

August 30, 2013. WTE Editor's Headline: "Film Could Open Your Mind"

A Salt Lake City workshop on environmental issues attracted my attention; thus, I recently spent a weekend in Utah, staying overnight with retired teachers who proudly displayed their 20 panels of rooftop solar, recently installed. With the help of tax breaks, the system would pay for itself in ten years, they said.

The workshop itself included representatives of key climate-activist and/or biodiversity groups in western states. Utah's unenlightened policies spawned Utah Tar Sands Resistance, a response to current threats. Peaceful Uprising resulted from Tim DeChristopher's civil disobedience. Wild Idaho Rising Tide (WIRT) was represented; so was 350.org (by yours truly). Here's what these movements are about:

Utah Tar Sands Resistance sprang up because a Canadian petroleum company has set its sights on opening the first U.S. tar-sands mine in eastern Utah's Book Cliffs region near Bryce Canyon. From across the country people descended on Green River, Utah, to make sure this project never breaks ground. Although Big Oil "paid its way to regulatory approval," it'll move forward only if the Canadian company can prove that digging up tar sands in Utah makes financial sense; hence, activists staged a sit-in at the road-construction site with enough participants to halt operations all day. Company stock at the Toronto Exchange tanked the following day. At investment meetings, resisters endeavor to convince potential investors that humanity can't afford this dangerous project.

Tim DeChristopher saved a huge stretch of prime Utah wilderness from fossil-fuel exploitation by posing as a bidder, "Bidder 70," in a December 2008 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lease auction. Shortly thereafter, the U.S. Department of the Interior canceled many of the leases in response to a subsequent court injunction, saying the BLM had rushed into the auction with insufficient environmental and scientific review. DeChristopher spent two years in prison; all the same, he and supporters initiated Peaceful Uprising. Soon after his release came his PBS interview with Bill Moyers, which you can find on Moyers.com. An award-winning film, "Bidder 70" showed at the August 2013 Loveland, Col., Arise Music Festival.

WIRT of Idaho confronts the root causes of climate change by imparting information on four issues: Northern Rockies / Northwest Megaloads; the Alberta Tar Sands; hydraulic fracturing in Idaho; and regional coal-export trains & ports.

"Megaloads" concerns hundreds of transports of massively oversized, Asian-built tar sands equipment, "each weighing 1/3 million pounds," routinely transported in "industrial corridors" through Washington, Idaho, and Montana. Along with compromising historical and sacred tribal sites, the transports "cost American taxpayers millions of dollars" in repairs to damaged rural roads, highways, and bridges, argues WIRT. As for the Canadian tar sands, the mining itself constitutes a "global climate crime" that exhausts three million barrels of fresh water every day, spews untold amounts of toxic waste, threatens the health and subsistence of downwind (and downstream) human and wildlife communities, compromises biodiversity, and generates 3 to 5 times more greenhouse gas emissions than conventional petroleum production. Coal-export trains and ports are targeted for their coal dust and diesel fumes, their adverse impacts on

communities when blocking traffic and emergency responses, all the while lowering property values and diminishing local jobs and businesses. The misguided industries “extend American dependence on fossil fuels, prolong dirty energy subsidies, and postpone alternative power generation.”

Climate warrior and 350.org founder Bill McKibben engaged in summer activism together with spouse Sue, by criss-crossing America “from the Mackinac Straits of Michigan where they want to run tar sands oil through aging pipes beneath the Great Lakes, to the Chevron refinery in Richmond, California, where they'd like to turn tar sands into gasoline.” Repeatedly subjected to “the pinch of handcuffs,” Bill describes a fossil fuel industry so focused on greed, it “rip[s] apart the planet and its communities.” The figure “350” refers to the safe limit of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere: 350 parts per million (ppm). We are now at 400ppm. To return to safe levels, we must rid ourselves pronto of our addiction to fossil fuels.

“The fate of Alberta’s tar sands—and the climate—may come down to the Keystone XL pipeline,” wrote David Biello in a recent Scientific American article, “Greenhouse Goo.” The goo is the tar-like oil called bitumen that can be extracted and shipped only after toxic and costly dilutions turn it into “dilbit.” 350.org plans across-country KXL resistance on September 21, “Draw the Line.”

I invite you to attend the showing of “Chasing Ice” at the Laramie County Library in Cheyenne on Thursday, September 12, 2013, at 6:30 PM. The event, free of charge, is sponsored by 350Cheyenne, which I founded a few months ago. This film of electrifying beauty documents the quest of one man (National Geographic photographer James Bolag) to explore glaciers and ice-sheets worldwide. Winner of the 2012 Sundance Film Festival, Roger Ebert labeled the film “heart-stopping.” The New York Times made it its Critic’s Pick and the NY Daily News gave it a five-star rating.

If you are bold enough to take steps beyond attending the film showing, get acquainted with 350.org, or google NoKXL, which takes you to a website where you may enter your pledge to resist the pipeline that’s supposed to bring the goo from Alberta to Texas, there to be refined and shipped to Asian markets. You heard of the disastrous spill two years ago that destroyed pristine Kalamazoo River along with countless nearby homes? If you haven’t, go to amazon.com and read the reviews of “The Dilbit Disaster.” You read of the awful spill in Mayflower, Kansas, earlier this year? Refresh your memory and google the catastrophe that struck the communities unfortunate enough to lie in its path. These are but two reasons to oppose KXL.

Hope to see you September 12!