Name _____ Date _____

Pipeline Letter to Students

Dear Students,

The coastal region of British Columbia, Canada is both beautiful and unique. One of the world's largest coastal temperate rain forests meets the cold water of the Pacific in one of the world's largest integrated land-sea areas. Plants and wildlife in this area depend on both the land and the sea for survival. Humpback whales, dolphins, and porpoises frequently traverse the channels between the many islands in this area; salmon depend on the inland rivers to spawn; and Pacific coastal gray wolves and Kermode, or white spirit, bears rely on this salmon migration for their own survival. First Nations communities, indigenous populations along the coast, also depend on both the land and sea for their cultural and traditional livelihood. But, it is also in this area that the construction of an oil pipeline has been proposed.

In particular, the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline proposal includes the construction of twin pipelines from Alberta's oil sands, across northern British Columbia, to the marine terminal in Kitimat. From here, the oil would be shipped in supertankers that would have to navigate the shallow, stormy waters within the narrow channels and around the many little islands in the area. Enbridge predicts they will collect about 525 thousand barrels of oil per day, which would mean a supertanker would arrive in Kitimat daily to get the oil to consumers in Asia who will use this oil for fuel and energy, for their own economic development interests.

The Asian market would benefit from this increased supply of oil, as would the Canadian economy. The oil and gas industry, along with the marine transportation industry, would benefit from the construction of the pipeline as well. Additionally, the construction and maintenance of the oil pipeline and associated marine services would create much-needed jobs in the area. Enbridge is hopeful that many of its employees will be aboriginal, from the nearby coastal First Nations communities. Because the pipeline will cross through many First Nations territories, these communities have also been promised money that they can use for social programming, like healthcare and education.

However, several stakeholders are concerned about the environmental, social, and cultural risks posed by this pipeline project. The increased oil tanker traffic poses a major threat to the marine ecosystem. For one example, the intertidal zone is especially vulnerable to an oil spill. Many marine mammals and First Nations communities depend on the food, such as clams, mussels, seaweed, and herring eggs, in the kelp beds in this zone.. An oil spill could threaten multiple food chains in the area. Furthermore, sub-tidal kelp, a food source for some important marine life in the area, will be threatened. The reduced food and the increased ship traffic and vessel noise may deter whales and dolphins from moving through the channels. The pipeline would also run along the edge of the Great Bear Rainforest, potentially affecting the interactions among the terrestrial wildlife as well. Furthermore, with any transportation of oil, there are concerns about potential oil leaks and spills,

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Pipeline Letter to Students, continued

which could be devastating to both the marine and terrestrial ecosystems. And finally, while some First Nations communities are hopeful for jobs and the possibility of increased funds for social programming, many more of these communities, such as the Gitga'at and Haisla, are concerned about how the pipeline relates to the social, economic, and ecological objectives included in their marine use plans.

We need your help in researching the situation and making a decision about whether or not to approve the construction of the pipeline in British Columbia. While you may not understand everything about constructing a pipeline right now, we want you to help us collect research on the impact that this decision will have on different stakeholders, both those that have a voice and those that do not. In doing so, you will learn more about the unique marine-land British Columbia ecosystem, details of the pipeline proposal, and the stakeholders involved. We are providing a map with links to some resources that can get you started on your research. When you present your final decision, we would like you to include evidence from the research you found. Please be thorough in making your decision and consider the stakeholders as well as the consequences of building the oil pipeline in British Columbia. Thank you for helping us weigh the tradeoffs in this very important decision.

Sincerely,

Christopher Tremblay
Canadian Pipeline Assessment Task Force Member

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