



When the environment  
becomes a game

## Description

# Understanding the corporate world's true motives behind environmental issues

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In light of President Trump's attack on environmental safeguards in the United States, it befits us to better understand the corporate world's true motives behind environmental issues.

Man's obsession for economic growth and political dominance goes far beyond his belief in democratic procedure, his concern for other cultures, or his defence of the natural environment.

When environmental decisions come under critical scrutiny, the official standard procedure is to argue economics and "politicized" science. Failing that, a popular fallback position is to question the competence of critics. Much like defending wildlife culls <sup>12</sup>, proponents seek to demonize the targeted species or individuals. The latter has worked well, not only with wolves, coyote, cormorants, seals and wood bison but also with people.

## Conservation versus political conservation

It is best to understand from the offset the difference between "true conservation" and "political conservation" <sup>1</sup>. Simply put, true conservation is founded on three principles; preservation, protection and the restoration of the natural environment and wildlife. The purpose is twofold: **to seek knowledge and to preserve**.

In the case of political conservation, the principles remain, but the format is often skewed by political and corporate interests <sup>2</sup>. This is a particular configuration where economic or political advantages are used, not for knowledge or preservation, but **to legitimize a desired end** <sup>2</sup>.

This can be achieved in various ways without changing the body of facts or truths presented in the final report. The most common way is through "creative writing" – *it's not what you say, it's how you say it*.



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## Are reports biased?

It's also a good idea to know how to read a Government or corporate report. If possible avoid the published study and opt for a facsimile of the author's original draft. Most wildlife biologists are reluctant to relinquish their drafts but it is imperative to obtain a facsimile that has not been politicized. By that I mean a report that has not been homogenized, pasteurized or sanitized. Take note of who is financing the work and look carefully at the **terms of reference**<sup>9</sup>. Has the study been peer reviewed? These suggestions go to objectivity.

## Scientific objectivity

As for scientific objectivity, I remind you that there is nothing more objective than a railway train. It's made of steel, wood and other compounds – has no political leaning, history nor agenda. It *will*, however, follow the track laid down before it, and in political conservation, these tracks are known as the “terms of reference”.

Other effective ways for authorities to protect their interests, with impunity, is to control how the research is to be financed as well as the timeline. They do this by ensuring an unrealistic date for completion, and by committing only a portion of the required funding. This is by design and forces the researchers to seek financial assistance from the only other sources who might be interested – in other words, the industries that risk being impacted by the study.

Industry's involvement comes at a cost and that might include their influence on the “terms of reference”. They might also expect some input on how the synopsis is to be written. This can be done effectively, and without changing the essence of the study, by the manner in which the summary is crafted.

If the work does not reflect their objectives, officials simply argue that insufficient resources and time constraints did not allow for a more comprehensive analysis. Depending on who commissions the study, it is possible that the research document never sees the light of day.

## It's all a game

It's a game much like chess, and the game is played with finesse, cunning and sometimes anonymity, as by the Outdoor Caucus in Canada, a covert group of elected MPs and un-elected Senators whose mandate is to block any bill that might protect animals. This un-elected caucus recently defeated Bill C-246, tabled by Lib. Nathaniel Erskine-Smith and called the *Modernizing Animal Protection Act*.



Anti pipeline protest – Image: William Chen [CC BY-SA 4.0], via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

## Disregard for the electorate

One popular tactic used to discourage people seeking information from the Government is to force them to go through “Access to information”. The individual making the request is introduced to a labyrinth of documents that must be completed as part of the request.

As for politicians, they learn very quickly how the game is played, and even the most seasoned among them can be swept up in a tangled maze of political manoeuvres and favours. They learn how people vote and how urban and rural voters differ. For this reason, many voters are disenfranchised and don't even bother to exercise their right to vote.

*The Broadbent Institute* claims that in one election, the Liberal party won a majority government of 184 seats out of 338. This cannot be called a true majority, because 60% of voters cast their preference for one of the other parties (a good argument for proportional representation), but the present system gives the ruling party overwhelming control of the House of Commons. It doesn't take long for politicians to understand who matters and who doesn't.

During the last Federal campaign, Justin Trudeau promised that this would be the last “first past the post” Federal election. He changed his tune when he came to understand how the game is played. Donald Trump won the Presidential race because he recognized the stratagem and quickly mastered the tactics.

The game goes much deeper and has infiltrated some departments such as the Ministry of Natural Resources <sup>10</sup>. The latter represents only 30% of Canadians <sup>8</sup> to the detriment of another 70% who do not view wildlife as a resource to be exploited <sup>1</sup>. This is a clear case of sacrificing democracy in the interest of politics.



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## The general public

Before going on, I must emphasize that targeting government and industry alone for controversial animal or environmental issues is self-serving and hypocritical. The general public, including myself, must accept the lion’s share of the blame. Our purchasing power and social conditioning are at the root of this cancer known to us as consumerism. We have convinced ourselves that we must have the biggest and best that technology has to offer, whether we need it or not.

We know of our ethical contradictions, ranging from our Federal trade dealings (military equipment) to institutionalized animal exploitation, yet we stop well short of demanding changes. How many of us know the impact of our own carbon footprint or the human carrying capacity of the country we live in? How many of us, who claim to care about the wellbeing of animals, attend annual events such as rodeos where horses are killed<sup>3</sup>, and shark killing Derbies (Nova Scotia) sponsored by Fisheries and Oceans Canada?

It was not many years ago when the James Bay Hydro Electric Project was in full development that some 10,000 caribous drowned trying to cross a river. This occurred when Hydro Quebec had deviated the water flow. When asked about the loss, one Quebec official was heard to say that caribou were “stupid”<sup>4</sup>.

Does our conditioning blind us from these realities? Is our compassion limited by our capacity to rationalize? Are the parameters of human ethics dictated by our dietary preferences? Canada’s covert *Outdoor Caucus* has been exposed, but how many of us will demand transparency, open government and proportional representation?

## Growth versus Development

Over the years we have heard arguments about climate change, the impact of fossil fuels (oil, bitumen, gas, fracking, coal, even wood) on both the natural and economic environments. We now recognize that Big Agriculture contributes more to climate change than fossil fuels.

There is no denying the importance of sustainable economic development, but let’s not confuse development with growth which is finite. This is not a question of semantics, but rather of clarity.



Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge – Image: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [Public domain], [via Wikimedia Commons](#)

## A flawed approach

As with all arguments, the economic one is flawed. *If your primary case for protecting something is economic, and someone offers you a greater financial incentive to relinquish that protection, where does that leave you?*

We see an example of this in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge, set aside by President Jimmy Carter as part of his legacy. President Carter's initiative was one of true conservation: to seek knowledge and preserve for future generations. Alaska is home to about 70% of the world's Brown bears and a wide variety of other wild fauna and flora. Economic returns from increased tourism, research grants for students from around the world, and seasonal jobs for Alaskans were a deciding factor moving forward with President Carter's legacy.

Regrettably, when oil companies were able to show a greater economic return in developing zone 1002, the deciding factor in fragmenting the refuge became economic and thus political.

Donald Trump has since removed many, if not all, environmental safeguards implemented to protect wildlife within National Heritage sites <sup>11</sup>. Money, politics, power, they all override any issue having only intrinsic value. Even science can be manipulated to whatever end the powers have set their minds to.

## Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora – C.I.T.E.S.

C.I.T.E.S. (aka "The Convention") and other exploitive groups (commercial hunters, fishers, trappers, furriers, etc.) have based their arguments on economic and political conservation.



Though the agreed text for C.I.T.E.S. was ratified in 1973, the Convention came into force only in 1975 (43years ago). Ironically, the world has lost more species in the past 40 years than at any time in our history. Nowhere is the dichotomy; if it were not for the Convention, we would be in far worse shape.

'If your primary case for protecting something is economic, and someone offers you a greater financial incentive to relinquish that protection, where does that leave you?'

## Conflict of interest

For all its efforts and goodwill, C.I.T.E.S. is crippled by conflicts of interest. Its maxim is to protect in order to exploit. A lawyer can no more defend **and prosecute** the same suspect in a criminal case than C.I.T.E.S. can defend **and exploit** animals simultaneously – the Convention is a political body protecting economic interests. Given the manner in which C.I.T.E.S. is configured, political conservation can't work, but given our long-established mindsets, political conservation is the only application that can work (reverse listings).

## As for Kinder Morgan

Many would ask, why shouldn't "**we**" take full advantage of available resources? Because the "we" goes far beyond humankind and because the rewards don't justify the **consequences**.

## Alberta and Norway

Comparisons have been made as to how both these jurisdictions managed their Heritage Funds. On the surface, it would appear that Norway's plan showed greater return with a current National fund of one trillion dollars, or 177,000\$ per Norwegian. The population of Norway (2017) was 5.282 million citizens<sup>8</sup>. By contrast, the return for each Albertan from their Fund is 4,300\$ per citizen, with a population in 2017 of 4.306 million people. There are of course other data explaining the overall economic return over the years (though the latter seems to support the Norwegian plan). My reason for not including that information is because I don't see the environment as a line entry on a profit and loss statement (P&L).

## Dollars and cents, where's the sense?

The often-overlooked problem with using economics in issues such as this one is that it reduces the value of the living environment to dollars, Euros, pounds or yens. Many of us see the living environment on a wider canvas – one that sees global problems, including famine, war, displacement, loss or fragmentation of habitat<sup>5</sup> loss of species, health and yes, sustainable economic development as integral parts of this canvas.



Pipeline – Image: [Maureen](#) via [StockPholio.com](#)

## Native People

Others argue that the proceeds from the Kinder Morgan pipeline will benefit native people whose lands the pipeline will cross.

Keeping in mind residential schooling, forced relocations and cultural suppression, you will understand my skepticism with this argument. As for treaties, only recently have they been recognized by the courts as contracts. That said, it will be interesting to know how this affects land claims that are currently being negotiated, and how it will impact on all prior land settlements. As for the pipeline benefitting Native Canadians, the jury is still out.

## Déjà vu

I've listened to the corporate case regarding the Kinder Morgan project, as well as others, and I ask myself; *where have I heard these arguments before?*

Does anyone remember the tobacco lobby? It too had experts; it too had economists, scientists, and even medical doctors testifying on its behalf. It too argued about jobs – but even jobs have a cost. Quebec used taxpayers' money to defend the production of asbestos, a product that was (at that time) illegal to sell in Canada. The fact that asbestos is still traded on the international market, and is a carcinogen, doesn't seem to concern the government – economics do.

Canada sells Light Armored Vehicles (L.A.Vs) to countries, supposedly our allies, who use them against their own citizens. When asked why Canada *changed its laws* to enable this trade, we were told, "jobs". I can't help but wonder how many jobs justify the killing of innocent people. Another elected official dared to say, "*if we don't sell them L.A.Vs, someone else will*"



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## Same old, same old

The recurring corporate theme is based on economics and growth but little that deals with the cost – read: consequences – of this growth. There are other considerations that have and will continue to impact on the natural world, and that includes humankind.

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## Bitumen

Bitumen contains 102 times more copper, 21 times more vanadium, 11 times more sulphur, 11 times more nickel, 6 times more nitrogen and 5 times more lead than conventional crude. Its combustion efficiency is significantly reduced due to bitumen having a much lower ratio of hydrogen to carbon. The excess carbon and levels of sulphur, nitrogen and heavy metal contaminants are pollutants, which are not destroyed but dispersed by processing. With respect to the tar sands, it is said that of the 173 billion barrels of oil embedded in the tar sands deposits, these also contain some 8 billion barrels of sulphur and similar residues of nitrogen and toxic heavy metals.

Bitumen makes up 10 percent of tar sands oil deposits and requires the burning of considerably more fossil fuels during extraction and processing. This is required to convert billions of tonnes of a thick black murky substance making it fluid enough for the pipeline. The 820 kilograms of greenhouse gas emissions released by the extraction, upgrading and refining of a barrel of syncrude are among the highest in the world.<sup>6</sup>

## Economic obscenity

When eight men control as much wealth as the poorest half of the world’s population (*Oxfam- World Economic Forum, 2017*), and the top one percent (70,000,000) control over 50% of the world’s wealth, you can understand why many are looking at the wider canvas.

The corporate case **has economic merit** and cannot be dismissed, but it does lack balance and this can be seen through our inefficiencies, climate disruption and dramatic loss of habitat and species. Perhaps had we invested the Kinder Morgan funds in new energy technologies, it would have been more beneficial for the planet and future generations.

## Many perspectives

I have to ask myself, should we risk our environment on Bitumen (a viscous mixture of hydrocarbons), a 60-year-old pipeline, or even on non-renewable fossil fuels when climatologists and others feel we should be committing our energies towards renewable energy sources (*Climate accord – Paris France*)? As to the general public, I’ll admit that most could care less about the environment, preferring the personal benefits of consumerism, while others are too busy trying to survive, and they foolishly put their faith in those having political or economic agendas.

The real money from the Kinder Morgan initiative will go to people whose T4’s list bonuses, stock options and deferred stock investments that will inflate off-shore accounts, and far outpace anything the average hard hat would earn.



Seal covered in oil from the Exxon Valdez – Image: [ARLIS Reference](#) via [StockPholio.net](#)

## Are the dangers of spills overstated?

Consider this; though declining in numbers, over the past three decades some 28,666 oil spills have been reported in Alberta alone (Leslie Young, Global News). Not reported in the data is another 31,453 spills including everything from salt water to liquid petroleum. As for the National Energy Board, 53% of spills originating from wells, pumping stations (under 2 cubic meters) don't get counted<sup>7</sup>. Though these spills are very small, they still cause damage and should be included in the total. Alberta has roughly 400,000 kilometres of pipeline and pumps 2.5 million barrels every day<sup>7</sup>.

## Understanding other views

And finally, I ask myself, should I make a greater effort to understand proponents of this project, some of whom make little to no effort to understand that the economic approach has a cost, and that cost is one more gamble our environment cannot afford?

## Be true to yourself

Why the controversy over the Kinder Morgan pipeline?

1. Because it is time that we distance ourselves from fossil fuels.
2. Because little to no consideration is given to the impact an accident will have on wildlife. Despite what you believe, the effects of the Exxon Valdez accident in Alaska and the British Petroleum spill in the Gulf of Mexico are still being felt.
3. Because the use of bitumen<sup>9</sup> will have a greater impact on the environment than conventional oil – and this *regardless*



of whether there is an accident or not.

4. Because the Federal Government is not acting in a transparent manner when it comes to the financing of this project. This includes the cost of expanding and upgrading an ageing system.

As for me, I do try to understand other views and I'm the first to admit that I'm a walking "contradiction", but then I've never met anyone who wasn't. I am deeply concerned over the nuclear industry, I worry about the number of birds killed by wind power and the impact that burning wood has on the environment. I enjoy all the benefits of the petrochemical industry, including oil. To those who feel that these contradictions lessen the validity of my concerns, I ask them to remember where I'm coming from. Right or wrong, I am an animal advocate, a defender of the innocent, including humans.

Businesses have their corporate lawyers, their tax consultants and offshore accounts. Economists have their dartboards, and politicians their quangos, house immunity, indexed pensions, party whips and aspirations to the Senate. The man on the street relies on his never-ending ability to rationalize and covets the temporary comforts of consumerism. As for those who defend animals, we are expected to wear hair shirts, and always plead the animal case from a position of extreme compromise. The late Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King once said: 'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.'

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## A question of definition

As with most disagreements, this is a question of definition: economic growth versus economic development – political conservation versus true conservation. This is a question of values, a question of where you source your information, and more importantly, how you filter it.

No doubt, proponents of industry will prevail, because money always does. As for myself, I will not deny what defines me, nor turn my back on 52 years defending the innocent for the sake of jobs, short-term political gain or corporate profit.

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\*First submitted in August 2018

1. True conservation applies to all species of flora and fauna equally. Political conservation applies to species having some kind of capital value or to species impacting on those having capital value.
2. True conservation means to seek knowledge and preserve. Political conservation means to legitimize an end. The Government of Canada claims there are over 5 million Harp seals in off the East Coast but refuses to table where these figures originate. They also refuse to clearly state the annual cost to Canadians for subsidizing the annual commercial seal hunt.
3. Number of horses are killed at rodeos. Between 1986 and 2011, *The Humane Society of Canada* documented more than 40 animal deaths linked to the Calgary Stampede. In 2008, eight horses died in chuckwagon racing at the Saskatoon Exhibition and another four horses died at a rodeo in northern Alberta (also chuckwagon races). In 2009, four more animals were killed at the Calgary Stampede, followed by six more horses in 2006. There are deaths almost every year, either on the course or as a result of injuries sustained during training for the race or during the race itself.
4. Media in Québec and the *National Geographic Society*.
5. Displacement deals with victims of war being uprooted from their homelands and made to live as refugees. Loss of Habitat is the same thing but refers to wildlife. The results are the same.
6. Paul McKay *Outside the Bitumen Bubble*, April 10, 2018, The Energy Mix.
7. I refer to two sources regarding the number of oil spills that have occurred in Alberta: the *Energy Resources Conservation Board*

and the *National Energy Board* which governs the bigger cross border pipelines.

8. Norway isn't the only country to have managed their resources differently from Alberta. Others include the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Kazakhstan, as well as Kuwait.
9. The terms of reference used in the *Royal Commission on Sealing and the Sealing Industry in Canada* asked that the contributors prove the negative impact seals had on the industry. No mention of the positive impact it might have within the system.
10. Only 8.4% of Canadians hunt while 85.5% prefer non-hunting activities (*Nature Canada*). The 85.5% who do not hunt are not invited to MNR Consultation sessions. See a Government of Canada survey entitled *The Importance Canadians place on Wildlife*.
11. The *Alaska National Wildlife Refuge*, and now possibly the *Yellowstone National Park* among others, have or will be delisted by President Donald Trump.
12. Wildlife culls are a flagrant example of man's failure to live with or understand nature. It is confirmation that we manage wildlife not for need but for our own benefit. Nature manages itself through prey/predator balance.

Feature image: Tar sands, courtesy of Greenpeace

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**Georges R. Dupras** has advocated for animals for over fifty years. A member of the *International Association for Bear Research and Management (IBA)*, a *Director of the Animal Alliance of Canada (AAC)*, *Quebec Representative of Zoocheck Canada* and *past Board member of the Canadian SPCA*, he worked on the original *Save the Seal* campaign in 1966 that culminated in the founding of the *International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW)* in 1969. *Georges Dupras* has published two books, *Values in Conflict* and the eBook *Ethics, a Human Condition*, and currently lives in *Montreal, Canada*.



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