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Keepers of the Athabasca

Indigenous Climate Action

In January 2016, Keepers of the Athabasca hosts 150 Indigenous leaders from across the country in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton) Treaty 6 Territory, to discuss climate change, the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples and how we as Indigenous peoples can organize to build our own climate action plan.

In December 2015, world leaders met in Paris at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties 21 and signed the historic Paris Accord. This agreement included the recognition of Indigenous peoples in the preamble and traditional indigenous knowledge within the operative text. Significantly, this highlights the tireless work of Indigenous rights activists and advocates that have been pushing for recognition of the rights of Indigenous Peoples worldwide.

Following the UN meeting, provincial and federal leaders of Canada are now looking at developing climate change policy to ensure that Canada meets its commitments to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. These policies have great potential to either negatively or positively impact Indigenous peoples rights. We see an urgent need to engage our communities, our leaders and our people to stand up and take this opportunity to lead the way to solutions that adequately recognize, address and include our rights.

In recognition of this need, Eriel Deranger from the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Crystal Lameman from Beaver Lake Cree First Nation, Jesse Cardinal with the Kikino Metis Settlement, and Melina Laboucan-Massimo from Lubicon Lake Band (all Indigenous women from tar sands impacted communities) proposed a series of gatherings of key Indigenous peoples, organizations and groups impacted by climate change, resource extraction and proposed policies. These meetings act as educational, networking, and planning resources to encourage development of an Indigenous Climate Change Action Plan.

To ensure our communities, our rights, our culture and our knowledge systems are fully recognized, protected and implemented into any and all climate change policies in Canada.

The indigenous action on climate change coalition, including Keepers of the Athabasca, is now engaging Indigenous people for their input into national and provincial climate plans.

By Jesse Cardinal, Coordinator, Keepers of the Athabasca

Swan Hills (hazardous waste) Treatment Centre: FYI #1

Established 1986, the Swan Hills (hazardous waste) Treatment Centre (SHTC), specializing in PCB destruction, has an Alberta Environment approval that comes up for review every ten years. The first time the 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 (1992), representing Sucker Creek First Nation, Swan River First Nation, and Driftpile Cree Nation, as well as a strong presentation by Grand Chief Jim Badger (1996) representing Lesser Slave Indian Regional Council (at that time 8 local FN’s), regarding abrogation of Treaty Rights when pollution prevents people from engaging in traditional activities, speak to some very long standing objections to SHTC.

Keepers of the Athabasca put out a call for those interested in challenging the approval in 2016. We received a strong response, especially from First Nations communities, and in our challenge to the approval, we have resubmitted the previous statements, as we were assured the original responders and their families still maintain the same concerns.

In our challenge to the SHTC, we also included the 2015 ‘State of the Watershed’ 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 had accidents, explosions and fires. While the SHTC contractor maintains this is a ‘coincidence’, Keepers continue to follow up.
Keepers of the Athabasca: Solar and Food Partnerships

In 2016, Keepers of the Athabasca will accomplish two new solar installations with our partners, Fort McMurray First Nation and Beaver Lake Cree Nation.

Each community has produced a poster contest by youth to advertise our ‘Save the Future’ meetings, where, after starting our project in a good way with prayers by a local Elder, the poster prizes are given out, and planning decisions are made by local community members toward each $30,000 installation. Project teams are formed at the ‘Save the Future’ meeting, including a Building or siting team for decisions on where the solar installation will be located.

A Training Team will consult in the community on how many people want training in the solar field, which will help determine how the solar project will be installed. The Contract team will help draw up the request for proposals and the contract for installation, which will go to bid with over sixty different Alberta companies, and at least two from the U.S.

Finally, the Garden Team will explore possibilities for sustainable food production in the community, including assessing community interest, capacity, and experience, along with local soil types, favourite foods, and marketing preferences. As we explored in our We are the Land conference last year, diversifying the economy can start at home!

Team Leaders after the 1st ‘Save the Future’ Meeting at Beaver Lake Cree Nation: Building: Marilyn Gladue, Contracts: Crystal Lameman, Training: Coleen Anderson, Project Manager: Jule Asterisk, and Garden: Shona Lameman