

I have come to express the grave concerns of our people as a person who lives in the wilderness of northern Saskatchewan and whose family have always lived here as the Dene, Cree and Metis people on what is now called Treaty Ten Territory.

We are the land, the lakes and the rivers. We are totally interconnected with the living ecosystem which includes what governments and industries call resources. We bear witness to the pain of industrial development on our home land. Everywhere we go to use the land which was promised for us to continue to be able to use in the Treaty, we are running into an industrial presence. The Federal Government had agreed that we would be able to practice our traditional hunting, fishing, and cultural ways on our traditional territories. That was the agreement. If this resource rush continues at this pace, the Treaty obligations of the Government of Canada to the First Nations will be in total breach.

The leaders of our communities receive dozens of letters from the Government of Saskatchewan giving us 30 days to respond to the permit applications from exploration companies and logging companies. Every single letter states the same thing, "the Ministry of the Environment has assessed that the potential environmental impacts can be managed in a manner that will have low impact on the resources that may be used to exercise Treaty Rights and traditional uses." The issue with this is that there is a cumulative impact that is not being considered by government but is seriously impacting the animals throughout the region and destroying our ability to adequately live from our environmentally sensitive lands and waters. There are more than 2700 mineral claims on the Athabasca Basin most of which are for uranium, and oil sands, two of the worst contaminating industries on the planet.

Then there is logging that is taking more than 40% of our forests. Biologists have recommended that 40% of the forests be left intact to continue the diversity of species. Why are industries being allowed to go well over that limit and do so in such a short time frame? At public meetings the government officials have been asked this very question. The response is always, 'the economy'.

The government has never had sufficient Environmental Protection Laws to deal with these particular industries but since Omnibus Bill C-45 gutted everything it has become a veritable resource rush. They want access to every single resource on and under our Treaty Lands and the corporations clearly wanted protections out of the way. They also want to grab it up before First Nations force the Government to meet the obligations and responsibilities to the Treaty agreements.

When dealing with uranium and the oil sands the environmental protections need to be a lot more stringent. There are far too many unknown consequences to the extraction of these substances and the longevity of the contaminants. The backwards thinking of taking without knowing how to permanently deal with the radioactive waste in both the tailings and the spent fuel is creating sacrifice zones. It is clearly already proven these contaminants cannot be cleaned up. This has got to be addressed. How are creating toxic and radioactive sacrifice zones in the best interest of anyone on the planet? The ability to put up a chain link fence with a trefoil radiation warning on it is not equal to environmental sound responsibility. As one trapper in Deschambeau Lake put it, caribou and ducks can't read.

The resource extraction corporations working in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan are pushing for a northern corridor. The first thing they claim is that it will provide better services for northern residents.

That is not why they are proposing a northern corridor and all northern people know this. This will open the north to even more resource extraction. It will impact the wildlife and culturally integrity of the Aboriginal people even further.

One of the concerns we in northern communities have is lease transfers. Whether the leases are recreational or industrial, when they are transferred to another for industrial exploration or development they should have to go through the consultation process with the indigenous peoples who are impacted by these projects.

The Environmental Assessment process must have input and take the recommendations from the people of the land seriously. No one knows or understands the impacts that are happening to the extent that traditional land-users do. Biologists have not got the historical perspective that the people do. Our first-hand experience with both the resource extraction industry and Government regulators is that they do not and are very reluctant to tell the truth about the impacts that their projects will have during and after they have taken all they can and the very real risks those will pose to our health now and for future generations. The current way of doing an Environmental Assessment is a sad imposter to what should be done. Although industry regulators are supposed to ensure the safety and sustainability of the environment, they are under so much pressure to sustain the economy, to meet the expectations promised in Trade Agreements that they are ultimately failing to do their jobs. There are never sufficient numbers of inspectors to truly do the job and there are insignificant consequences to the industries to deter them from contaminating lands, air and water. The ALARA principle is not acceptable for setting safety standards when the impacts are intergenerational.

The north is a sponge full of water. This water is going to be impacted hard with pipeline spills and pollution from oil sands projects. What will be left of our home in 40 years? We have seen the devastation left by these industries. We are already suffering the health consequences of living in the toxins these industries unearth and the processes they use. There will never be enough money made to reverse the damage made by this economic growth model. There need to be Environmental Laws that have the power to leave certain elements in the ground so that there will be lands and waters that will sustain the generations ahead. The land, the water, the biodiversity including the people that are indigenous to these lands are the true resources that need protecting. We do not consent to being collateral damage for corporate profits.