**Keepers of the Athabasca**

**Solar Partnership with Sucker Creek First Nation**

Keepers of the Athabasca and Sucker Creek First Nation have entered into a partnership to provide a solar pilot project for the community. Our request for proposals originally called for a 6.5 kW solar installation on the Treaty 8 Building at Sucker Creek First Nation, 22 km east of High Prairie.

Sucker Creek First Nation hosted two ‘Save The Future’ community meetings last year to prepare for this project. Posters were submitted from Joussard School and all submissions received a prize. The RfP calls for training for community members interested in learning about solar power and how it works, directly adjacent to Highway 2.

Our last community meeting was held on March 17, 2018. Members of Sucker Creek First Nation had nine (9) proposals to choose from. The proposal chosen, Ridgeline Power Solutions, will put over 10 kW of solar on the Treaty 8 building, showing that commitment really helped to expand the size of this solar project. This is phase 1 of a larger solar project, hopefully including homes. We would like to thank all involved.

**Save the Date! Healing Gathering for the Land and Water August 23-26 2018**

From the report on HG 2017: Each day began with a pipe ceremony by our respected pipe holders to start in a prayerful way. Prayers were said by the lake and at the Clearwater River which runs through Waterways, the oldest community built before Fort McMurray became a town. This was also one of the hardest hit during the 2016 wild fires with over 90% burned to the ground. Also a tour was made to the tar sands just north of Fort McMurray where a devastation of another sort happened that has also affected the people of these northern communities.
Keepers’ workshops for schools, community groups, and others focus on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Exploring the Treaties, Canada’s Truth & Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action, and Traditional Knowledge about watersheds. The “Flowing into Right Relationship” workshop series provides some of the information and education needed to combat ignorance and racism. Keepers’ Indigenous Water Governance workshop, formulated by Indigenous lawyer Caleb Behn, speaks to some of the contracts, laws, and agreements around water that existed before colonialist.

Participants from across the country and all walks of life confirm that the Kairos Blanket Exercise builds empathy and opens minds and hearts to ongoing learning about First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. To list a few examples, it is used as an education and reconciliation tool by Alberta Health Services, the RCMP, and the Alberta Teachers Association, and the Calgary City Council described the KBE “as a powerful ‘watershed’ moment for council.”

Keepers invites you to join our Athabasca River paddle this year from June 28 (leaving from Smith, Alberta) to July 1 (arriving at the Magnificent River Rats Festival in Athabasca—Learning about the land and water and our history.

Swan Hills (hazardous waste) Treatment Centre (SHTC) file FYI #4

First Nations, residents, businesses, and municipalities want to know - does contamination from the Swan Hills (hazardous waste) Treatment Centre (SHTC) reach the Lesser Slave Lake area? It appears to - the Technical Update to the State of the Watershed Report (Lesser Slave Watershed Council 2015) states; “A short-term peak in the late 1990s in PCBs, dioxins and furans, possibly due to the accidental release from the Swan Hills hazardous waste facility”. There have been at least six fires, explosions, and other confirmed 'unplanned releases' from SHTC since they opened in 1987, apart from their ongoing allowable releases.

SHTC is located at the top of the Swan Hills, 70 kilometres as the crow flies from the Town of Slave Lake, about 160 km due west from the Town of Athabasca, and 65 km NE from Fort Assiniboine. SHTC is operated by SUEZ Environmental, in a contract with the Government of Alberta. When our concerns were recognized by Alberta Environment and Parks, we were eager to get questions answered. Now, almost three years and two meetings later, Keepers of the Athabasca participated in removing lake sediment core samples from Lesser Slave Lake, near the mouth of the Swan River on March 12, 2018, assisted by a guide from Swan River First Nation, and environmental consultant Theo Charette for SUEZ.

Keepers of the Athabasca had originally asked for three locations to be tested. Despite letters of support for sampling all three sites from the Town of Athabasca, Woodland County, Driftpine First Nation, Sucker Creek First Nation, Swan River first Nation, and many more individuals and groups, Narrow Lake near Athabasca, and Goose Lake near Fort Assiniboine were not included in this year’s testing. Alberta Environment has informed us that they are ‘monitoring’ our negotiations with SUEZ. We hope they note these unanswered requests for testing. With the prevailing westerly/northwesterly winds in this region, there are concerns about airborne or snow borne PCB and dioxin particulates near Athabasca, and in the Fort Assiniboine area.

Keepers of the Athabasca successfully challenged the Alberta Environment Approval for this facility in 2015, resubmitting objections from Lesser Slave Lake Indian Regional Council members, as they are still relevant and held by the authors.