

Volume 3, Issue 1

December 1, 2015

Please see our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/KeepersOfTheAthabasca for upcoming events.

Yes! I want to be a Keeper.

name: _____

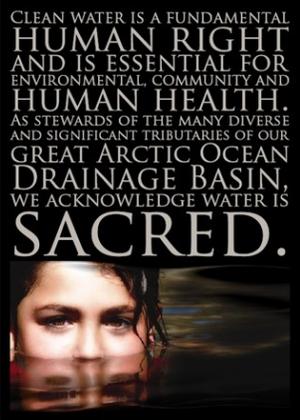
address: _____

email: _____

optional: Donation amount (circle one):

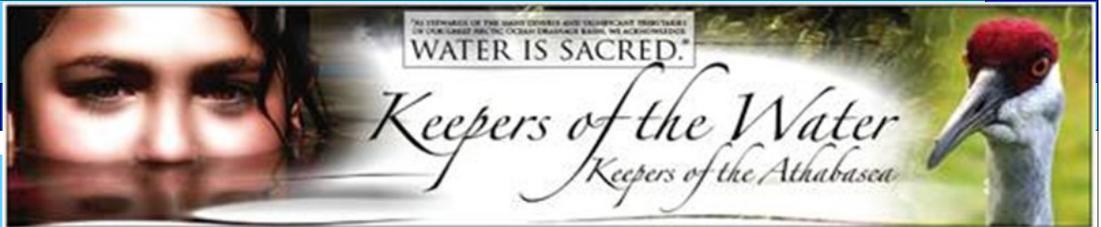
\$10 \$20 \$50 \$100 Other: _____

Please send to: Treasurer, Keepers of the Athabasca
PO Box 2503, Lac La Biche, AB T0A 2C0
As Keepers of the Athabasca is not a registered charity, we cannot offer tax receipts.



Keepers Accomplishments

- co-sponsorship of an annual Healing Walk in "ground zero" of the tar sands between Fort McKay and Fort McMurray, Alberta, 2010-2014
- community meetings on groundwater protection, fracking, climate change, etc.
- conferences with Treaty 8 and the University of Alberta on the effects of open pit and in-situ tar sands mining on surface water, wetlands and groundwater
- press releases and advocacy on issues related to the adverse effects of industrial development in the watershed
- solar energy installation in partnership with Fort Chipewyan First Nation
- Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) training and water monitoring through Living Lakes Canada's Community-based Water Quality Monitoring program (<http://www.livinglakes.ca/community-based-water-quality-monitoring>)
- participation in Canada/Alberta Joint Oil Sands Monitoring program
- participation on boards of other organizations; the Athabasca Water Council, Alberta Environment Network
- participation in government policy consultations through the Alberta Environmental Network
- participation in Water Week events
- supporting petitions and actions focused on water, environment, Aboriginal justice and Treaty rights
- sponsorship and participation in annual Keepers of the Water gatherings



News from the Keepers:

Monitoring pollution in the Athabasca River

Since 2013, **Keepers of the Athabasca** has been leading community based water monitoring along the Athabasca River. We began with four sample sites, working our way up to monitor 12 sites in 2015. Involving local people and communities in citizen science helps, as people get connected, invested, and empowered to help create change in their surrounding environment.

An ongoing concern is gravel mining in floodplains, alluvial aquifers, wetlands, and riparian areas, causing increased sedimentation, pollution, and warming of related water bodies. On Halloween of 2013, the **Obed Coal Mine** breached an unlisted holding pond, releasing almost a billion litres of mining sludge and water. This destroyed fish and wildlife habitat in the Apetowan and Plante creeks, including habitat of Alberta's endangered

provincial fish, the bull trout. While Alberta Environment tested river water at that time, they didn't release the results: Alberta Health released the disturbing information that mercury was 9 times higher than normal, in the Athabasca River while cancer causing PAH's were four times higher than allowable while the plume dispersed. Because of the huge amount of sludge deposited, pollutants will continue to be mobilized each spring for many years to come, increasing the significance of our monitoring. Charges are being



Fall 2015 CABIN trainee group

laid against the Obed mine owners.

This year, we formed a partnership with Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, and trained 8 of their members in the CABIN program for community based water monitoring. The training was delivered by Keepers and Living Lakes Canada, and focuses on benthic invertebrates. CABIN stands for the Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network, led by Environment Canada, with monitoring results shared on their database. Keepers of the Athabasca is currently working with the University of Alberta Community Service Learning program for a written report detailing findings from our monitoring work.

A lot of attention has been given to monitoring the Lower Athabasca, location of Canada's oil/Tarsands. It is widely recognized that data gaps exist on the Upper Athabasca watershed, and our monitoring addresses some of those gaps.

We are the Land Conference

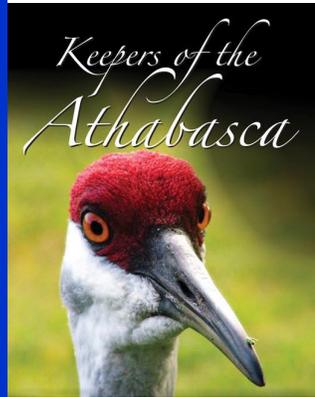
Keepers of the Athabasca hosted a successful conference on June 1st and 2nd in Edmonton Alberta called 'We are the Land'. The event focused on renewable energy and Food Security. Keepers of the Athabasca partnered with Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Kehewin Youth Group and Mother Earth Action Co-operative. Over the 2 days we saw over 200 participants from all over Alberta, mainly Indigenous people who took part in some of the following workshops; Climate change, seed saving and seed sovereignty, solar energy, traditional medicines, alternative housing, energy solutions for Indigenous communities, green housing and more. The feedback given was positive

with many hoping for more gatherings similar to We are the Land. Keepers of the Athabasca worked with the community of Fort Chipewyan to install a solar panel system on their Elder and Youth Lodge. As our vision is to help protect the land, air, water and all living beings, we are working to help educate ourselves and others, and include Indigenous communities in producing a renewable energy future that serves to provide economic opportunities, and to be in balance with the environment, instead of our current energy options, which have caused large and in many cases, irreparable damage, to the land, air and water. At our 'We are the Land' conference, we opened up

to receive interest in more solar energy partnerships, and we received interest from both the Fort McMurray First Nation, and the Beaver Lake Cree Nation. Keepers of the Athabasca is moving forward with project grants for these two new partners.



The Lower Athabasca Regional Plan and the Surface Water Quantity Framework



KEEPERS OF THE ATHABASCA

PO Box 2503
LacLaBiche, Alberta
TOA 2C0

Indigenous Climate Change Meeting:

Jan 24–26, '16

By invite only: please contact:

Coordinator: Jesse Cardinal
email: keeperathabasca@gmail.com
Communications: Jule Asterisk
email: keepers.communications@gmail.com:

www.keepersofthewater.ca/athabasca

Alberta introduced the Land Use Framework in 2008, as a way to better understand how the land was being used and impacted in Alberta, as well as to set guidelines for land use. Within the land use framework, there are seven regional plans for the province. Keepers of the Athabasca has been focused on the Lower Athabasca Regional Plan (LARP), which came into effect in September of 2012. Within the LARP are separate frameworks, which take a closer look at some of the immediate issues that need to be addressed, such as tailings ponds, water quality, water quantity, wetlands, biodiversity, air quality, and groundwater and landscape management. Since the implementation of LARP, there have been plans created, stakeholder engagements, and policies created, which are all supposed to help protect the land, air and water, while somehow also encouraging growth in tar sands. Five First Nations pulled out of the LARP process and stakeholder engagements on the frameworks, as they were finding they were providing meaningful input, only to learn that almost none of their knowledge was being incorporated into these frameworks. Keepers of the Athabasca has been involved in learning and attending stakeholder engagements on most of the frameworks. Some ongoing concerns that Keepers has been dealing with are the water levels in the Athabasca River. We have seen a drastic decline in water levels on the Athabasca, past Fort McMurray. This has resulted in direct impacts to treaty rights for Treaty 8 Indigenous peoples. On July 24th, 2015 the Alberta Government announced a water restriction was in place on the Athabasca River, which restricted all tar sands operators on the Athabasca River to temporarily stop withdrawing water, except the 3 'grandfathered' companies; Shell, Suncor and Syncrude. On September 16, the water restriction was lifted, although water levels remain extremely low. Keepers of the Athabasca will continue to work with impacted communities to learn of the impacts and to put pressure on the government to adapt the surface water quantity framework accordingly, the current framework does not serve to acknowledge climate change, or protect the river and its inhabitants. Find out more about Keepers works on our website.

Healing Gathering for the Land and Water

This year marks the first ever **Healing Gathering for the Land and Water**, hosted on the Fort McMurray First Nation territory, less than 10 minutes travel from the Healing Gathering. The first international delegation to the Healing Gathering 2015 was the Tar Sands Ride, four Youth who rode their bicycles from Seattle, Washington, USA to Fort McMurray (1,763 km).

The Healing Walk event, produced by Keepers of the Athabasca with our local and international partners ran for five years (2010–2014). Committed individuals and groups were hosted by impacted Indigenous communities around the oil/Tarsands tailings ponds praying for healing, some of them multiple times.

The local community feels the need for healing more than ever, after Canada's largest pipeline break in July 2015. Nexen pipe spilled over 5,000 cubic metres of

bitumen, sand, and water from a 1 year old pipe, onto Fort McMurray First Nation territory, less than 10 minutes travel from the Healing Gathering. The first international delegation to the Healing Gathering 2015 was the Tar Sands Ride, four Youth who rode their bicycles from Seattle, Washington, USA to Fort McMurray (1,763 km).

The Healing Gathering will continue on to its second year on the last weekend in July, 2016. We encourage anyone who has not yet experienced the oil/Tarsands to benefit by attending this Gathering, which not only provides tours of contaminated sites, but also healing ceremony, and traditional knowledge seminars.

The 2015 Agenda included the following: Day 1: Welcome and remarks by Elders, Pipe ceremony,

Workshops on plant medicine gathering, Local history of **Fort McMurray First Nation** and oil/Tarsands development, Lunch, Demonstrations of moose meat and fish drying, Guided plant medicine walks, Dinner, open mike

Day 2: Water ceremony, Tours to Fort McKay, Syncrude and Suncor tailings ponds, Tour to Nexen and Embridge spill sites to view and

Facilitators lead a Traditional Medicines workshop at the Healing Gathering for the Land and Water 2015

pray, Dinner, jiggling

Day 3: Pipe ceremony, Medicine plant workshops, Welcoming of Delegations Lunch, Traditional knowledge workshop, History of Fort McMurray First Nation Industrial Relations Corporation role in oil sands development, Tour of Fort McMurray First Nation and Clearwater, Dinner, Sweat Lodge Ceremony

