

The Big Zit

By Eric Schimek

As odd as it may seem, my isolated corner of the North woods is part to the largest excavation project in human history. You can see the pipeline from google maps:

[The pipeline](#)

The pipeline is coming down from the Alberta oil sands, through Superior, down to Chicago, then branching out towards the rest of the US and parts of Canada. It will be carrying low-grade crude oil.

Here's a [close-up satellite photo](#) of the project.

These pools are holding tanks of oily, tarry slurry. They are extremely toxic.

The shocking thing is that you can already see these holding pools from space. It is a small white blotch on the image below, the scale of which can be seen by the two labeled landmarks (Washington State and Lake Superior).

This Alberta oil sands project is the last gasp of an industry that can no longer replenish its reserves. It is energy inefficient, heavily subsidized (through low taxes), and environmentally monstrous.

[A great video series on the Tar Sands, and its affect on the community.](#)

The Alberta oil sands project is an attempt to, literally, 'boil the oil out of the soil'. Say that ten times fast! The process tears the land apart, and consumes a lot of energy and water. The landscape photographs of this extraction process are horrific. The energy return on investment (EROI) is somewhere around 2 to 1, which is quite low. The process boils away around 1 barrel of water for every barrel of oil extracted.

Despite a long history of failed investments to monetize the oily soil, investors are still being draw to this project due to high government subsidies and the relative safety of oil extraction in Canada. The amount of oil sands present in the Alberta soil are simply huge, the 20% that is close enough to the surface to extract is on par with Middle Eastern oil reserves.

These oil sands, along with coal liquefaction, are being marketed as replacements for Middle Eastern oil. Current plans are to expand this project, making an even larger impact on the environment in Alberta.

[Click here for more photos](#)

The scale of this scar is simply monstrous, and threaten to turn the boreal forests of Northern Alberta into a chemical slurry.

Erik Schimek is a computer geek with a background in history, political science, educational theory and public administration. You can follow some of his musings at [Shiny New Keychain Blogspot](#).