



Erica Dossa of Bozeman, MT, Peter Dolan of Great Falls, MT and an unnamed activist locked together with three others to protest Big Oil at the governor's office on July 12

PHOTO BY MURPHY WOODHOUSE

PROTEST RULES

Cascadians protest Big Oil in Montana BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

The last night of the Earth First! 2011 Round River Rendezvous was one of the quietest nights of the almost weeklong gathering. EF!ers, members of Rising Tide and other environmental activists slept at their campsites in the Lolo National Forest, awaiting a 5 am wake-up call for an action against Big Oil that would use chants, signs and “sleeping dragons.”

Where, when and what that action would be was known to only some of the action's organizers that morning. In the end, Johannes Pedersen of Eugene was one of the six protesters to lock himself in front of the Montana governor's office in Helena, and he was one of five arrested during the protest.

The Rendezvous, aka the Rondy, took place in Montana but drew about 250 people from Oregon and across the U.S., and from as far away as Spain and Australia. The 20 or so Cascadians — activists from the Pacific Northwest bioregion — were a strong presence at the gathering.

Climate change and destructive fossil fuel extraction, along with logging, don't affect just one state. “The tar sands are a county, state, regional, countrywide and international issue,” said Emma Bea of Rising Ride North America.

“The Silvertip Pipeline spill is a precursor of what is to come,” said Northern Rockies Rising Tide's Max Granger of the dangers of new oil pipelines and massive loads of oil extraction equipment coming to Montana.

After days of workshops and training sessions, participants knew the action would target the tar sands route and Big Oil. They knew about fossil fuel extraction from fracking to coal. They knew their legal rights and how to practice civil disobedience and direct action as safely and ethically as possible.

The last day of the Rendezvous was spent in training for some, and for others in making signs and banners and laying out strategy. “Good things come out of the Rondy,” said Bea. “It brings us all together, and it's a place where a lot of strategizing happens.”

Pedersen said, “A well-done action has hours and hours spent in meetings planning it.” It's much harder, he said, to be an organizer than it is to simply be the person locking down. Pedersen was the man being arrested on the cover of *EW* May 12, having locked himself by the neck to a car in protest of the Seneca biomass plant and that company's logging of old-growth forests.

An hours-long direct action training session at the camp focused not only on

the nuts and bolts of civil disobedience — tricks cops use to get you to admit guilt (even if you're not guilty), how to make your body heavy as the police drag you away, how to lock your body to others using only arms and legs in order to prevent loggers from cutting down a tree with sitters in it — but also on how to talk to police, passersby or workers who may be affected by the action, and how to use body language that is friendly and nonconfrontational.

“I would like to remain silent, uh huh, uh huh. I would like to see my lawyer, oh yeah,” went a chant for remembering how to deal with police officers who have detained you. The leader of the legal training session pointed out that it doesn't hurt to defuse a situation with humor, so go ahead and sing.

Earth First! has been portrayed in the media as a group of dangerous hippies bent on destruction. But EF! and Rising Tide, a grassroots network dedicated to stopping climate change, are careful, organized groups that do not “compromise in defense of Mother Earth,” because they want to stop environmental destruction before it's too late.

Cascadian Mick Garvin, a veteran of the 1995-96 Warner Creek blockade

outside Eugene, said when you look at EF! and Rising Tide dancing on tables and banging on drums, “Think about the political theater of the '60s.”

He adds, “An optimist sees the glass half full, a pessimist sees it half empty, an Earth First!er sees the crack in the bottom and all the good stuff flowing out across the table, and so they'll do whatever it takes to wake us up to that.”

The EF!ers camped in the forest just off the route being used by Canada's Imperial Oil for its megaloads of oil extraction equipment — learning, partying and leaving as little impact as possible. The same cannot be said of the megaloads, pipelines and spills Big Oil brings to the mountains and rivers of the West.

The megaloads carry machines barged up the Columbia River to Idaho. They are placed on the rigs that haul them through wild and scenic as well as populated areas of Montana and Idaho to the tar sands of Canada where the machines will turn a boreal forest into a moonscape the size of Florida and poison nearby indigenous tribes, according Granger.

The National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club and others are celebrating a victory against the megaloads — the Montana