

THE CO-OPERATIVE FINANCIAL SERVICES BACKS CREE INDIANS IN LEGAL ACTION AGAINST CANADA'S TAR SAND DEVELOPMENTS

26 February 2009

The Co-operative Financial Services today (26 February) announced it is backing a legal action by the Beaver Lake Cree Nation to stop expansion of ecologically disastrous tar sand developments.

Chief Al Lameman and other senior members of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation are in the UK to enlist support for their legal proceedings and to highlight their plight.

Tar sand developments are destroying the Beaver Lake Cree's reserve-home and traditional lands in Alberta, Canada, impacting upon their constitutionally protected treaty rights. The Beaver Lake Cree have therefore commenced a legal challenge to protect the ecological integrity of their traditional territories, citing over 15,000 infringements of their rights and are seeking an injunction against new developments.

CFS will be helping the Beaver Lake Cree demonstrate the impact of tar sand developments on their traditional way of life, in preparation of their legal case.

Chief Lameman said: "The animals, fish, plants and medicine that sustain us are being destroyed. Caribou, moose and other wildlife will not come near the disturbance caused by oil wells and the hundreds of kilometres of pipelines, seismic exploration lines and access roads criss-crossing our land. We thank The Co-operative for their support. The tar sands have global consequences and are an issue for all."

Shell, BP, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips and Total have tar sands projects or expansion plans that could be impacted if the Beaver Lake Cree legal action is successful. Shell's Orion Hilda Lake tar sands project is within the area potentially affected and currently produces 10,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd), with approval for growth to 20,000 barrels this year and potential to produce 40,000 bpd. BP announced earlier this month that it has started evaluating its Kirby tar sands leases in the area, which could support production of up to 70,000 bpd.

Paul Monaghan, Head of Social Goals and Sustainability at CFS said: "We already know that commercialisation of tar sands risks massive environmental damage. If the Beaver Lake Cree Nation are successful in their ground-breaking legal challenge and other indigenous groups follow, oil companies could also be looking at massive investment damages."

Whilst in the UK, the Beaver Lake Cree will be helping to launch CFS and WWF-UK's new 'Toxic Fuels' campaign. The campaign will raise awareness of the emerging global trend to extract oil from unconventional sources such as Canadian tar sands and US shale oil. In addition to local ecological devastation, the extraction and production of these fuels emits between three and eight times more carbon dioxide than conventional oils. If unchallenged, this trend risks making attempts to avoid dangerous levels of climate change almost impossible.

David Norman, WWF-UK Campaigns Director said: "Climate change is happening faster and stronger than previously predicted and is impacting on ecosystems around the globe. Tar sands are already Canada's largest single greenhouse gas emitter and mean that Canada will not meet its international obligations on climate change. As global citizens Canadian politicians need to stop the expansion of their oil sands operation. Tar sands have no place in a low carbon global economy."

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Notes to Editors:

1. When the ancestors of the Beaver Lake Cree signed a treaty with Canada in 1876, they ceded vast tracts of land in exchange for guaranteed treaty rights to hunt and fish within those territories. In order for the Beaver Lake Cree Nation's rights to have meaning, they claim the habitats of the fish and wildlife they depend on must be protected throughout their ancient homeland. The large-scale deforestation, wildlife disturbance and pollution resulting from tar sand developments threaten these treaty rights. Asserting their role as caretakers of their traditional territories, The Beaver Lake Cree Nation have brought a legal challenge to force Alberta and Canada to keep their promises and to protect the ecological integrity of these lands.
2. The Beaver Lake Cree Nation's legal counsel is Jack Woodward, author of *Native Law*, Canada's principal legal text on aboriginal law. Jack has been working in this field for 30 years and has been the lead lawyer on some of the most groundbreaking First Nation's rights cases in the Canada. Including the *Meares Island* case where the British Columbia court granted an injunction stopping the logging of old growth forest on the basis of an aboriginal right. More recently, he won the *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia and Canada* suit. This case laid the groundwork for the Beaver Lake Cree Nation case. It says that lands and forests must be developed in a way that gives primacy to the sustainability of First Nation's rights.
3. The Co-operative Financial Services will be providing funding for the filming of elder depositions, which will document the Beaver Lake Cree Nation's folklore and traditional way of life, and the threats to this way of life by tar sand developments. Some of the videos will be used in court and some in campaigning, and they will also act as a historical record documenting a culture and a community under threat.
4. In July 2008, CFS and WWF-UK published a high profile report, 'Unconventional Oil: Scraping the bottom of the barrel?' which highlighted the environmental, social and financial risk associated with these fuels. It can be downloaded from: <http://www.goodwithmoney.co.uk/toxicfuels>
5. In September 2008, The Co-operative Investments organised an institutional investor event, in conjunction with the UK Social Investment Forum (UKSIF), to present the report's findings and garner support for collective shareholder action during 2009. This work is ongoing and reflects its customer-led Ethical Engagement Policy to use its influence as a shareholder to push for positive change in the companies in which it invests.
6. Other tar sand developments, which could be impacted by the Beaver Lake Cree legal case, include: ExxonMobil's Cold Lake project currently producing 150,000 bpd, with plans to increase production to 180,000 bpd; the Christina Lake and Foster Creek projects in which ConocoPhillips has a fifty per cent stake and currently produce 50,000 bpd, with plans to increase this to 400,000 by 2015; and ConocoPhillips and Total's joint Surmont project which currently produces 27,000 bpd and has plans to expand to 193,000 bpd.

7. Canada is thought to have probable tar sand reserves of 315 billion barrels and proven currently accessible reserves of 175 billion barrels; this is second only to Saudi Arabia's proven conventional reserves. More than US\$125 billion of tar sand projects have been announced for development by 2015. Shell has announced an intention to produce 670,000 barrels of oil daily from Canadian tar sands by 2020, while ExxonMobil, BP and ConocoPhillips are also hoping to produce several hundred thousand barrels each per day.
8. If all 1.1 trillion barrels of probable North American unconventional oil reserves (both tar sands and shale oil) were exploited within the next century, it would result in emissions of 980 Gt CO₂, equating to an estimated increase in atmospheric CO₂ levels of between 49 and 65 parts per million. The consequences of these additional emissions could be catastrophic given that global atmospheric levels are already at 430ppm CO₂e and exceeding 450ppm CO₂e significantly increases the risk of dangerous climate change.

Dangerous climate change is defined as warming of more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels, whereby stresses upon the world's water resources, food production capacity and ecosystems increase significantly. To stand a reasonable chance of avoiding this, atmospheric concentrations of key greenhouse gasses must not exceed 450ppm CO₂e. Achieving this will require global emissions to peak by around 2015 and at least halve by 2050, with developed nations making more substantial cuts of around 80%.