



June 8, 2006

Diana Parker  
Director, Folklife Festival  
Smithsonian Institution  
750 9th Street, NW, Suite 4100  
Washington, D.C. 20560-0953

Fax:

Dear Ms. Parker,

We are following up on your earlier conversations with NRDC to voice our serious concerns about the Smithsonian's focus on Alberta's tar (or oil) sands in the 2006 Folklife Festival. We ask that in keeping with the Smithsonian's role as an impartial institution that holds a public trust for cultural and scientific education, you ensure that Alberta present a balanced introduction of tar sands oil development to the American public. To do so requires a full accounting of the climate change and other negative environmental impacts arising from the rapidly growing exploitation of this fossil fuel. As currently planned, Alberta's tar sands exhibit is a breath-taking departure from the Smithsonian's tradition of celebrating culture, music, art, food and diversity.

There is growing worry that oil extraction from Alberta's tar sands would contribute to global warming and devastate a large expanse of the pristine boreal forest. A vast expansion of oil development is underway in the tar sands, including plans to fuel the tar sands with a new pipeline through the pristine Mackenzie Valley in the Northwest Territories. The 2006 Folklife Festival has become the centerpiece for Alberta to showcase this expansion of oil production from the tar sands in the hope of attracting U.S. investment, good will and trade. This does not seem in keeping with the Folklife Festival mission to highlight cultural traditions. The festival has never served as an industry trade show or business expo, nor should it be allowed to become one. Yet, an unusually large number of Folklife Festival sponsors have a financial interest in promoting the tar sands oil and pipeline development, including Enbridge, EnCana, FinningCAT, Suncor Energy, Petro-Canada, and NOVA Chemicals. It creates the unfortunate impression that the Smithsonian and its exhibitions are available for commercial promotional purposes.

Although still in the infancy of its development, tar sands already are Canada's fastest growing contributor to global warming. Tar sands production generates 2.5 times as much heat-trapping gases as conventional oil production. Tar sands are found below thousands of acres of boreal forest and wetlands – an area the size of Florida that is critical wildlife habitat. But the impact will be much broader. To fuel the tar sands, one

of the longest natural gas pipelines in the world is being planned that could ruin the pristine Mackenzie Valley in the Northwest Territories and destroy millions of acres of natural habitat for grizzly bears, caribou, lynx and migratory birds.

As you know, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. We have worked for many years to raise awareness in the United States about the impacts that our energy use and forest products use has on wilderness areas in Canada. NRDC's 1.2 million members and activists are especially concerned with protection of Canada's boreal forest – one of North America's last large wilderness areas. The Pembina Institute, one of Canada's leading environmental groups working on energy issues, has been actively engaged on tar sands issues for over a decade and holds significant knowledge and experience with the environmental issues arising from tar sands development. In November 2005, the Institute published *Oil Sands Fever: The Environmental Implications of Canada's Oil Sands Rush* and launched [www.oilsandswatch.org](http://www.oilsandswatch.org), the first publication and website to document the full extent of the environmental impacts arising from the accelerating rate of tar sands development. A copy of this report will be sent to you.

We ask that the Smithsonian work with Alberta to tell the full story, including the environmental impacts and implications of this form of fossil fuel production. We believe this can be best accommodated by directly including the environmental community and its perspective in the exhibit. As it seems to be designed, the exhibit presents an absurdly one-sided picture that ignores the devastating and long-term consequences of developing tar sands. The public deserves to hear the full story.

We are ready to continue our discussions with you about how these goals can be achieved and we are ready to participate to help provide a balanced perspective.

Sincerely,



Susan Casey-Lefkowitz  
Director Canada Projects  
Natural Resources Defense Council



Dr. Marlo Reynolds  
Executive Director  
Pembina Institute