

Stop it at the Source: Fighting Teck's mega tar sands mine

By Bronwen Tucker



If approved, the Frontier Teck Mine would be Alberta's largest single tar sands mine project and would be equivalent to permanently adding about 10 million new cars on the road, or about 60 million tonnes of CO₂ a year. Photo: Louis Bockner, Sierra Club BC

Right now, the Vancouver-based company Teck Resources is pushing hard to win approval for the largest-ever tar sands mine proposal in Alberta's history. The Frontier Mine would cost \$20 billion, operate for more than 40 years, and produce 260,000 barrels of bitumen per day. Teck Resources wants to slip the project through the approval process without much public scrutiny, but the Council of Canadians is working to make sure that does not happen.

The Frontier Mine is a dramatic step away from the fairer, 100 per cent renewable energy economy we need to be building. While the people-powered fights to stop and stall new pipelines have made it much harder for new tar sands projects to go forward, to have the best chance at stemming their expansion, we also need to shift some focus upstream to projects like the Frontier Mine.

At the beginning of October, I drove up to Fort McMurray to participate as an intervener in the federal-provincial Joint Review Panel hearings for this mine on behalf of the Council of Canadians. Here are some of the reasons why we called on the panel to "reject Teck":

1. The Frontier Mine is a carbon bomb.

Teck Frontier's well-to-wheels emissions would be equivalent to permanently adding about 10 million new cars on the road, or about 60 million tonnes of CO₂ a year.

When we take stock of Teck's emissions, we also have to consider the big

picture. We are facing cascading failures with respect to the tar sands' climate impacts – the Teck mine does not fit within Alberta's 100 MT emissions cap based on the other new projects that have already been approved, the Alberta emissions cap is already not ambitious enough to meet our 2030 federal targets, and our 2030 federal targets are already well below what can be considered Canada's fair share of meeting the Paris Agreement.

2. It is unlikely to provide steady jobs, tax revenue or profit.

Because the Frontier Mine requires high oil prices to stay profitable but also high upfront investment, there is a good chance it will not provide steady jobs or economic benefits for the public. While the environmental impacts and Indigenous rights violations associated with this project would not be acceptable even if the project were much more profitable, it is important to highlight that all of that damage could be for almost no economic benefit. More jobs would be created by investing in almost any other sector.

3. It doesn't uphold Indigenous rights.

During the hearings I listened to testimony from elders and water protectors from the Deninu K'ue First Nation, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Fort McKay First Nation, and Fort McMurray First Nation, among others. They told the panel about the many ways that the cumulative impacts of tar sands projects are already hurting their communities.

Patrick Simon of the Deninu K'ue First Nation, located 300 kilometres downstream of the project, told the panel, "Soon, you will have Indigenous peoples from all the way up in the Arctic coming down to these hearings because the impacts of these projects are carrying so far away from the source."

While many of the impacted nations' leaders have signed participation agreements with Teck for this project, some stated they felt they had no choice because their efforts to counter tar sands developments have always been ignored.

The Frontier Mine is such an extreme project that we are cautiously hopeful the panel will reject it, or approve it with so many conditions that Teck cannot afford to build it. But if it is approved, the project will still face a decision from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna right before the 2019 election. We are building the political pressure now to make sure they cannot say yes to it.

With your generous support, the Council of Canadians is working to build a just transition away from the tar sands and towards 100 per cent renewable energy. There is still a lot of work to be done to get there, and not very much time left – thank you for being a part of it!

Bronwen Tucker is the Prairies-Northwest Territories Regional Organizer for the Council of Canadians.