

DOGWOOD INITIATIVE UNITES WITH OTHER GROUPS IN CALL FOR OIL AND GAS REFORMS IN BC

Victoria, April 8, 2004: Dogwood Initiative joins with First Nations, rural landowners, workers' organizations and environmentalists in releasing "10 Steps to Responsible Development", a plan to reform practices in BC's oil and gas industry.

Natural gas is now the province's leading source of resource revenue. Drilling, road-building, and gas production are at record levels, and are projected to increase. Impacts on the land are already consequential.

Yet consultation with landowners, First Nations and local government is shirked by government, and by the corporations doing the work. Regulations and oversight that protect the environment have been gutted or scrapped. Cumulative impacts on communities and landscapes are not even considered in this headlong rush to produce BC's gas resources as rapidly as possible.

"The 10 Steps plan will ensure more responsible, less destructive development of the resource," said Arthur Caldicott of Dogwood Initiative, the Victoria-based organization that works for sustainable, local control of land and resources. "This government is promoting natural gas and coalbed methane development with disregard for the communities, the landowners, and especially, the First Nations, who live on and own the land."

The plan recommends that recognition of First Nations rights, landowner rights, human health protection, and monitoring and enforcement be strengthened.

Some of the issues the plan addresses are:

- BC is expanding production with no balanced long term plans for the resource
- Not saving oil and gas, or banking revenues, for the future
- Direct jobs in the sector are falling and 4 out of 5 jobs are being filled by Albertans
- First Nations Treaty and Aboriginal Title and Rights are not respected
- Landowners in BC have few rights and no support in dealing with industry
- Increased development near communities means health risks, especially from sour gas

Among the recommendations are a call for energy policy that balances oil and gas development with the promotion of renewables; the establishment of a "heritage" fund to support the transition to sustainable industries; suspending coalbed methane development until safeguards are put in place; and incentives to employ BC workers.

"First Nations' Aboriginal Title and Rights are not being respected by this government," said Caldicott, "which is why Aboriginal leaders from across the province have formed the Title and Rights Alliance, and why they are participating in this '10 Steps' plan for reform."

Joining Dogwood Initiative as signatories to the ten point platform are: the BC Government and Service Employees Union, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the Communication, Energy and Paperworkers Union, the Chetwynd Environmental Society, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Hudson's Hope Landowners Association, the Pembina Institute, the Sierra Club of Canada – BC Chapter, the Sierra Legal Defence Fund, Treaty 8 First Nations, and West Coast Environmental Law.

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The report is available at www.dogwoodinitiative.org