

Keepers of the Water Delegation to Attend the 2023 Dene Nation Water Summit

For Immediate Release:



Mar 13, 2023 — A delegation from the Keepers of the Water (KOW) grassroots organization will be attending the annual *Dene Nation Water Summit* from March 13th to 17th, 2023, hosted at the Ingamo Hall in Inuvik, Northwest Territories (NT).

The Dene National Water Summit is held annually and attended by community leaders and members of the Dene Regions Inuvialuit and Métis Nations, where discussions, conversations, and presentations about water issues, concerns and threats to clean water are held over several days.

The KOW delegation's attendance is to provide a traditional knowledge exchange (Indigenous science), health, and western scientific presentations about living downstream from the Alberta tar sands extraction projects. Our three presenters will cover many topics, including environmental racism, the science on tailings, impacts on the Arctic watershed, environmental racism, direct impacts of the recently reported Imperial Oil spill, air pollution, the lack of consultation and FPIC (free prior and informed consent), and our demand for an independent health study.

On February 4th, 5.3 million litres of toxic tailings leaked overland from Imperial Oil's tailing "pond," enough to fill two Olympic-sized swimming pools in a single incident. At that same time, we also learned that the same day Imperial Oil reported a second leak at the same facility, which has been leaking from four other areas since May. The last people notified of the tailings spills were nearby Indigenous communities of Mikisew FN, Athabasca Chipewyan FN, and Fort McKay FN.

"These impacts are felt immensely in downstream Indigenous communities and continues to perpetuate the ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples and yet it's become common for Indigenous communities to be the last to be informed." Jesse Cardinal, KOW Executive Director

The potential "treated" tailings will flow through multiple Nation's watersheds before eventually ending up in the Arctic Ocean. It is the responsibility of KOW to ensure that all Nations within the Arctic Ocean Drainage Basin have the necessary Traditional Ecological Knowledge

(Indigenous science), as well as western science, to support advancing Indigenous Sovereignty over their territories and watersheds.

The tar sands' tailings "ponds" now contain over 1.4 trillion litres of toxic waste and cover an area more than two times the size of the city of Vancouver. Growing daily, tailings "ponds" contain dangerous levels of mercury, arsenic and naphthenic acids, which are toxic by-products unique to the tar sands extraction industry. Even after treatment, tailings remain high in salinity and naphthenic acids.

"The design of the oil sands tailings ponds is an ongoing problem, and the regulator needs to allow for better and safer tailings pond design. The tailings pond's design, approved by the Alberta Energy Regulator, does not call for a liner and does allow for seepage of tailing liquids in the groundwater below and around each tailings pond." Paul Belanger, [Keepers of the Water Science Advisor](#)

Canada has not obtained the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of downstream Indigenous communities. This legal requirement stems from Canada's United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Act, which came into force in 2021. UNDRIP guarantees Indigenous Peoples the opportunity to participate in state legislative and policy initiatives that directly and negatively impact the watershed they live in and rely on for sustenance.

Keepers of the Water knows through Traditional Knowledge keeping and exchange that what happens in the watershed of one Nation's territory can and does negatively impact the watersheds and wetlands in other Nation's territories. Keepers of the Water presenters are Jean L'Hommecourt, KOW Board of Directors Co-chair, Paul Belanger, KOW Science Advisor, and Dr. John Connor, KOW Board of Directors.

About KEEPERS OF THE WATER (keepersofthewater.ca): Keepers of the Water are First Nations, Métis, Inuit, environmental groups, concerned citizens, and communities working together for the protection of water, air, land, and all living things within the Arctic Ocean Drainage Basin.

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