

## First Nations rally against Enbridge pipeline

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#### BURNS LAKE

A northern B.C. First Nation that organized a weekend energy summit to highlight environmental concerns over Enbridge's \$4.5-billion proposed pipeline says opposition to the project is growing. More than 200 people from communities along the pipeline route gathered Saturday in Moricetown, 400 kilometres west of Prince George. First Nations present included the Mikisew Cree and Alexander first nations in Alberta. Also on hand were the Kelly Lake Cree, the West Moberly, Nadleh Whut'en, Wet'suwet'en, Kitkatla, Gita'at, Haida, Nisga'a and Lake Babine first nations in B.C. The Gitksan of B.C. sent a letter of support to the event.

"This energy summit was a reminder that the tar sands affects us all -- from Fort Chipewyan to Haida Gwaii and beyond. We can only protect our lands and waters if we stand together," said Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief Alphonse Gagnon, one of spokesman of the event.

Gagnon said the risks of the project are too high, citing the impact of a pipeline spill.

The 1,170-kilometre pipeline would carry oil from the Alberta tar sands to Kitimat for export to the U.S. western seaboard and to Asia. The pipeline would pass just north of Prince George at Bear Lake, south of Vanderhoof, just north of Burns Lake and south of Houston.

Enbridge says it has a good track record of safety on its pipelines, and that is it working to develop relationships with first nations along the pipeline route through Alberta and northern B.C.

Some first nations have signed protocol agreements with Enbridge, but others are firmly opposed to the pipeline project, including the Wet'suwet'en, located in the Burns Lake area, 225 kilometres west of Prince George, and the Nadleh Whut'en, 160 kilometres west of Prince George.

Gagnon noted that the Wet'suwet'en are also not in favour of the regulatory review process for the project that will involve the National Energy Board and the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, because they believe it is too "pro-development." Both agencies rarely give the thumbs down to projects. Among those who attended the the energy summit was Mikisew Cree member George Poitras from Fort Chipewyan, a community downstream from the Alberta oil sands. The community has cited concerns over

cancer in their community. "The situation downstream from the tar sands is so toxic that one of our elders told his son not to have children because everything is so polluted and our people can no longer drink the water or eat the fish," said Poitras.

The Alberta government says water quality has been monitored since the early 1970s and testing has consistently shown there has been no increase in concentrations of contaminants as oil sands development has progressed.

Representatives of coast First Nations have concerns over oil tanker traffic. "The tycoons expect to further spread the tar sands poison, putting their lavish desires before our lifestyles and our culture," said Guujaaw, president of the Council of the Haida Nation, who uses his traditional Haida name.

Enbridge had shelved the project in late 2006 but put it back on the front burner early in 2008 after securing \$100 million from Western oil producers and key Asian refiners to get the project through the regulatory process under the NEB and the CEEA.

Enbridge has been citing the economic benefits of the project, including the large investment and the thousands of construction jobs.

Enbridge spokesperson Steve Greenaway said the company would have liked to have been invited to the weekend energy summit to answer questions but respect it was the Wet'suwet'en's meeting.

While the company has signed nearly 30 protocol agreements with first nations along the pipeline route, Greenaway acknowledged it doesn't necessarily mean they support the project. In fact, some of the first nations that have signed the agreements attended the energy summit, noted Greenaway.

He said the protocol agreements -- which can involve no-strings-attached funding for first nations to undertake studies on traditional knowledge -- are meant to lay the groundwork for long-term relationships.

Enbridge is working on a framework to give first nations a chance to take an ownership stake in the pipeline as well. There are also business and job opportunities with the project.

Greenaway, acknowledging that northerners will have concerns over spills, noted the company delivers about 800 million barrels of oil a year and last year spilled 2,665 barrels, about three ten-thousandth of one per cent. "I do think it's a good track record. We are one of the safest pipelines in the world," he said.

Key issues in the complex project -- described by Enbridge as the largest crude oil pipeline expansion in North America -- include mountainous terrain, hundreds of river crossings and a tanker terminal at Kitimat.

Thousands of workers will be needed during the estimated three-year construction period, but relatively few when complete. It's estimated that 50 permanent workers in Kitimat will be needed and a handful of workers along the route.

Enbridge has said it plans to file its environmental application this year.

A two-year assessment timeline - should the company get approval - puts the start of the three-year construction period beyond 2012.