

SPRING | 2023

# KEEPERS OF THE WATER

Quarterly Newsletter



## Imperial Oil's Kearl mine leaks 5.3 million litres of toxic tailings industrial wastewater

BY ALYSSA-MAE LAVIOLETTE

Treaty 8 (Fort McMurray) -

Imperial Oil's Kearl mine has been leaking toxic industrial wastewater since May 2022. On February 7th, 2023, 5.3 million litres of toxic tailings spilled into the Athabasca River without notice to the downstream communities in the Wood Buffalo region in Northern Alberta.

Imperial Oil's Kearl mine has been leaking toxic industrial wastewater, called tailings, onto the territories of numerous Indigenous communities, including Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation and Mikisew Cree First Nation, for over nine months. Local Indigenous communities, the federal government, and the public were not informed of the leak until a separate incident spilled an additional 5.3 million litres of wastewater into the environment.

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Kearl tailings breach cont.

This disaster underscores the ongoing failure of tar sands producers to responsibly manage their waste and the danger that poses to ecosystems and human health.



April 20th, 2023, Indigenous and environmental groups, along with members of the public, gathered on Parliament Hill to rally against Imperial Oil in solidarity with impacted Indigenous Nations affected by the recent toxic leak from its Kearl site in the tar sands. The rally took place on the day Imperial Oil's CEO was called to answer questions in Parliament over the company's handling of the toxic leak.

“Water is sacred. It's our lifeblood. A life force that is a sacred element in many Indigenous Peoples cultures around the globe. When companies like Imperial Oil recklessly pollute the waterways of Indigenous nations with toxic waste, they are not just threatening the environment, but also the very existence of the downstream communities. Our rally against Imperial Oil was a necessary act of resistance and of solidarity.” said Tori Cress, Communications Manager at Keepers of the Water and Anishinaabe from G'Chimnissing.

Media Link: <https://www.keepersofthewater.ca/news/rally-april20-2023>

On February 4th, 5.3 million litres leaked from Imperial Oil's tailing “pond,” enough to fill two Olympic-sized swimming pools in a single incident.





# Save the Date

## Hold the Date TAR SANDS HEALING WALK 2023



● **August 3-7, 2023 | Indian Beach, Anzac, AB**

Keepers of the Water and Indigenous Climate Action are working together as a Call to Action to offer a space for healing, and accountability

The event will consist of a healing day for community members and a 14 km healing walk for Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters.

**For more information:**  
[info@keepersofthewater.ca](mailto:info@keepersofthewater.ca)



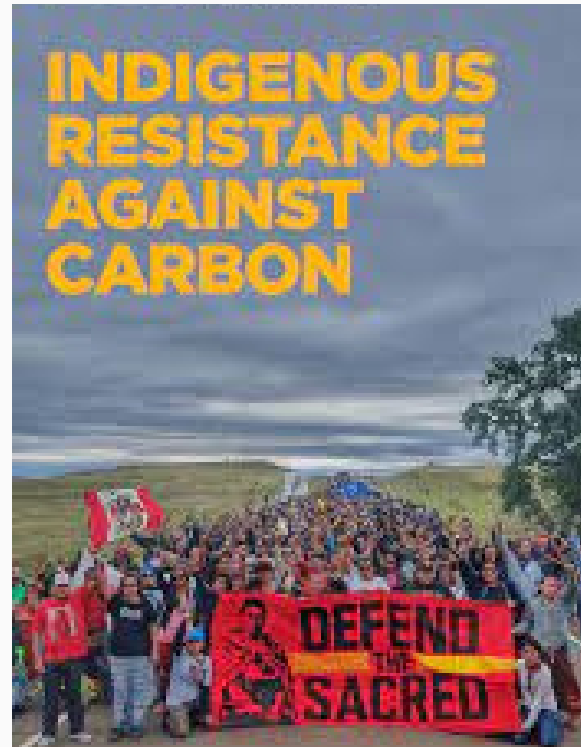
## Carbon Pricing Training for Keepers of the Water

BY TORI CRESS

In March and April, staff and board members were invited to participate in Indigenous Environmental Network's virtual Carbon Pricing training with facilitators Thomas Joseph and Tamra Gilbertson. Through scheduled Zoom meetings, we discussed and learned about carbon pricing mechanisms and false narrative solutions being sold to Indigenous leadership and Canadians alike as a tool to combat climate change.

Through this connection, we learned about an upcoming Carbon Pricing and False Solutions Training for the Trainers that Daniel and I both applied to attend on behalf of KOW so that we can develop our own in-house training for staff and board members. In our work to protect water, there is so much work that needs to be done and we know that knowledge is a powerful tool in this work.

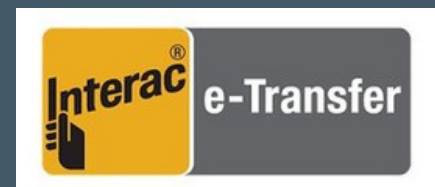
There is no reduction in actual carbon emissions in these schemes proposed by the Pathways Alliance, which represents the six largest oil sands producers.



## Support Us! Donate to Keepers of the Water

Become a Water protector by supporting the grassroots work of the Keepers of the Water today! It is through your generous support that we continue to evolve and grow.

Send e-Transfer donations to: [keepersofthewaterdonate@gmail.com](mailto:keepersofthewaterdonate@gmail.com)





Meet our new staff member:

## Alyssa-Mae Laviolette

### Tar Sands Community Outreach Coordinator

Sı Alyssa-Maé hushyé, K'ai Taile Dēnesųłné from K'ételikóę (Fort Chipewyan) and was raised in the Fort McMurray area. She is a member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation in Treaty 8 Territory.

Alyssa has always been passionate about creating change and awareness surrounding Indigenous Rights and revitalizing cultural practices through her work with Indigenous organizations and nations. She is currently attending the University of Alberta in the Bachelor of Education and holds multiple certificates in Indigenous Leadership as well as a Diploma in Event Management. Through her professional and community experience, she continually works to improve sustainable practices, develop a greater understanding of environmental issues surrounding our lands and water through conservation. She joined Keepers of the Water as the Tarsands Outreach Community Coordinator to create partnerships with Indigenous organizations and communities to raise awareness for Indigenous Rights and Protection of Water.

Her contact information is:  
[treaty8outreach@keepersofthewater.ca](mailto:treaty8outreach@keepersofthewater.ca)



# NWT Outreach Update



## Arctic Circumpolar Conference

BY JESSE CARDINAL

Keepers of the Water presented at the Arctic Circumpolar Conference by the Institute for Circumpolar Health Research on the work of Keepers Of the Water and the work we do to protect water. The presentation was presented to the Elders from all the communities from the Northwest Territories.

The presentation was well received and people were interested in learning more about taking action. KOW was invited out to other communities to share and create more awareness.

Keepers of the Water is one of the few organizations sharing information about the dangers happening to the waters in our northern communities.

KOW has made a commitment to continue our outreach to communities in northern territories.





# Coal Outreach Update

## Generate and Navigate 2023 Presentation

BY AUTUMN EAGLESPEAKER

Mid March Keepers of the Water Outreach Coordinator Treaty 7, presented at the Inside Education's 12th in-person Youth Environmental Leadership Summit, Generate and Navigate 2023.

A total of 20 high schools from across Alberta and northeast BC were selected by the environmental and natural resource charity to come together in Canmore, Alberta, to better understand the science, issues, technology, and careers related to energy, climate, and water.

During the three-day Summit, six students and two teachers from each of the 20 schools were given a unique opportunity to meet and engage with over 70 expert guests from academic institutions, industry, government, Alberta's Indigenous community, and environmental groups.

Autumn shared about the work that we do at Keepers of the Water and about the importance of protecting our waters, as well as thinking from an Indigenous holistic perspective in protecting the environment and safeguarding the future. Students were shocked to learn about the development of coal in the province and in BC, as well as saddened to hear about the tailings breach in Northern Alberta.

The students were super insightful and gave great hope for the future.





# Coal Outreach Update

## Cardston Elementary School Presentation

BY AUTUMN EAGLESPEAKER

Early April I took a trip down to Southern Alberta to Cardston to spend the day with the staff and kids at Cardston Elementary School to share about the work that we do at Keepers of the Water.

Students in grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 learned about water and watershed education, protecting our waters and lands, and the harmful destruction of thermal coal mining in the Rocky Mountains. Students also learned about Understanding water pollution in our watersheds through a fun, hands-on activity.

The students were also very excited to be entered into the draw for a gift basket which contained the book *We Are Water Protectors*, a home garden starter kit, seeds, gloves and treats. The students got to take home a certificate acknowledging their water pledge to be Keepers of the Water.



## Calgary Community Presentation

BY AUTUMN EAGLESPEAKER

Indigenous people and allies gathered to learn about protecting our waters from toxic chemical harm through mining, tailings breaches, agriculture and human waste.

The session began with a prayer led by KOW Co-Chair Alvin Manitopyes. Alvin also shared insights into the importance of the relationship to water and our early beginnings as humans in water. Alvin also shared the importance of kinship and relationality.

Outreach Coordinator Autumn shared about the work that KOW is doing in the Rocky Mountain region to stop mining, specifically thermal coal, which is the dirtiest form of coal extraction and usage. She also shared about how interconnected the water is in Alberta and beyond.

KOW Scientist Advisor Paul Belanger provided information about the Community monitoring program, as well shared about the Suncor tailings breach and leakages into the Athabasca River. Paul stated that Currently 6 million litres of tailings has breached its holding tank and feeding into local groundwater and waterways, and that the breach is still happening.

Philip Meintzer from Alberta Wilderness Association provided insight into the proposed mining of McLellan Lake by Suncor. This lake is a natural fen and one of the last pristine areas of land in the tar sands region. AWA is asking for people to help take action to save McLellan Lake by signing onto their petition on their website: [www.albertawilderness.ca](http://www.albertawilderness.ca)

Participants also provided their insights into the need for the protection of water.

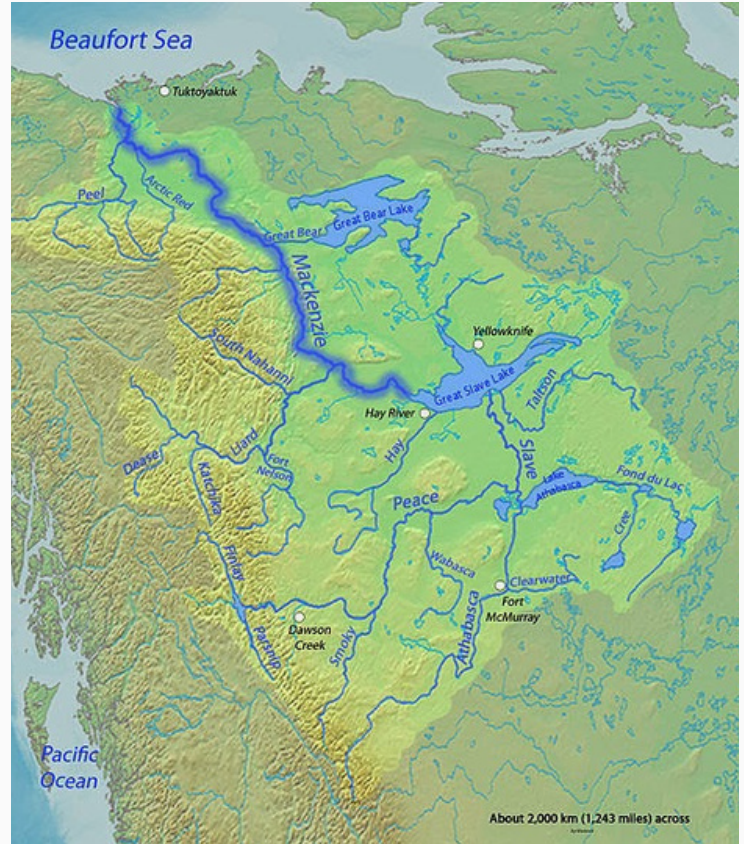




# Personhood Update

## Personhood for the Deh-Cho

BY CRYSTAL STAMP-CARDINAL



Collaboration between Keepers of the Water and Research for the Front Lines

KoW seeks to gather further information about the possibility of achieving personhood status for the DehCho River. This research will build on the preliminary report Personhood Report for the Deh-Cho (Mackenzie) River by Crystal Stamp-Cardinal and Dr. Josie Auger.

We have collaborated with Research for the Front Lines (R4FL) whose mission is to support research that is led by grassroots, front-line communities, movements, and organizations. R4FL has gathered a small team of researchers to review the existing information on the DehCho River, its jurisdictions, Indigenous laws that pertain to the DehCho, general legal approaches to personhood status for non-humans, and how the Muteshekau Shipu River was designated as a person.

KoW hopes this research will lead to a deeper understanding of the process and steps required to achieve personhood status for DehCho. We hope to be able to collaborate soon with Indigenous Communities within these Watersheds, other organizations and ENGOs looking at personhood to bring together a 'Northern Rivers Alliance'.



# Keepers of the Water - In Action

## Saskatoon Rally

Keepers of the Water (KOW) attended the Indigenous Land Defenders delegation's panel and press conference at the RBC Revealed mobilization campaign at the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)'s Annual General Meeting (AGM) on April 4th and 5th, 2023, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.



## Ottawa (Traditional, Unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg People Rally

Indigenous and environmental groups, along with members of the public, gathered on Parliament Hill to rally against Imperial Oil in solidarity with impacted Indigenous Nations affected by the recent toxic leak from its Kearl site in the tar sands. The rally took place on the day Imperial Oil's CEO was called to answer questions in Parliament over the company's handling of the toxic leak.



## World Water Day

KOW partnered with Grant MacEwan University for World Water Day - March 22, 2023. Speaker included KOW ED Jesse Cardinal, KOW Co-Chair Jean L'Hommecourt, KOW Science Advisor Paul Belanger, Dr. Kelieke Schalomon - Dean of Faculty of Arts & Dr. David Danto - Dean of Faculty of Health & Community Studies.

