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## B.C. residents want oilsands pipeline stopped

Posted 4 hours ago

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Today staff

Some B.C. residents in communities along the route of a planned Enbridge pipeline are calling for a moratorium on the transport of oil equivalent from the Alberta oilsands through their towns.

An energy summit held in Moricetown, B.C., drew more than 200 people Saturday to discuss the impacts of the proposed project, which would result in a 1,170-kilometre twin pipeline from the oilsands to a new marine tanker port in Kitimat, B.C. The project is to export petroleum and import condensate (relatively light hydrocarbons).

“We don't want it,” said Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief Alphonse Gagnon yesterday morning. “We're here to protect our land and we're uniting.”

He had called the summit a reminder that the “tarsands affects us all — from Fort Chipewyan to Haida Gwaii and beyond. We can only protect our lands and waters if we stand together.” Nations attending the summit included Kelly Lake Cree, West Moberly, Nadleh Whut'en, Kitkatla, Gitga'at, Haida, Nisga'a and Lake Babine, all of B.C, as well as representatives from the Mikisew Cree First Nation from Fort Chipewyan.

The moratorium would be in place until all affected nations, each according to their own laws and traditions, decides whether or not to allow the project to proceed, and a comprehensive public inquiry occurs that meets the needs of affected northern, coastal and downstream communities. An inquiry must address core issues, including the cumulative impacts of other energy and resource development projects, whether oil supertankers should be permitted at all in sensitive inside waters, and whether oilsands expansion and related pipelines are undermining action on climate change. The resolution is to be forwarded to the provincial and federal governments as well as Enbridge.

Gagnon said when Enbridge first looked at the Gateway project three to four years ago, the First Nations weren't prepared or properly organized and didn't understand the full impact pipelines could have. This time, they are prepared, and the numbers of concerned nations is growing, he said. A second look at the delayed project began in the spring of last year.

“Every time we have a meeting, it's bigger.” He said all the coastal First Nations are opposing

tanker traffic and the oil terminal, while the interior First Nations are “gathering steam” to oppose the pipeline. The central B.C. town where the summit was held is a Wet'suwet'en village on the Bulkley River, about halfway between Prince George and Prince Rupert.

“After the first time round ... we took the time to go and meet with the (First Nations) up at Fort McMurray and McKay and talk with them about all the impacts the oilsands are having on them. We went right up to Fort Chipewyan to the Athabasca Delta and we met with the people there a couple of times.”

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“With all of the concerns that aren't being looked after there, it's got us concerned about whether or not we should be allowing any outlets to come out of there until they start really paying attention to what kind of health issues they're dealing with in Fort Chipewyan.”

George Poitras of the Mikisew Cree First Nations travelled to the summit to share stories of what he called the “devastating impacts” the upstream oilsands development has had on Fort Chip, including higher levels of cancer rates. “Our people can no longer drink the water or eat the fish.”

But Enbridge spokesman Steven Greenaway says the company's door is always open to the First Nations, and the consultation process is far from over for the project, which has yet to receive regulatory approval. That application is expected to be made later this year.

“We're listening and we're carrying on that consultation. We're listening very closely to what the concerns of those aboriginal leaders and all communities along the pipeline route.”

Greenaway said the company has held 19 non-aboriginal open houses and “dozens and dozens” of aboriginal open houses. In addition, the company has now signed 30 protocol agreements — which sets the foundation for a relationship going forward — with nations along the proposed route but cautions “it doesn't necessarily constitute support.” But it does allow Enbridge to have open houses and share information, and begin to discuss aboriginal and traditional knowledge studies it wants to have with the communities.

Another concern for the Wet'suwet'en people is that the proposed pipeline route is on the continental divide between the Fraser and the Skeena watersheds, and Wet'suwet'en territory goes on both sides.

“As far as in B.C., we haven't relinquished our rights. We feel we own the territory,” said Gagnon.

Last month, some Wet'suwet'en passed through Ottawa and left a vial of bitumen at Natural Resources Minister Lisa Raitt's office “to let them know we don't want them coming through our territory,” he said.

Greenaway said Enbridge projects do go through treaty territory, which makes it more challenging.

“(But) we recognize the constitutional rights aboriginal communities have. ... That’s one of the reasons why we are doing consultation. It also drives our hope and expectation we would have aboriginal communities as equity partners.” That include business procurement and employment opportunities. Acknowledging the concerns outlined at the summit, he added Enbridge is reaching out to those First Nations to involve them in the Northern Gateway decision-making process. That includes helping design a better project, he said: “Everything from pipeline routing to how we can best mitigate any environmental impacts that we may have.”

He hopes people will delay any judgment of the project until it is finalized with that input from those communities.

“This is a very complex set of issues that we’re dealing with. It will take a great deal of discussion, but more than anything, it will take a great deal of listening from us,” said Greenaway, adding he wishes Enbridge had been invited to the summit.

“We would have gladly come to listen directly to what the concerns were.”

Meanwhile, Guujaa, president of the Council of the Haida Nation, said in a statement, “The tycoons expect to further spread the tar sands poison, putting their lavish desires before our lifestyles and our culture. We depend on these lands and waters and we will not put the safety and well being of our territories in their hands.”

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*Article ID# 1607359*

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