**The tar sands of Alberta**

The tar sands of Alberta are one of the fastest growing industries in Canada.  Each year, Canada’s investment and production of oil is increasing meaning that more emissions are being released into the atmosphere. Even though the tar sands may be good for the economy, there are still many environmental factors to take into account as well.  This paper will outline the advantages and disadvantages of Alberta’s tar sands in terms of how the economy and the environment is being affected, as well as the government’s position in these issues.

The tar sands play a major role in the growth of Canada’s economy.  The reason for this is because Canada exports more oil than it imports. Oil exports to the United States have gone up by 547 percent.  Because oil demands are also going up in countries like India and China, Canada is investing and producing even more oil each year.  Today in Alberta, one billion barrels of petroleum are being produced a day.  In the next ten years, almost three billion barrels will be produced, 100, 000 new jobs [1] will be created, as well as billions of dollars in taxes paid to the government.  According to a University of Calgary historian, “The oilsands give Canada one of the single greatest advantages of any state in the Western world; it gives Canada the ability to supply all of North America for the next 50 years without touching a drop of imported oil."1  In other words, this historian is saying that any other country would want the tar sands to help support their nation and grow their economy.

The tar sands of Alberta take up a huge amount of land making them the second-largest oil deposit in the world.  Tar sands are extra heavy oil deposited from a type of petroleum called bitumen.  Bitumen can be found in Alberta, 141, 000 square kilometers [2] below the Northern forests. Within the last few years, the tar sands have grown even bigger taking up almost 2,000 square kilometres1 of land.   As the tar sands grow in size, they use up larger amounts of water and energy, and produce tons of carbon dioxide emissions.  Soon emissions will reach 2.3 million tons a year which is equivalent to the amount of emissions produced by more than 500, 000 typically-driven cars. By 2010, the tar sand industry will create about eight billion tons of waste as well as one billion cubic meters of waste water which is enough to fill 400 Olympic-sized swimming pools2. Further into the future, Canada may be accounted for almost 0.2 percent of the emissions produced by the world’s energy industries.  Other environmental impacts of the Alberta’s sands include air and water pollution not only in Western Canada, but the Great Lakes in southern Ontario as well.  The effects that the tar sands leave on the environment are so great making Alberta one of the biggest contributors to global warming and climate change.

In addition to the environmental effects, there are also health issues associated with tar sand pollution. Toxic substances from the tar sands have caused nearby Aboriginal populations to experience increased respiratory diseases, rare cancers and cardiovascular problems.  Animals are also being discovered with tumors and mutations.

Stephen Harper often talks about balancing economic growth with environmental protection, but in 2008, Harper put the economy before the environment when he accepted an $8 billion-dollar proposal from Imperial Oil to start a new tar-sands project.  This new project is expected to create about 3.7 million tons of greenhouse gases a year [3] which is equivalent to the amount of emissions produced by 800, 000 cars.  When it comes to the where the government’s position is with the tar sands, it is clear that government is more concerned about the economy than with the environment.  This may be because of the current global economic crisis that Canada and other countries around the world are facing, but our environmental crisis is also just as important.

In conclusion, the tar sands of Alberta are one of the fastest growing industries in Canada creating billions of dollars for the economy, but at the same time, tones of greenhouse gas emissions are being released into the atmosphere.  If the Canadian government doesn’t take the environmental effects of the tar sands seriously, they will have to face other consequences in the future. Therefore, in addition to the economy, the government should be looking into doing more for the environment as well.

Sources

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