F
dare stacks tower above the spruce and aspen forest of northeastern British Columbia unleashing huge plumes of flames. Across the region, these monoliths pour carbon pollution into the atmosphere 24/7. Now, liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants on the coast could add countless more. Communities and companies are seeking to reduce their reliance on polluting fossil fuels, so the industry is looking to exports for survival.

LNG Canada, Woodfibre LNG and Kitimat LNG, three approved LNG plants in the province, would require tens of thousands of new fracking wells to supply them with fracked gas. If the LNG plants are built, fracked gas production would need to more than double over the next eight years. Otherwise, if the facilities are not built, fracking would continue at current rates and then begin falling after 2032. Altogether, the proposed LNG plants would contribute around 15 megatonnes of carbon pollution in 2050 — even though B.C.’s new provincial government has promised “net zero” emissions by then. Frankly, the math just doesn’t add up. LNG Canada alone, a project which is already under construction, would emit more carbon pollution than every passenger vehicle in British Columbia once completed. Getting people out of their vehicles becomes futile when a single facility can undo those efforts.

On a global scale, there’s no doubt exporting LNG will lock-in decades more carbon pollution at a time when scientists are pleading for us to reverse course. Yet the province offered billions in subsidies to breathe life into this industry after most proposed LNG plants folded due to persistent low prices and oversupply. Premier John Horgan gave a huge package of tax breaks and subsidies to get LNG Canada off the ground. In fact, provincial fossil fuel subsidies grew 79 per cent since the NDP came to power. Despite all this public money, B.C. LNG is on shaky footing. It’s the most expensive proposed anywhere in the world and any small drop in projected demand renders it uneconomic.

Even the International Energy Agency wrote in 2019, “There is significant uncertainty as to the scale and durability of demand for imported LNG in developing markets around the world.” Last year, it said the pandemic “raises questions about the future prospects of the record amount of new liquefied natural gas export facilities approved in 2019.”

Even LNG Canada’s proponents are anxiously eyeing the exits. Shell and Petronas, the two largest partners, are cutting spending and reevaluating their gas assets with an eye instead to renewables. Meanwhile Japan, Korea and China, the target markets for B.C. LNG, have all announced new net-zero climate commitments well within the lifetime of the facility. That’s terrific news for the climate but should raise alarm for northern communities who are staking their prosperity on LNG. British Columbia needs a plan to ensure every corner of the province thrives as the world leaves fossil fuels behind.

A BRAND NEW FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY IN A CLIMATE CRISIS?

LNG Canada alone... would emit more carbon pollution than every passenger vehicle in British Columbia

Photo top: CNRL West Stoddert Gas Plant near Wonowon, B.C.
Photo bottom: Kelt Exploration Ltd. Inga Compressor Station near Wonowon, B.C.

Photo: mountain goat nanny and kid (John E. Marriott).
FRACKING THE FOOTHILLS

From the Rocky Mountains to the Alberta border, across an area the size of Nova Scotia in northeastern BC, more than 20,000 fracking wells poachmark the land. They draw half a million trucks worth of water each year from gentle, winding rivers and shallow lakes. Companies mix it with silica sand and a toxic chemical cocktail and blast it deep underground to shatter the shale rock beds below.

This is the Montney Basin — where fracked gas comes from. Forests and farmland have been lost to a vast industrial labyrinth of fracking infrastructure. Access roads, seismic lines, wells pads, water hubs, pipelines, compressor stations, gas plants and waste disposal in BC. Cover five times as much land as Alberta tar sands mines.

Home to Dunne-za, Dene Tha’ and Métis people, the region is part of Treaty 8 which guarantees hunting, fishing and trapping rights to Indigenous peoples. First Nations in the area have taken different approaches to protect their rights in the face of fracking.

Blueberry River First Nation is suing the provincial government for treaty violations because 73 per cent of their territory is within 250 metres of industrial disturbance. Doig River First Nation has established K’haa$t’uze Tribal Park to maintain and restore a 90,000-hectare tract of forest and wetland. Fort Nelson First Nation has a guardians program to monitor industrial activity and cumulative effects on their lands and waters.

While it’s clear fracking destroys land and poisons water, we’re just beginning to understand its effects on human health. Dr. Elyse Caron-Beaudoin, a toxicologist and researcher at the Université de Montréal, found traces of the known carcinogen benzene were 3.5 times higher in pregnant women in northeastern BC than the national average, and six times higher if they were Indigenous. Research like hers has led the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment to call for an end to fracking.

Trees or carbon capture cannot offset growing fracking emissions

Growing emissions from BC’s fracked gas industry would require impractical timelines to decarbonize everything else and demonstrable reliance on carbon offsets and capture.

The BC NDP keeps saying any LNG industry would need to fit within provincial climate targets. But they use creative carbon accounting to pretend their math adds up — like including only half of the LNG Canada project in Kitimat. Even as they promise a new goal of net-zero emissions by mid-century, their “miracle technologies” — one ancient and one futuristic — that pull pollution out of the air. They’ve been doing it for millions of years. But that doesn’t make it okay to continue pumping it out. Carbon offsets involve planting trees, but you’re only maintaining or restoring a natural carbon sink that’s always been there. No company or government can claim its activities are somehow not polluting the climate as a result. These payments have been sold as a way for Indigenous Nations to see economic benefit from protecting forests on their territories. We should be paying them for their long history of stewardship. But let’s not pretend it can help us meet our climate targets.

Meanwhile, another project getting much attention is the possibility of “direct air capture” of carbon dioxide. Carbon Engineering in Squamish runs a plant that pulls pollution out of the air and converts it into fuel. It’s where Horgan announced his new climate promises in the recent election. But the technology is in its infancy. B.C. would need dozens of these plants, each a thousand times the size of the current one, to balance out a growing fracking and LNG industry. I suppose the public will pay for that?

Meeting provincial climate targets will be hard enough. Let’s not set ourselves up to fail by relying on unproven, expensive schemes.
WHO’S FRACKING NORTHEAST BC?

Deep Well Royalty Credit
Carbon Tax Exemption (LNG):

Total: $686 million

SUBSIDIES KEEP GAS ON LIFE SUPPORT

Maybe the most frustrating thing about B.C.’s nascent LNG industry is that without colossal financial support from the provincial government, it would simply disappear. Gas companies receive billions of dollars in the form of tax breaks, subsidies and royalty credits. Largest among these subsidies are the royalty credit programs, which allow fracking companies to reduce the resource revenue they pay to the provincial government. B.C. has no less than seven different schemes to whittle away any benefits to the public purse.

Foremost is the deep well royalty credit, which was introduced back when fracking and LNG companies actually had to pay for their pollution like the rest of us, new facilities would be a non-starter. But they’re given special treatment under the provincial carbon tax. LNG Canada, likely to be the single largest polluter in the province, gets an exemption to the yearly increases. And the tax doesn’t apply at all to methane leaks from fracking operations in the northeast. Instead, along with infrastructures like roads and pipelines, the provincial government pays up to 50 per cent of the costs of projects to limit those emissions. Gas companies get “carrots”—we get the sticks.

Finally, Horgan offered more subtle subsidies to roll out the red carpet for LNG Canada. It can defer PST on construction costs, essentially an interest-free loan for decades, and it will pay discounted electricity prices to BC Hydro. Now, other LNG facilities can justifiably expect the same sweetheart deal. It’s pretty clear the gas industry only remains alive in B.C. at the expense of the public purse. As Asiacooked it up in 2012, this stubborn relations strategy, not a climate one. Since former premier Christy Clark and Liberals offered more subsidies to keep gas companies staving off climate ruin. The outlook for LNG only gets worse. Expect these companies to demand even more. It needs to end. All Horgan has to do for B.C. to get moving on climate action is force these fracking companies to stand on their own two feet and do his level best to prepare northern communities for the industry’s inevitable decline.

COOKING (THE CLIMATE) WITH GAS

Any idea B.C. LNG will help “get Asia off coal” is a public relations strategy, not a climate one. Since former premier Christy Clark cooked it up in 2012, this stubborn talking point has persisted through Liberal and NDP governments alike. But frankly there’s no evidence to support it. Gas is no longer competing with coal for new electricity. As Asia retires its coal plants, renewables are rushing in to meet demand. Wind and solar made up 90 per cent of new power generation in 2020. It’s because they’re cheaper. Fracked gas is fast becoming extremely expensive backup fuel for green energy and will soon be replaced by batteries. Even if B.C. fracked gas was likely to replace coal power, the lifetime emissions savings are marginal at best. It’s true burning gas produces less carbon pollution than coal for the same amount of power, but that benefit is lost by the time you lose a portion of it to leaky wells, burn a whole lot more to power compressor stations and liquefaction facilities and then transport what’s left across the Pacific.

On a global scale, this switch would not stave off climate ruin. Even if the world replaced all projected coal power with gas plants, the electricity sector would still be producing five times too much carbon pollution as it needs to maintain a safe climate. Instead, the UN Environment Program says we need to slash global gas production by three per cent each year to 2030.

There’s no getting around the stark reality that B.C.’s proposed LNG industry cannot exist in a world that maintains a safe climate. Rather than finding ever more complicated schemes to prop up gas development, the provincial government needs to get serious about bringing our emissions to zero as quickly as possible.
INVEST IN A POST-CARBON FUTURE FOR THE NORTH

For decades, governments in Victoria have used resource revenue from northern B.C. to build schools and hospitals and transit lines in major cities. Now, as the province looks towards an economy that doesn’t come at the expense of our climate, it’s time for the urban centres of the province to return the favour.

Let’s invest in a just transition for the North and end “rip it and ship it” reliance on fickle overseas markets. Across the region, there are companies and communities that are already well on their way to building an economy that will last.

Provincial leaders need to engage with northerners to determine what they need to thrive in a future without fracking or LNG. In particular, they must support Indigenous Nations’ efforts to foster an economy that aligns with their values.

It will take major investments in infrastructure and services to position northern communities for success.**

Nobody is going to open a software company in a community where the internet is spotty at best, the workforce doesn’t have the necessary skills and abandoned gas wells are breathing the community dead.

One provincial government agency, the Northern Development Initiative Trust, is already funding the kinds of community economic development projects that are laying the groundwork for a vibrant, thriving northern economy.** What would it look like to make this organization the vehicle for a transition off fossil fuels?

Places like Haida Gwaii, Smithers, Valemount and Tumbler Ridge have shown northern communities can chart their own sustainable economic development. With resources from the provincial government and support from the climate movement, northerners can build on those efforts across the region and envision a future without fossil fuels.

**Wilderness Committee. 2019.

TAKE ACTION

Write to your MLA or use our letter tool at EndFracking.ca. Urge them to:

- Direct the B.C. Oil and Gas Commission to stop giving out permits for new fracking wells
- Apply the full carbon tax to methane leaks and LNG plants
- End the deep well royalty credit and other subsidies to fracking companies
- Rule out the use of carbon offsets or carbon capture in CleanBC planning
- Work with the Northern Development Initiative Trust to make it a vehicle for a just transition to a post-carbon economy in the North.

To stay informed and up to date with our campaigns, sign up for updates: WildernessCommittee.org/Actions

WildernessCommittee • 1-800-661-WILD (9453)

YES!

HERE’S MY GIFT TO END FRACKING IN BC!

Enclosed is: □ $35 □ $60 □ $150 □ Other $

Fed. reg. charity #11929-3009-RR0001

NAME

PHONE

ADDRESS

CITY

PROVINCE

POSTAL CODE

EMAIL

□ Yes, send me updates via email

□ Email my tax receipt.

Your donation supports critical climate action work.

REFERENCES

- BC Oil and Gas Commission. 2020.
- Yes, I would like to receive updates via email.

To stay informed and up to date with our campaigns, sign up for updates: WildernessCommittee.org/Actions

WildernessCommittee • 1-800-661-WILD (9453)

HERES MY GIFT TO END FRACKING IN BC!

Enclosed is: □ $35 □ $60 □ $150 □ Other $

Fed. reg. charity #11929-3009-RR0001

NAME

PHONE

ADDRESS

CITY

PROVINCE

POSTAL CODE

EMAIL

□ Yes, send me updates via email

□ Email my tax receipt.

Your donation supports critical climate action work.

REFERENCES

- BC Oil and Gas Commission. 2020.
- Yes, I would like to receive updates via email.

To stay informed and up to date with our campaigns, sign up for updates: WildernessCommittee.org/Actions

WildernessCommittee • 1-800-661-WILD (9453)