Keepers has new Anti-racism funding to present our workshops for adults in Friendship Centres around Northern Alberta. These workshops include: Indigenous Water Governance: exploring pre-contact understandings about water and current paradigms while asking the question; can there be an Indigenous Water Governance model for Canada? Exploring the Treaties: reviewing the appropriate Treaty at workshop location, while inviting discussion on historic and modern perspectives, how this Treaty has been and could be upheld. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: comparing UNDRIP to the U.N. sustainable development goals, workshop participants also learn about Canada’s history with this document. Community Climate Action surveying climate science and Indigenous Knowledge observations, the difference between climate and weather, emergency preparedness, energy efficiency and solar programs, assessing solar design, and solar requests for proposals. We can also follow up and assist to plan and contract your new solar installation! The KAIROS “Blanket Exercise”; This powerful interactive exercise educates participants on the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada. State of the Watershed: A talking and listening circle provides venue for communities to discuss watershed issues that they are concerned about.

To amplify these efforts, we have applied for additional funding to do a radio ad competition so get your thinking caps on! Themes: 1) how to be Treaty partners 2) how to live in harmony with the land 3) how to respectfully include Traditional Knowledge in science 4) how to accomplish climate justice. Winning ads could play on the radio for six months.

On November 21 and 22, 2018, Keepers held the first phase of our Tailings project, the community consultation phase. Traditional Knowledge keepers from Fort McKay First Nation, Fort McMurray First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, and others were present to give their perspective on areas that need additional study regarding groundwater movement around the tailing ponds. We had a presentation from Dr. Wendling of GW solutions, who is developing the ‘data visualization’ tool. This tool will enable community based water monitoring (CBM) programs to ‘see’ the quality of surface water and groundwater, and whether there is interaction between these. We also had a presentation from Dr. Romain Chesnaux, with assistant Anouk Ferroud, who brought their groundwater model all the way from Quebec. Keepers presented to the group about our pollution investigation in the High Level area, different options for CBM programs, we introduced a proposed new health study, which needs letters of support to get started. First Nations Technical Services Advisory Group presented on different funding options for CBM programs. We also took a bus trip up to Fort McKay, and spent some time at Bitumount, discussing how groundwater moves. Phase 2 will take place May 14 and 15, 2019, including industry and others.

Dr. Romain, Dr. Wendling, and Anouk Ferroud demonstrate how contamination enters and moves around in groundwater.
Keepers' presentation to the JRP for Teck’s Frontier bitumen mine

While they pretend respect, Teck Resources did not incorporate Indigenous knowledge in formulating their proposal. The principle of sustainable development in Canada’s environmental protection act is not upheld in this new application, as tremendous health and environmental effects are being felt from already existing bitumen projects. There has still never been a comprehensive health study on the confirmed rare cancer clusters that exist in the Fort McKay and Fort Chipewyan areas. Self-reporting by industry is shown to be ineffective in protecting environment and human health. Financial considerations include: overstatement of the benefits of this project, abuse of their stated ‘discount rate’ for the purpose of evaluating liability, and not including many financial effects that will be felt by society, but probably not shareholders (health care, effects on the environment and wildlife, remediation).

In consideration of climate change, it’s a terrible idea to add yet another huge new bitumen producer. We also pointed out that Alberta doesn’t have export capacity for the bitumen we have now, and we can’t afford ‘continual growth’ anymore because there is just no ecological buffer left. Cumulative effects have caught up to us before they have even been measured by western science. Regarding tailings, we pointed out that government and industry have known about the risk for groundwater seepage since 1981, yet there was no reporting on this until 2018, when Keepers started our tailings project.

While many, including First Nations who signed agreements with Teck, made great presentations to the JRP, Keepers of the Athabasca fears that even this will not be enough to stop this project.