

Feeding the beast

As a lifelong Albertan I read the stories on the oil sands ("Scar sands," June 2008) and Flathead valley ("A river to ruin" June 2008) with great interest. What is happening with the development in and around the Fort McMurray region is only part of the story. Closer to Edmonton, in the Fort Saskatchewan-Redwater area, thousands of acres of some of the best farmland in Alberta have been stripped or are threatened with being stripped to provide land for the massive upgraders that are being built to turn the heavy bitumen from the tar sands into synthetic crude oil. To provide energy to these upgraders, Sherritt International, along with its funding partners, the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan and City of Edmonton-owned power company EPCOR, is proposing to build a coal-gasification facility to produce synthetic gas to be used as an energy feed source. The Dodds-Roundhill Coal Gasification Project lies less than 100 kilometres southeast of Edmonton, and threatens my and my neighbours' farms and homes. This project would see one or more coal-gasification plants and an accompanying strip mine. The mine would, over its life, occupy 312 square kilometres of prime agricultural land. Along with these types of development come pipelines, power lines and other infrastructure that interferes with farming practices and has a negative impact on the landowners' quality of life. The energy industry has a huge economic impact in Alberta, but as the environmental and social costs of development are becoming more obvious, a growing number of Albertans are asking whether the long-term costs are not starting to outweigh the short-term benefits.

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