Our solar and food project with Beaver Lake Cree Nation is off to an auspicious start! Solar installation took place on December 2, 2016 for phase 1. We had three ‘Save the Future’ community meetings to define this project, with great participation from membership, Youth, and Leadership of BLCN.

Youth designed excellent and inspiring graphics for posters, including these shown here. During the last ‘Save the Future’ community meeting, Kuby Energy was chosen from the four proposals submitted. Crystal Lameman, the project manager for BLCN applied for the new program by our provincial government to fund 60% of capital costs for solar projects with Indigenous organizations, so this project will now be 60% larger than our original project plan!

Also, by a beautiful set of circumstances along with the hard work of Crystal and our other Team Leads, Siting: Marilyn Gladue, Training: Coleen Anderson, and Garden: Shona Lameman, the development of an orchard and community garden is also going ahead at Amisk School, with over 80 fruit trees already planted! Berry bushes and vegetable garden coming in Spring of 2017.

‘Flowing into Right Relationship’ events: Join our River Journey

‘Flowing into Right Relationship’ is our theme for 2017, celebrating Keepers of the Athabasca’s 10 year anniversary and Canada’s 150th. We will provide several opportunities to gather, celebrate, and listen to the concerns of the people regarding our shared watershed. As Treaty people together in 2017, KOA will be reviewing our mission and seeking public consultation to clarify our actions and priorities.

‘Flowing into Right Relationship’ also provides an opportunity for our membership and supporters to come together for a beautiful river journey. On June 29, we will travel from Mirror Landing (near Smith, Alberta, just past the Athabasca turn off on Highway 2 North) to Athabasca, sharing canoes, stories of reconciliation, and ideas on how to move forward to a better relationship between Indigenous peoples and immigrants. We will be welcomed at the ‘River Rats’ Festival in Athabasca for a Water Ceremony on July 1, 2017.

In Canada, we have a colonial history that is still affecting relationships to this day. We are all Treaty People, as our ancestors signed the Treaties on both sides. Look for community gatherings near you, or help to plan one for your community. We want to meet you and your friends, and connect with like minded protectors of the water who will stand with the Athabasca River. Please contact us on our facebook page or communications email or phone (Page 2 of this Newsletter).
I am excited to be part of Keepers of Athabasca and hope that my background as a biologist can help bring this organization closer to its vision, goal and mission. I have worked in, on, and with water all of my career. From water sampling under government led watershed management in my native Denmark, to database management for the University of Athabasca where I am currently also working on a Bibliography for the Athabasca River Basin. Since my time at Copenhagen University, I have actively promoted conservation and education because I believe Nature has a value within it self, and deserves to be kept whole and untouched for future generations of man, animal and plant to grow a life from. Privately, I live an ecologically aware lifestyle off grid in the Tawatinaw Valley where we garden, gather, hunt and cut firewood from our own land. The event of the year for us was the installation of our new Solar panel system. I have a great interest in Herbology, so on summer days I collect native plants that I dry for use in the winter as herb medicine. I am looking forward to getting to know you all better and to get working! Marie Bay Breiner

Established 1986 and owned by Alberta Infrastructure, the Swan Hills (hazardous waste) Treatment Centre (SHTC), specializing in PCB incineration, had an Alberta Environment approval that came up for review every ten years until 2016. The operators of the plant, SUEZ Environmental, are now on a temporary, year by year approval after Keepers successfully challenged their 10 year Approval in 2015.

The first time this approval came up in 1996, there were near riots in Kinuso as locals wanted the plant shut down. Detailed submissions from the Regional Elders’ Environment Commission, representing Sucker Creek First Nation, Swan River First Nation, and Driftpile Cree Nation, as well as a strong presentation by Grand Chief Jim Badger representing Lesser Slave Indian Regional Council speak to some very long standing objections to SHTC. Keepers resubmitted these original concerns with our challenge, so they are now ‘recognized’ by Alberta Environment, as they were not before.

Keepers of the Athabasca put out a call join us to challenge the approval when it came up for renewal We received a strong response, especially from First Nations communities, and citizens in Kinuso and Slave Lake. In our challenge, we included the 2015 ‘State of the Watershed’ technical report, commissioned by the Lesser Slave Watershed Council, in which PCB’s are found in Lesser Slave Lake sediment core samples, increasing in the years SHTC has had accidents, explosions and fires.

On August 28, 2015, our concerns were recognized as valid by Alberta Environment. On September 9, 2016, Keepers of the Athabasca met with the management team from SHTC, including the division manager for SUEZ Environmental, facilitated by Alberta Environment.

Monitoring of the SHTC has occurred exclusively within a thirty kilometre radius of the facility, while contamination may be deposited farther away. Methods of release include through the air (‘allowable emissions’ and ‘unplanned releases’) and binding with snow which can then enter the surface water table through spring run-off. Major concerns for residents include increased cancer and other health risks due to potential low - medium grade contamination across a widespread area.

At our September meeting, SUEZ agreed to provide three additional sediment core samples in the Town of Athabasca, Town of Slave Lake, and Town of Fort Assiniboine. In addition, Keepers along with local volunteers will be performing a door-to-door health survey in the T0G 1K0 area code, as requested many times through the years by local residents. This health survey will also be available on our website for those in a different area code.