

Desperately trying to derail Canadian oil sands

Radical activists launch more attacks on oil sands, Keystone pipeline, jobs and revenues

A Commentary by Paul Driessen

Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman has approved his state's portion of the Keystone XL pipeline, explaining that its revised route avoids areas that critics had earlier claimed were environmentally sensitive.

The Alberta-to-Texas pipeline would create more than 5,500 [Nebraska jobs](#) during its construction period and support 1,000 permanent jobs through 2030. During the project's lifetime, KXL would generate \$950 million in labor income, \$130 million in property, sales and other state and local taxes, and \$679 million for the state's gross domestic product, by bringing Canadian oil sands petroleum to Texas refineries.

President Obama's second term agenda, continued viability of Medicare and Social Security programs, and America's economy and environment need the pipeline and oil even more than Nebraska does.

[The pipeline and Alberta petroleum](#) could mean \$45 billion per year by 2035 in increased goods and services, up to 465,000 more jobs in the 2,000 American companies that already support oil sands operations or utilize the hydrocarbons in motor fuel and petrochemical manufacturing – and billions in annual state and federal tax revenues. While all fifty states would realize employment and economic gains, California, Illinois, Wisconsin, Texas, Ohio, New York, Montana and Michigan would benefit most (in that order) from this job and economic activity, the [Canadian Energy Research Institute](#) calculates.

Canada has an estimated [169 billion barrels](#) of oil sands fuel that can be recovered economically with today's technology – 20% by mining and 80% via *in situ* drilling and steam injection. Much of this oil is destined for the United States via the KXL pipeline, to replace similar heavy crude that we now import from Mexico and Venezuela, and oil from other nations that have much lower environmental standards and far worse human rights records than Canada, including Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Russia, Iraq and Algeria.

During a recent tour of the mining and *in situ* operations, I smelled no hydrocarbons, learned that fresh [water use](#) is declining and water recycling has risen to 80-95 percent, and hiked through former mine sites that have

been restored to beautiful lakes, creeks, forests ... and grasslands where wild buffalo roam. Most oil sands will not be mined, however – but produced by drilling wells hundreds of feet deep, injecting steam to melt the bitumen, and collecting it in other pipes several feet below the steam pipes. Multiple wells are drilled from each widely separated site, and each is also reclaimed when the oil is recovered.

Oil sands production contributes only 0.14% of global greenhouse gases, Environment Canada notes, and would add only [0.00001 degrees C](#) per year to global warming. Production-to-automotive-use CO₂/GHG emissions for oil sands crude are on par with crude from Nigeria, America's third biggest supplier.

All this has prompted oil sands and pipeline [opponents](#) to generate press releases and new “scientific reports,” in a desperate attempt to derail KXL permits, by raising scary sounding ecological issues.

* Assorted “experts” persist in trying to blame global warming and climate change for forest fires, droughts, floods, heat waves and even Hurricane Sandy – and say oil sands will somehow worsen these problems. But our planet [hasn't warmed](#) in 16 years, US hurricanes are at one of their [lowest cyclical ebbs](#) since the Civil War, humanity has confronted [forest fires](#) and severe weather events repeatedly throughout our history, and Sandy's hardly unprecedented pounding of New York City was compounded by numerous ill-considered [decisions by its political leaders](#).

* The anti-hydrocarbon group Oil Change International claims [petroleum coke](#) produced in the oil sands process is not fully accounted for in GHG analyses and will hasten global warming. However, “pet coke” burned as fuel in the Alberta oil sands operations is already included in GHG emission analyses. It is a byproduct of all heavy oil refining, so the Canadian variety simply displaces Mexican and Venezuelan pet coke. And most oil sands output is “upgraded” to medium weight oil for pipelining, by removing carbon and adding hydrogen – with the carbon stored onsite for later sale to manufacturers and other users.

* Scientists from Queens University in Kingston, Ontario, say [aromatic hydrocarbon levels](#) have increased in the sediments of several Alberta lakes since oil sands development began in the 1960s. Various media stories claimed the study is another “blow to the Keystone pipeline.” The media spin is a bit far-fetched.

First, these hydrocarbon levels are rather typical of remote Alberta lakes, and are well below what is found in lakes near Canada's urban areas. Second, the measured changes are 25 to 50 nanograms – parts per billion – the equivalent of 25-50 seconds in 32 years, or up to 50 billionths of a fifth of a teaspoon of water. Survey instruments could not even measure these amounts several decades ago, and even the scientists offered no evidence to suggest that such levels constitute an actual problem.

Third, while the hydrocarbons could have come from airborne pollution from oil sands production, they could also have come from conifer forest fires, or increasing boat and seaplane traffic on the lakes. The reported increases could even have resulted from contaminated samples, collecting gear or lab instruments, due to fuel sheens on the lake surface, oils on upper sediment levels, reused lab equipment, or even sunscreen or lotion on technicians' hands. "Parts per billion" is *tiny*, and contamination a constant issue.

Finally, the researchers also noted that algae, photosynthesis and nutrient levels in the lakes have increased since the late 1970s, partly as a result of "climate warming" that began when Earth emerged from its 1942-1976 cooling period. This also increased algae-eating zooplankton populations. The lakes are healthy!

In short, the benefits of the oil sands and Keystone pipeline are clear. The downsides are minimal, exaggerated or imaginary. And the alternatives to oil sands are far worse for people and planet.

As analyst and author [Indur Goklany](#) demonstrates in his book, [The Improving State of the World](#), we are living longer, healthier, more comfortable and productive lives – on a cleaner planet – than even kings and queens dreamed of 150 years ago. As he explains in his latest paper, "[Humanity Unbound](#)," a major reason is fossil fuels, which have "saved humanity from nature, and nature from humanity."

Oil sands are a crucial component of the [energy revolution](#) that could generate millions of jobs and hundreds of billions of dollars in economic benefits and tax revenues, resurrect US steel and manufacturing industries, make North America largely energy independent, and enhance our national security.

We cannot afford to turn our backs on this – especially with 23 million Americans unemployed or underemployed, 47 million on food stamps, 128 million dependent on various government programs, and the nation \$16

trillion in debt. This is unsustainable, and driving the USA toward [Greece and Europe](#).

Equally unsustainable are policies advanced in name of preventing climate change. As Austrian film maker and environmentalist Ulrich Eichelmann explains in his new documentary, these [Climate Crimes](#) are “killing nature.” Dams are flooding vast ecological preserves to generate hydroelectric power; corn and other monoculture crops are destroying vital habitats; and German, Greek and other European families that can no longer afford heating oil and electricity are chopping down forests for firewood.

Here in the United States, thousands of monstrous wind turbines are butchering 13,000,000 to 39,000,000 [bird and bats](#) every year – including eagles, hawks, whooping cranes and other essential and endangered species. And yet the US Fish and Wildlife Service refuses to investigate or prosecute industrial wind operators for this [horrific slaughter](#), and even assists in the flagrant [deception and cover-up](#).

But the programs continue, thanks to billions of taxpayer dollars poured annually into Solyndra and other “green” [schemes and bankruptcies](#), and despite scandals like [miraculous Euro solar panels](#) that generate electricity even at 2:00 am, US programs that turn janitors, bus drivers and paper cup makers into “[green job](#)” recipients and, not surprisingly, [mafia involvement](#) in Italy’s wind and solar escapades.

President Obama has a perfect opportunity to restore ethics and common sense to America’s energy and environmental policies. Our planet and children hope he makes the right choice and says Yes to Keystone.

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