

The monster beneath Alberta & eyes of Irene

Deep below the bio-diverse boreal forest of Canada's Albertan province, there lies a secret. A sleeping monster so daunting, sensible people wouldn't imagine awaking him. Its ensuing wrath could bring unprecedented chaos. As one of many culpable predators, the monster's prey could include much of life on Earth. In size, it lies largely unperturbed. Should President Obama awake it?

This monster is not Bigfoot. Actually observable and truly capable of widespread destruction, the monster we illustrate is the bitumen sludge contained in the Albertan tar sands. Extracting it would ultimately have consequences to our climate that should bring logical brains and compassionate hearts to a raging boil.

Many "people" stand to share responsibility for desiring an awakening of this monster, including Exxon & TransCanada, the company proposing another extension of the tar sands oil into the United States. The proposed Keystone XL pipeline will stretch from Alberta to Houston, Texas, dissecting six states to end at refineries.

Extraction of the tar sands involves clear-cutting and scraping away all forests and possible life, often 100 feet down. Maneuvering massive machines with bellowing smoke stacks and steel toothed scoops, the companies wage war with the land. The thick black slush is spooned out of its 300 million year home. Hundreds of toxic chemicals await to separate, thin, and thicken it into a more marketable sludge. With river diversion and square mile discharge "ponds," this process is incredibly fossil-fuel, water, and waste intensive.

Many XL opponents have the Yellowstone River tar sands pipeline burst in hindsight. Land occupiers fear of leakage and harm from construction. This includes people who use the Ogallala Aquifer for irrigation and drinking water, indigenous community habitat, and many other flora, fauna, and territory en route. When will we say now is the time to transition away from fossil fuels, to let go of our immature illusion of beckoning bountifulness, and finally change our collective behaviors?

Widely quoted climatologist Jim Hansen has said if humans expect to mitigate or slow global warming, coal must be phased out by 2030. Unconventional fossil fuels must too be left in the ground. "If the tar sands are thrown into the mix, it is essentially game over for the climate." Hansen warns.

The Tar Sands Action was organized to publicly protest this pipeline's possible plunder. The action is a peaceful civil disobedience, a daily sit-in for two weeks. Occurring in front of the White House, the action was largely organized by 350.org founder Bill McKibben and recent startup *Peaceful Uprising*.

Participating on day one, we were among the first group arrested. We expected a fine for the action as it is consistent with a minor traffic violation. We were instead arbitrarily detained for over two days. Though expecting to deter further action, this political ploy only strengthened all the participant's resolve. Productive discussion, spontaneous games, and a deep sense of brother/sister hood emerged from those 52 hours together.

Incarceration brought perks like free bologna sandwiches and 6 ounces of water every 12 hours. Steel cots and incessant fluorescent were also included in our "this ain't the Marriott" package, as one guard put it. But our time detained was short and menial. The cuff marks went away; hot food has returned to

our palates. A stark contrast to how the scars and slashing our action served to slander are not temporary, but everlasting, dire, and visceral.

So far, 2011 has brought record droughts, sudden floods, extreme fires & tornadoes, food yield shortages, and a 700-mile wide Hurricane Irene. These are not threats, but present realities on a symptom ridden, sick & ill planet.

It's not just the popularized polar bears affected by climate change. The Somali hungry, drowning Pakistani, homeless Louisianan, evicted Amazon people and many more are the many eyes that were peering at us through the eye of Irene over the weekend; pondering our plutocratic plunder, questioning our quests.

Victims of climate anomalies like Hurricane Irene must not be small singularized statistics. Each unnecessary Somali and Carolinian death must be mounting motivation to mitigate further, fiercer climate chaos. Sitting idly by, especially consciously, while such pillage is plentiful, is no longer morally plausible.

At his inauguration, President Obama promised what environmentalists, who helped him stand on that podium, had been wanting to hear. "The moment when the rise of the oceans begin to slow and our planet begins to heal," he said. With no significant climate legislation passed in the last two years, this pipeline will be his presidency's environmental watershed moment. Will he sign off on the exploitation of the Albertan watersheds? We can't know if he looked into Irene's many eyes and considered how this monster could impact not just his next election, but the future of the Earth's climate.

But Prisoner #58 & #51 sure hope he did.

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