industry, First Nations and nongovernmental organizations.

To gain insight into the credibility and perspectives of any organization, we recommend you read their mission and mandate statements, as well as any information provided on funding sources and board membership.

- Alberta Energy [energy.alberta.ca](http://energy.alberta.ca)
- Beaver Lake Cree Nation [beaverlakecreenation.ca](http://beaverlakecreenation.ca)
- Canada-Alberta Oil Sands Environmental Monitoring Information Portal [jointoilsandsmonitoring.ca](http://jointoilsandsmonitoring.ca)
- Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers [capp.ca](http://capp.ca)
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives [policyalternatives.ca](http://policyalternatives.ca), Climate Justice Project
- Canadian Energy Research Institute [ceri.ca](http://ceri.ca)
- Climate Action Network Canada [climateactionnetwork.ca](http://climateactionnetwork.ca)
- Coastal First Nations Great Bear Initiative [coastalfirstnations.ca](http://coastalfirstnations.ca)
- Dogwood Initiative [dogwoodinitiative.org](http://dogwoodinitiative.org)
- Douglas Channel Watch [douglaschannelwatch.ca](http://douglaschannelwatch.ca)

- Environment Canada [ec.gc.ca](http://ec.gc.ca)
  - Environmental Defence [environmentaldefence.ca](http://environmentaldefence.ca), tar sands pages
  - ForestEthics [forestethics.ca](http://forestethics.ca)
  - Greenpeace Canada [greenpeace.org/Canada](http://greenpeace.org/Canada), climate and energy pages
  - Haisla Nation [haisla.ca](http://haisla.ca)
  - Idle No More [idlenomore.ca](http://idlenomore.ca)
  - Indigenous Environmental Network [ienearth.org](http://ienearth.org)
  - International Energy Agency [iea.org](http://iea.org)
  - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [ipcc.ch](http://ipcc.ch)
  - Keepers of the Athabasca [keepersofthewater.ca](http://keepersofthewater.ca)
  - Nadleh Whut'en First Nation [nadleh.ca](http://nadleh.ca)
  - Natural Resources Canada [nrcan.gc.ca](http://nrcan.gc.ca)
  - Natural Resources Defence Council [nrdc.org](http://nrdc.org)
  - Northwest Institute for Bioregional Research [northwestinstitute.ca](http://northwestinstitute.ca)
  - Oil Sands Reality Check [tarsandsrealitycheck.ca](http://tarsandsrealitycheck.ca)
  - Pembina Institute [pembina.org](http://pembina.org)
  - RAVEN [raventrust.com](http://raventrust.com)
  - Saik'uz First Nation [saikuz.com](http://saikuz.com)
  - Save the Fraser [savethefraser.ca](http://savethefraser.ca)
  - Sea to Sands Conservation Alliance [sea2sands.ca](http://sea2sands.ca)
  - Sierra Club Canada [sierraclub.ca](http://sierraclub.ca)
  - Skeena Wild Conservation Trust [skeenawild.org](http://skeenawild.org)
  - Tar Sands Solutions Network [tarsandssolutions.org](http://tarsandssolutions.org)
  - Tides Canada / Clean Energy Canada [cleanenergycanada.org](http://cleanenergycanada.org)
  - Wilderness Committee [wildernesscommittee.org](http://wildernesscommittee.org)
  - Yinka Dene Alliance [yinkadene.ca](http://yinkadene.ca)
- You can also read more about the Nobel Women's Initiative, including our work for action on climate change by visiting [nobelwomensinitiative.org](http://nobelwomensinitiative.org)

## WOMEN BREAKING GROUND: delegation participants



### Jody Williams

**Chair, Nobel Women's Initiative  
United States**

Jody received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for her work to ban anti-personnel landmines through the

International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), which shared the Peace Prize with her that year. Like others who have seen the ravages of war, she is an outspoken peace activist who struggles to reclaim the real meaning of peace—a concept which goes far beyond the absence of armed conflict and is defined by human security, not national security. Since January of 2006, Jody has worked to achieve her peace work through the Nobel Women's Initiative, which she chairs. In 2003, Williams was named Distinguished Visiting Professor of Global Justice in the Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston. Her memoir, *My Name is Jody Williams: A Vermont Girl's Winding Path to the Nobel Peace Prize*, was published by the University of California in March 2013.

“We must increase investment in renewable energy and increasing efficiency. The expansion of the oil sands is taking us in the opposite direction. And that's what we heard from women all along the route. They want a sustainable economy—not the destruction of their rivers, forests and coasts for short term expansion of the oil sands.” - Jody Williams



### Chris Page

**Board Member,  
Center for Environmental Health  
United States**

Chris Page has 20 years of experience in the sustainability field. Currently

working in the field of energy and sustainability strategy for the information technology industry, Chris previously worked for Rocky Mountain Institute with energy efficiency guru Amory Lovins. She has also been a field instructor for the National Outdoor Leadership School, teaching natural history and wilderness survival skills to students in Alaska, Wyoming, Mexico, and Kenya; and written for National Public Radio's Living on Earth. While living in Colorado, she was a volunteer for Mountain Rescue Aspen, supplying aid to lost and injured hikers and skiers in the backcountry. She is also mom to Thaddeus James, 18 months old.

“One woman who has lived in Fort McKay all her life told us she has lost seven members of her family to cancer and has been diagnosed twice herself. Surely the experiences of these women, and the further potential health impacts, must be taken into account by policymakers not only in Canada, but also by the countries buying the oil.” - Chris Page





### Kandi Mossett

**Native Energy & Climate  
Campaign Organizer,  
Indigenous Environmental Network  
United States**

Kandi was born in North Dakota and grew up in an area known today as the Fort Berthold Reservation (Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara Nation). She obtained her undergraduate degree in natural resource and park management and went on to earn a master's degree in environmental management within an earth systems science and policy program. She began working for the Indigenous Environmental Network as the Tribal Campus Climate Challenge (TCCC) Organizer in February of 2007, working on projects ranging from light-bulb swaps to small-scale community solar panel installations and community gardens. Her work has expanded over the years to include work in the international arena. She has participated in a number of high-level conferences including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen (2009) and Mexico (2010), as well as the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth.

“We heard in Fort McKay, Alberta, that the community had to live for five months on bottled water because they couldn't drink the water out of the taps. Children in that community are also experiencing breathing problems because of the pollution coming out of the stacks. What compounds this reality is that the harsh impacts—including contaminated water and air—will only become worse and spread as the oil sands development worsens climate change.” - Kandi Mossett



### Marianne Douglas

**Professor, Department of Earth  
& Atmospheric Sciences,  
University of Alberta  
Canada**

Marianne Douglas has spent the past 25 years conducting research on environmental change. A professor in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta, she is also the Director of the Canadian Circumpolar Institute. Although the focus of her research has been in the Canadian Arctic Islands, she has completed a few field seasons in Antarctica and is presently working in the Yukon. She and her research team use paleolimnological techniques (the study of lake sediments) to document the effects of global warming in the Arctic as well as the effects human activities are having on the environment. She currently sits on the boards of the Association of Canadian Universities for Northern Studies, the Arctic Research Consortium of the US, the Polar Continental Shelf Project and the Canadian Scientific Submersible Facility, and is the out-going chair of the Canadian Committee for Antarctic Research.

“Climate change is occurring due to processes all over the world, and one of these places is actually here in Canada in the tar sands, where a tremendous amount of industry is releasing very intensive amounts of greenhouse gas emissions. And those are having impacts on the whole country. For people who don't think this is an important issue, they need to come out here and take a look—seeing is believing.” - Marianne Douglas



### **Sarah Harmer**

**Singer/Songwriter, Co-founder  
of Protecting Escarpment  
Rural Land (PERL)  
Canada**

From Burlington, Ontario, Sarah got her musical start with country rockers The Saddletramps, and then formed her own band, Weeping Tile. Her first solo album of original material, *You Were Here* (2000), received critical acclaim, including Time Magazine's pick as debut CD of the year. 2004's *All of Our Names* earned Sarah her first Juno Award, for Adult Alternative Album of the Year. In the years following the studio release of the Polaris-Prize winning *I'm a Mountain*, she set aside music to focus on political and environmental campaigns, helping to shepherd PERL, the organization she co-founded. Sarah recently completed a tour along the Niagara Escarpment for PERL to raise awareness about quarry rezoning. It was a unique, not-for-profit tour that featured the Sarah Harmer Acoustic Band hiking, kayaking and performing in towns along the route.

“Political leaders, especially those who have a direct responsibility for the well-being of these communities, must address First Nations' rising cries of concern. These cries speak to a larger truth—with the tar sands industry operating as it is, the reality of a safe and sustainable future slips further and further away for all of us.” - Sarah Harmer

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