

**Natural Resources Defense Council * Environmental Defence Canada * Earthworks
Boreal Songbird Initiative * Indigenous Environmental Network * ForestEthics
Rainforest Action Network * Global Community Monitor
Oil Change International * Global Exchange * Plains Justice**

June 26, 2008

Western Governors' Association
1600 Broadway, Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Governor,

Thank you for addressing both wildlife corridors and climate change at the Annual Meeting of the Western Governors' Association (WGA) in Jackson Hole. These are critical issues where action is badly needed if the West's unique attributes are to be maintained. We are writing today about the greenhouse gas and wildlife corridor impacts of oil extraction from Canadian tar sands which are located in the Boreal Forest of Canada – the largest intact forest ecosystem remaining on the planet.

The environmental costs from tar sands oil extraction are high. Tar sands open pit mining and drilling are Canada's fastest growing source of global warming emissions. Looking just at the production process, to produce a barrel of tar sands oil costs the climate three times the emissions as a barrel of conventional oil. For mining, up to four barrels of water are drained from the Athabasca River to produce one barrel of tar sands oil, resulting in tailings ponds of toxics that can be seen from space by the naked eye. Aboriginal communities downstream from the tar sands are concerned about high cancer rates.

The WGA is known as a forum for discussing clear limits on greenhouse gas emissions to fight global warming. Western Governors are now pioneering real solutions such as a cap-and-trade system through the Western Climate Initiative and a low carbon fuel standard that requires a reduction in lifecycle carbon in transportation fuels. You have been joined in this by Mayors across the country who, at their recent June conference in Miami, adopted a high-carbon fuels resolution calling for better information about lifecycle carbon emissions and tracking of high carbon fuels such as tar sands oil.

While work on global warming solutions moves forward, the Governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan are aggressively promoting the expansion of tar sands production and are using venues such as the WGA to tell the world that they are addressing resulting emissions - even as the evidence shows otherwise. Alberta has a system of "intensity" targets that requires a reduction of greenhouse gasses per barrel of oil but allows overall emissions to explode as oil production rises. Saskatchewan says it has absolute greenhouse gas emissions reductions targets, but it has no plan to meet them.

Further, both the Alberta and Saskatchewan governments say they are moving ahead with carbon capture and storage (CCS) to reduce their industrial emissions, but to date neither has come forward with a policy framework with a clear timeline, nor have they explained how the extensive infrastructure for CCS will be paid for or the liability and risk issues handled.

Because you are focused on wildlife corridors, you should know tar sands and its toxic tailings ponds lie on the migration path of many migratory waterfowl and shorebirds. Almost forty percent of North America's waterfowl and thirty percent of its shorebirds nest in the wetlands of the Canadian Boreal Forest. Just last April, 500 ducks landed on a tar sands tailings pond and died. We know this from an anonymous tipster, so there is a question of how many incidents like this go unreported.

We are equally concerned about the global warming and ecological impacts of any tar sands or oil shale production in the western United States. Given the current uncertainty regarding the technologies that would be used in the United States, there are important lessons to be learned from the Canadian experience.

The attached ad will run in the Casper Star-Tribune on Monday. We wanted you to have this information so you would have both sides of the story and could raise these concerns with Alberta and Saskatchewan during the conference and address the environmental impacts of tar sands oil in the WGA. For more information, please contact Susan Casey-Lefkowitz, NRDC, sclefkowitz@nrdc.org or 202-289-2366.

Sincerely,

Natural Resources Defense Council
Environmental Defence Canada
Earthworks
Boreal Songbird Initiative
Rainforest Action Network
Indigenous Environmental Network
Global Community Monitor
Oil Change International
Global Exchange
ForestEthics
Plains Justice

CC: Premiers of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba