

REPORT OF THE AFL ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

What a difference two years have made! The AFL Environment Committee has worked tirelessly over the course of many years to bring to the attention of our and their members the importance of environmental issues. As we all now know the issue of climate change and global warming has evolved from being a topic of discussion reserved for members of the environmental and scientific community to being front and centre in the social consciousness of the global community, with labour being no exception.

As a result of this awakened environmental consciousness, the members of the Environment Committee, while having achieved increased credibility, have also been challenged to retain our focus on a few major issues and not be derailed by the emergence of an ever-expanding list of environmental priorities. The Committee has worked to ensure that the affiliates of the Alberta Federation of Labour are kept informed on climate change and global warming and what we as activists and members of our communities can do to be proactive and positive in the development of environmental initiatives within our workplaces, locals and homes. The Committee continued their commitment to being visible to the broader labour movement by alternating the location of its meetings between the north and south of the province. In addition to meetings in Edmonton and

Calgary, the Committee also held a meeting in the Town of Hinton and made a site visit to the West Fraser Hinton Pulp and Paper Mill, having the opportunity to view first hand the processes that take place in the manufacturing of paper products and the environmental protection policies supported by the Mill. The tour covered the issue of the impacts of the pulp mill has on the air and water as those apply to their operating license. The committee members were appalled at the discharges into the water system which falls within current Alberta Protection Guidelines. Committee members also partook of a nature walk along the Hinton Beaver Board Walk, a community initiative located within the town limits, which winds through a protected wildlife reserve, including beaver dams and natural wild grasses.

The Committee visited an area by Highway 40 which passes through the Tech Coal Mine located south of Hinton. This tour witnessed the large numbers of big game located in this area as the animals have become quite tame because of the park-like atmosphere. This is an environmental issue because the wildlife populations have increased to the point where they may damage the ecosystem by over grazing. This situation can cause extra stressors to these animals, which can result in sickness and disease infecting the herds. Land managers and Sustainable Resource Development have finally

recognized the problem and meetings are taking place to deal with this problem.

We also had the chance to visit areas within the West Fraser Forest Management Area. We witnessed active logging sites and subsequent reforested areas as well. This gave the Committee a better understanding of forestry practices. The Committee would like to thank the unions who support our work for allowing us to acquire the information through such tours that adds to labour's knowledge and understanding of the complexity of environmental issues in the province.

The AFL Environment Committee met ten times since the 2007 Convention. During this time your committee carried out the mandates from the last Convention, made recommendations to the AFL and worked to ensure that a balanced environmental perspective from labour was presented at the Provincial and at the Federal level.

As many of you are aware an environmentally responsible agenda is not always popular with industry in the province of Alberta or even with the provincial government. It is always a challenge for labour-based environmental activists to overcome the mindset of many workers who believe that environmental responsibility leads to job loss. This is especially evident in the oil and gas sector which can be found everywhere throughout the province.

Affiliates of the AFL still have a lot of work ahead of us to overcome the uncertainty of our membership and educate them so that they understand

and support our projects and programs. It does not have to be a question of jobs versus the environment: it needs to be a question of environmentally responsible work activities.

To enable the Environmental Committee to stay focused and productive we concentrated our efforts on a few defined issues. This practice allowed us to undertake activities that allowed us a chance of being successful. During the term of this Committee since the 2007 Convention we have continued to stay abreast of current environmental issues including the softwood lumber dispute, the water for life strategy, and coal bed methane developments, and issues related to the Kyoto Accord. We are also continuing to follow developments in the oil and gas sectors through the northern part of the province, especially around Fort McMurray.

Our working relationships with various environmental activist organizations continue to flourish as we network with groups such as Alberta Environment Network (AEN), the Clean Air Strategic Alliance (CASA) and the Society for Environmentally Responsible Livestock Operations (SERLO) and the Forest Resources Advisory Group (FRAG), and continuing follow-up from the Public Advisory Committee from Hinton Pulp as well.

A first for this committee is that we now have a voice on the CLC Environment Committee as Sister Roxanne Dreger from UNA has been appointed to that committee and Sister Melissa Field from HSAA will serve as our alternate. This will certainly give us some voice on the national level, where

they will join with Sister Rh'ena Oake who has been named to the CLC committee from CUPE.

Members of the Committee have actively worked to expand its knowledge by attending seminars and conferences. Committee members have represented the AFL and the AEN at the "Fixed on Nitrogen" conference (that studied the impact of man-made nitrogen saturation), the CPANS climate change conference, the AEN cross-caucus and annual general conferences, the Alberta Environment biennial environmental conference, two information meetings with the Canadian Nuclear Workers Council, the AUMA municipal sustainability planning seminar; and it is planning on sending two delegates to the international congress for local environmental initiatives (ICLEI) meeting in Edmonton this June.

With environmental issues taking higher awareness (until the recent credit crisis), the Committee found itself in a position to become proactive in its work. Instead of always responding to emerging issues, the Committee has set itself an action plan that, if supported by Convention, will see it engage government on issues related to water, waste materials, alternative power, and energy conservation. One of its biggest challenges will be working out the details for paperless meetings. The Committee has suggested that all meetings be "paperless" whenever possible; that all members use laptops and memory sticks; and that all matters relating to the Committee be provided electronically in advance.

By far its biggest initiative is the recommendation that the AFL practise what we preach by offering carbon offsets to delegates attending this convention and recognizing delegates and unions who do. The Committee is also recommending that the AFL take a leadership role by committing to purchase carbon offsets when officers and staff travel on AFL business and to offer this option to activists attending all AFL events.

Your Environment Committee is looking forward to the upcoming overhaul of the AFL website which will allow us to educate trade unionists to understand the relationship between environmental issues and trade union issues.

CONCLUSION

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the work of Sister Sandi Mutter who left the Committee part way through the term.

In conclusion, the next two years promises to be as engaging and busy as the last two years. We are confident our work can start a paradigm shift in how the AFL carries out its work. We encourage affiliate unions to send representatives for this Committee that are eager to meet help make the changes that can show labour really can be the leaders in dealing with environmental issues.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Committee,

AFL ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE, 2007 – 2009

Rh'ena Oake, Co-Chair	CUPE 1169
Eric Rosendahl, Co-Chair & AFL Council Liaison	CEP 855
Tom Olenuk, Secretary & AFL Council Liaison	EDLC
Jo Chelick	PSAC/UTE 30025
Roxann Dreger	UNA
Jean Endruschat	CUPW-Edm.
Melissa Field	HSAA
Richard Slabysz	CUPE 30
Jim Selby	AFL
Nancy Furlong (information)	AFL
Gil McGowan (information)	AFL

Committee Members who served a partial term:

Sandi Mutter	TWU
Bobby Schneider	TWU