

# BURNABY MOUNTAIN, LHUKW'LHUKW'ÁYTEN

Named for the peeling arbutus tree, Lhukw'lhukw'áytén is a place where I have seen (and eaten) salmonberries, thimbleberries, oso plum, blackberries, and more. I've even seen a coyote and once, a bobcat near the Coast Salish Watch House, a twenty-minute walk from the Simon Fraser University campus on Burnaby Mountain.

The Tsleil-Waututh, the people of the inlet, did their own comprehensive environmental assessment of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion in 2015, outlining the unacceptable risks associated with the project. There is no consent, and no social license, for expanding a pipeline that traps us into accelerating climate crisis.

Principled opposition to the pipeline expansion from people who understand its dangers has led to hundreds of arrests, including mine. Still, at a crucial moment, just as Kinder Morgan withdrew, putting the pipeline expansion into question, the federal government purchased the pipeline, using taxpayer dollars to bail out this American multinational corporation and usher us into a new phase of the petrostate.

The Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations had illegitimate permits quashed by the Federal Court of Appeal in 2018. Canada threw more illegitimate permits around, removed the avenue of appeal, and continued their colonial bullying as usual, betraying our public interest while citing so-called “national interest.”

Canada is violating Indigenous law and natural law. Indigenous law was already here before newcomers arrived on these shores, and it respects natural law in a way that colonial laws are arrogantly and dangerously disconnected from.

The Coast Salish Watch House at the east gate of the Trans Mountain tank farm is guided by the Coast Salish law of Nawt'samat—one heart, one mind, one spirit—we are all related. Raised with blessings from Coast Salish Elders and the support of thousands of people who walked up to the mountain in March 2018, the Watch House is a reminder to align our spirits with natural law.

Years ago, I had the good fortune to hear Lee Maracle tell an audience at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre that when we are on Coast Salish land, we are Coast Salish citizens with a responsibility to respect this land and its original people, whether or not we understand this or have been taught this. We still have this responsibility. To me, this is natural law, this spiritual responsibility to care for that which gives us life. As Rueben George, manager of the Tsleil-Waututh Sacred Trust initiative, puts it, we have a reciprocal relationship with the land and water.

Another entry point into natural law is basic physics, chemistry, and biology, all of which are telling us to take climate destabilization seriously as a threat to life as we know it on this earth.

Unlike Canada, which is slipping and sliding all over its oily talk on reconciliation, I take the responsibility to be a good relative to the Coast Salish people seriously. The original peoples of this land have my respect. Unlike the pipeline and its pushers, this respect is something that cannot be purchased. It can only be freely given.

Thousands of trees that were needed to cool the city of Burnaby have already been clearcut in the last two years. Thousands more are in imminent danger of being killed, wrecking ecosystems that people have been trying to heal for decades, such as the Brunette River watershed. This is criminal negligence from a corporate-captured government that is leading us towards mass extinction more quickly through poor decision making.

A pandemic came to stop the madness, but Trans Mountain continued to push the pipeline anyways, violating

WorkSafe guidelines in their haste to destroy the land and spreading Covid-19 throughout its work camps.

I remember walking around the Burnaby tank terminal in 2018 and finding a flicker feather on the ground. Today, the flickers are long gone, pushed away by the din of heavy trucks and the loss of trees. I estimate that the average temperature along the Trans Mountain Trail has increased an average of two degrees due to the loss of tree coverage that used to cool the area. Noise levels these days are often through the roof.

Joggers, dogwalkers, and elementary school kids go past this suburban sacrifice zone day after day. Cognitive dissonance becomes normalized as trucks cart out dead trees and dirt that used to help keep the mountain alive and safe for the children to breathe its fresh air.

Up north, vicious rare cancers continue to spread in the communities poisoned by the tar sands.

Down south, the inlet remains in peril, as does the ocean that could acidify even faster if this pipeline expands.

The tree that used to house a red-tailed hawk's nest—gone.

Thousands of cedars gone in the last couple of years. Trucks taking them away, hiding the evidence of what the mountain once was. Turning what had been healthy soil into erosion and barren concrete disaster.

Eagle Creek used to gurgle down the mountain, swelling with rain and thinning with sun, buried into a culvert in the tank farm. Silent as dry death.

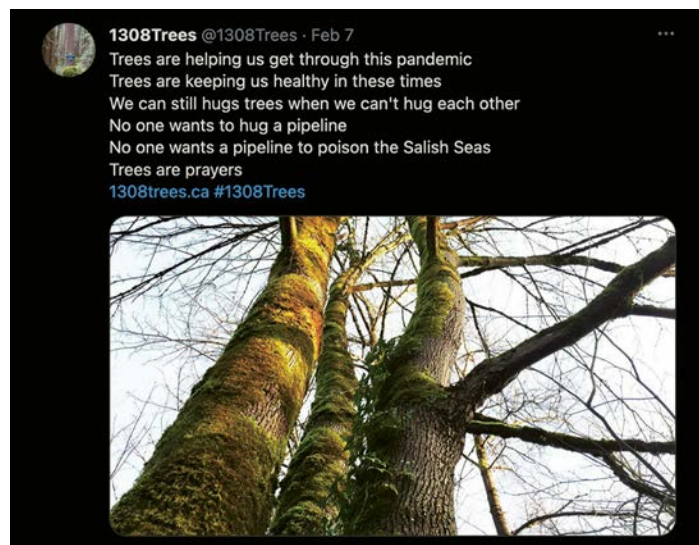
A pipeline expansion is a death trap, a one-way ticket to mass extinction. Even the Burnaby Fire Department has pointed out that, in the event of an accident or explosion, residents of Burnaby, including Simon Fraser University students, staff, and faculty, will be in immediate peril. Trudeau throws millions at Burnaby for a new fire hall so that some Liberal MPs can get re-elected in 2021, but fails to stop the threat at its source: the carbon bomb that no one can afford to be extracted from the tar sands.

Throughout the pipeline route, resistance remains strong in spirit. Secwepemc land defenders uphold their responsibilities to care for the land. Coldwater stands

guard for sacred rivers. The Tiny House Warriors rise up against invasive man camps. Courageous twin sisters stand against the twinning of the pipeline, holding up their family legacy to unsettle Canada.

They threaten to jail us for caring for the land, while they turn a blind eye to their violation of Indigenous law and natural law. Natural law is the bottom line, after all—not the imaginary profits that will never come to pass once this pipeline becomes a stranded asset. The petrostate stinks more and more.

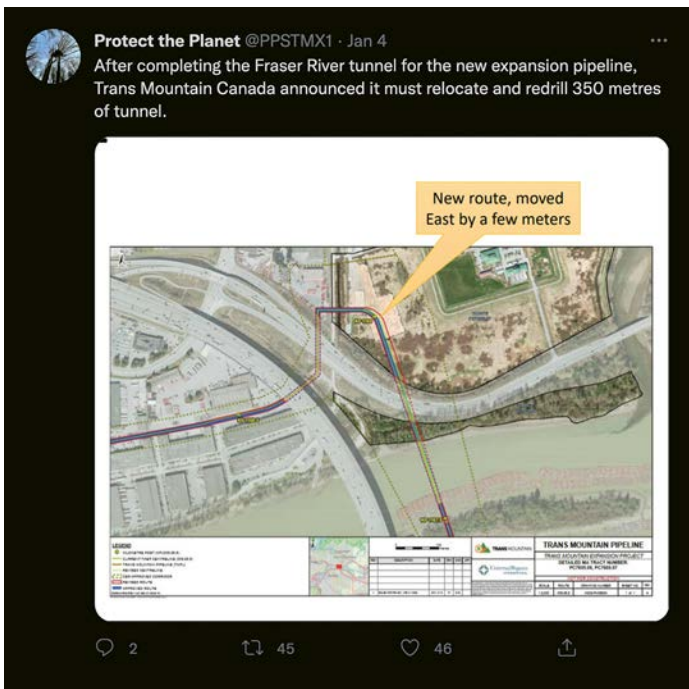
Injunctions are a racist tool of a racist state that prioritizes corporations and compulsive resource extraction rather than the multitude of kindred lives held sacred by Indigenous land protectors.



Prayer doesn't mean you stop trying everything else. If anything, you try everything, and more, by:

- Organizing to deny the social license for expanding pipelines that lock us into climate crisis and supporting fossil fuel divestment campaigns
- Making art to stop the pipeline. See the film *Coextinction* (2021) for instance
- Reaching hearts and minds through social media and storytelling. See Kayah George's articles in *Teen Vogue* ([www.teenvogue.com/story/banks-fund-climate-change](http://www.teenvogue.com/story/banks-fund-climate-change))

- Occupying trees (see [www.stoptmx.ca](http://www.stoptmx.ca))—Thank you to those courageous souls who have spent many months up in the trees, preventing them from being clear-cut
- Bird watching (thank you hummingbirds & Community Nest Finding Network—[www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/28/canada-hummingbird-halt-construction-pipeline](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/28/canada-hummingbird-halt-construction-pipeline))
- Monitoring the destruction inflicted by the pipeline and holding TMX accountable to the 156 conditions the Canada Energy Regulator is failing to enforce. When loopholes happen (as they do all the time), remind them that they are repeatedly and systemically violating regulations and bylaws. See for instance [www.mountainprotectors.org](http://www.mountainprotectors.org) and [www.1308trees.ca](http://www.1308trees.ca)
- Lobbying MPs and the federal government to stop the pipeline expansion. Don't let Prime Minister Trudeau and the Minister of Environment get away with greenwashing this acceleration toward mass extinction
- Proposing ideas to turn the tank farm into infrastructure that actually addresses the climate emergency. Those tanks could be repurposed as anaerobic digesters for instance (see [www.ecogas.co.nz](http://www.ecogas.co.nz) in Auckland, turning food waste into biofuel and fertilizer)



- Going to court, even doing jail time to show the injustice of this colonial system
- And more . . . Offer whatever gifts and skills you can. Your ideas and actions are welcome and needed here

After drilling under the Fraser River to expand the pipeline, Trans Mountain announced in January 2022 that it had to relocate and redrill 350 metres of tunnel ([www.stoptmx.ca](http://www.stoptmx.ca)). Threatening the river's health with its trial-and-error approach and disregard of its own consultants' advice, Trans Mountain has submitted a request to the Canada Energy Regulator (CER) to *expand* its drilling. Despite sinkholes, flood damage, and other dangerous signs, the CER rubber-stamped Trans Mountain's threat to the river, yet again endangering the river and all the lives that depend on it.

Instead of stopping this violence and reckless refusal to respect Indigenous knowledge, Justin Trudeau threw \$30 million at the City of Burnaby for a new fire hall to clean up the mess if an oil storage tank on Burnaby Mountain's tank farm explodes. But there isn't enough money in the world to protect Burnaby residents from disaster, or to clean the Salish Sea if a tanker leaks. Just ask the folks in Alaska after the Exxon Valdez disaster (see Riki Ott's *Not One Drop*).

When so-called government leaders fail us, we must still protect the land.

How many floods, forest fires, and heatwaves does it take for people to learn to listen to and respect the land? To remember our first mother, the earth, lays down the law that matters.

Natural law is more powerful than boom-and-bust, human-made power trips. I am grateful to live in a place where Coast Salish ancestors have the first word and will have the last word:

Nawt'samat.