

Keepers of the Water VI Commit to Protect Water

September 29, 2012, Fort Nelson, BC: First Nations water guardians, watershed organizations, and concerned citizens have gathered in Fort Nelson to work together to protect the health of our common waters for current and future generations. Everyone is invited to sign onto the Indigenous Declaration for Protecting Mother Earth and Water, endorsed at the Keepers of the Water VI Gathering, hosted by the Fort Nelson First Nation.

Led by Indigenous Peoples who hold a sacred trust to ensure the integrity of all waters, the Declaration affirms that water is a sacred gift, an essential element that sustains and connects all life. All people share an obligation to ensure that water in all of its forms is conserved with regard to the needs of all living things today and for future generations tomorrow.

Immediate dangers posed to our shared watersheds include the cumulative effects of fracking, mining, oil and gas extraction, climate change, pollution, deforestation, as well as human conflict. In the face of impending and ongoing water wars, the Keepers of the Water assert that peace is both possible and necessary, through cooperation focused on the protection of our shared commons, Mother Earth.

The Keepers proclaim that water is not a commodity to be bought or sold. At the same time, the large-scale industrial withdrawal and pollution of water can be priced to reflect the real costs to and substantial diminishment of living watersheds. The Keepers work toward comprehensive watershed stewardship. Land use planning to safeguard water sources and maintain ecosystem integrity must be implemented before industrial allocations or development decisions.

All peoples have a fundamental right and responsibility to water that must be recognized nationally and internationally, and incorporated into domestic law and policy. This declaration reinforces the United Nations' Declaration of the Human Right to Water and Sanitation. The UN declaration has been successfully used to protect the rights of Indigenous people in Botswana, who had their water rights violated and then reinstated by their government.

The Indigenous Declaration addresses the need for cooperation at all levels: individuals, organizations, local communities, regions, governments, industry, international and global networks. This cooperation must begin by respecting Indigenous and local communities who play a vital role in water stewardship because of their generations of knowledge, traditional practices and relationships to the land. The Declaration is a way to create awareness and build alliances and partnerships with all peoples, who share both need and respect for the earth's waters. For information, see <http://www.keepersofthewater.ca>.

In order to implement the declaration, the Keepers have formed a working group, whose membership is fair, transparent, and collective. For more information or for an interview, contact Keepers of the Water VI: info@keepersofthewater.ca