

# Through our back yard

*Northern communities deserve a careful evaluation of Energy East pipeline's risk versus its rewards*

BY JULEE BOAN

**F**OR those of us watching Alberta's tar sands development from afar, it seems to have hit a serious road block: the producers might be able to get bitumen — a form of petroleum — out of the ground, but they can't get it out of the country. At least not at the volume they'd like to.

The current proposals for pipeline expansions have exposed the Achilles heel of the federal government's energy plan. Bitumen needs to be diluted for the purpose of moving it through pipelines — producing a product known as “dilbit.” Attempts to have dilbit shipped to the West Coast (the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline) and through the United States (the Keystone XL pipeline) have been met with public uproar and private landowners' resistance. It appears that “Big Oil” hasn't yet been able to convince enough Canadians to risk our well-being for their economic gain.

Energy East is the latest in the ongoing list of pipeline proposals. A company called TransCanada Pipelines proposes to (re)develop a network of old and new pipelines stretching over 4,400 km from southern Alberta to New Brunswick. They want to use Energy East to ship over a million barrels of tar sands oil a day. If approved, it would be the largest oil pipeline in North America — and it runs through our back yard.

Consequences are both increased greenhouse gas emissions and risk of oil spills. According to the Pembina Institute, the crude oil production needed to fill the Energy East pipeline would generate an additional 30 to 32 million tonnes of carbon emissions each year — essentially



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cancelling gains from closing Ontario's coal plants.

Local concerns over oil spills are legitimate. Despite TransCanada's assurances about safety, the company has had a number of safety problems with its pipelines in recent years. In 2009, near Englehart in northeastern Ontario, the same natural gas pipeline that TransCanada intends to convert, ruptured and then exploded. There was another explosion near Beardmore in 2011. In 2012, a materials engineer and employee of TransCanada testified to the U.S. State Department that TransCanada was using substandard practices in pipeline construction, including using poorly trained safety inspectors and substandard welding practices. A subsequent National Energy Board investigation confirmed the testimony.

After the 'Beardmore Blast', the Canadian Transportation Board investigation determined that the explosion was caused by soil erosion, which had torn the protective coating off the pipe and had lead to stress corrosion cracks. A similar problem was determined by the U.S. National Transportation Safety

Board to have caused the Kalamazoo spill in Michigan in July 2010 where almost 900,000 gallons of heavy crude, transported through a pipeline operated by Enbridge, Inc., spilled into a creek feeding the Kalamazoo River. (The transportation of bitumen requires even more pressure than natural gas.) Three years later and after spending over \$1 billion, U.S. regulators still deem the Kalamazoo river bottom to be polluted.

Northern communities deserve a careful evaluation of the risk versus rewards associated with the project. Many groups in Northern Ontario, including Environment North, Citizens United for a Sustainable Planet (CUSP), the Council of Canadians and Ontario Nature are working to share information with communities on the risks associated with the proposal. Further, there are many opportunities to learn more and voice your opinion.

The Ontario Energy Board (OEB) will be in Thunder Bay on March 26 from 6:30-9 p.m., at the Airlane Hotel conducting public consultations. You can find

more details on the OEB website at [www.ontarioenergyboard.ca](http://www.ontarioenergyboard.ca). On April 9, Council of Canadians chairperson Maude Barlow, and Eriel Deranger of the Athabasca Fort Chipewyan First Nation will be discussing risks associated with pipeline expansion. More information can be found at [www.canadians.org/energyeast](http://www.canadians.org/energyeast).

*Julee Boan is a board member of Environment North in Thunder Bay.*

## YOUR SAY

The Ontario Energy Board will be in Thunder Bay Wednesday conducting public consultations on the Energy East pipeline proposal.