

## U.K. funds Cree nation to fight oilsands Manchester bank donates \$100,000 toward lawsuit

BY VINESH PRATAP, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JULY 8, 2009



Paul Monaghan, left, of the Co-Operative Group bank in Manchester, England, shakes hands with Beaver Lake Cree Nation Chief Al Lameman at the Beaver Lake powwow on Friday.

**Photograph by:** Chris Schwarz, Edmonton Journal

A consumer co-operative based in the United Kingdom is joining a small First Nations community in Alberta in its fight to stop the expansion of oilsands development in the province.

The Co-operative Group, a Manchester-based bank, says it will continue to support the 900-member Beaver Lake Cree Nation in Lac La Biche as it prepares to take on the Alberta and Canadian governments in a lawsuit.

Over the weekend, Co-operative Group donated \$100,000 to support the lawsuit. That came on top of the \$90,000 donated last March. The group said it plans to make another donation in August.

As the world's largest consumer-owned business, Co-operative Group has ethics-based guidelines about how to use customers' money. Colin Baines, ethics adviser for the organization, said the oilsands have become a target because members are concerned about the environmental impact of development there.

The Beaver Lake Cree filed a lawsuit in May 2008, contesting proposed developments in areas they say their ancestors used for hunting, trapping and fishing.

Jack Woodward, lawyer for the Beaver Lake Cree Nation, said it has 17,000 approved projects listed in its claim against federal and provincial governments.

"If all those projects go ahead, there will no longer be a meaningful right to hunt and fish," he said.

Treaty 6, signed more than 130 years ago, granted reserve land to the Beaver Lake Cree Nation. The community said its members' rights to continue hunting, trapping and fishing for their livelihoods were

also included in the 1876 treaty, but that these rights will be compromised by the planned oilsands developments.

Last month, lawyers for Alberta filed a pre-trial motion, asking the court to strike most of the band's lawsuit as "frivolous" and an "abuse of process." They said the dispute should have been solved through an appeals process with the Energy Resources Conservation Board, not at court.

Woodward said a date to hear the motion hasn't been set, but will probably come this fall.

The Co-operative Group said it understands it is "unrealistic" to ask development to stop completely.

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