



Keepers of the Water

STEWARDS OF OUR GREAT ARCTIC OCEAN BASIN

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<http://www.keepersofthewater.ca>

Tu Kho'l th'er - Water is Boss – Nipiy Okimaw

As Keepers of the Water, we, the people who have united from all walks of life, have an understanding that Water is sacred, and water is boss. That we must respect water.

In 2006, Dene and Inuit elders gathered along the Mackenzie River in the North West Territories and talked of their concern for the water. At that time, a declaration was born, in summary, the declaration states, that water is sacred and we must take care of it. It is that 2006 declaration that still guides the work that Keepers of the Water does today.

We are currently witnessing fires ravage the lands, taking everything in its path, and again, we are reminded that without water, these fires will continue. Everyone at this time is faced with the reality of the importance of water. It can no longer be denied or ignored.

The province of Alberta has made some good steps towards understanding the need to care for water, by committing to phase out coal starting in 2018. All coal powered plants will need to be emission free by 2030 or be shut down; is it enough? One thing for sure, it's a step in the right direction. Coal is one of the dirtiest polluters to the air, for climate change, and the water, as seen by the largest coal slurry spill in Canadian history along the Athabasca River, which spilled 1 billion litres of wastewater in 2013. To this day, the Indigenous peoples of the north are concerned about impacts of contamination from Obed, downstream on the Athabasca and into the Mackenzie rivers.

With little rain or snow, we are in desperate need of water, Chair for Keepers of the Water, Sam Gargon of the Dehcho states "Once again we are experiencing extremely low water level on the Mackenzie (Dehcho) making it hazardous for boaters and those living of the land. Overnight (May 19, 2016) the level has dropped 3-5 feet." We heard similar accounts from community people in Fort Chipewyan.

What would cause such a drastic drop in a short time? Could it be the high demand for water all around? Dams can be a contributing factor to low water level. Every year we are seeing the overall water levels drop in the lakes and rivers but yet the demand for water increases, and with the massive land base that the fires are covering in Alberta and Northwest Territories combined, there will be an 'unplanned' water use, that often does not get calculated in the science equations of water allowances that governments have taken as their role.

Today and now, is the time for the Alberta Government to really consider a strong solar energy adoption, into all that we do. While the tarsands are at low operation, we should be not thinking of how to get ramped up again in tarsands production, which is the largest water consumers of the Athabasca River, but instead take a good honest look, and a realistic one, at what can we do instead?

Water is not a commodity, Water is life and will continue teaching us, Water is boss, until we listen.

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