

District Court issued an injunction halting them for now, ruling that the Montana Department of Transportation violated the Montana Environmental Policy Act by failing to consider alternative routes, to consider decommissioning the highway modifications needed for the project, or to conduct an independent evaluation of the proposal.

Once oil is extracted from the tar sands in a toxic process, the oil is shipped to the U.S. via a pipeline. Conservationists and some native tribes have been fighting the proposed \$13-billion Keystone XL pipeline system that would bring even more tar-sands oil to U.S. refineries.

Adding fuel to the fire is the recent spill of at least 1,000 barrels of oil into the Yellowstone River by Exxon's Silvertip Pipeline. As it turns out, the Silvertip sometimes carries the heavier and more toxic tar sands crude that causes more wear and tear on pipes than regular "sweet crude," according to a recent Reuters story.

As dawn drew near, Earth First!ers began the 5 am wake-up calls. A revolution, if the wake-up calls were to be believed, is not going to happen in your sleeping bag. Luckily for the sleepy 70 or so protesters, the calls were followed by coffee and breakfast prepared by the Seeds of Peace Collective, which brings everything from mobile kitchens to medics in support of environmental, economic and social justice actions.

Banners were furled, car pools were organized and, finally, directions were given out. Imperial Oil was convinced EF! was targeting its megaload parked not far from the Earth First! campsite and had hired extra security. EF! and Rising Tide instead were heading for Helena, Montana's state Capitol, for a surprise conversation with Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer. Most of the protesters only learned of the location as they got into the vehicles. For most actions, Pedersen said, "information is on a need-to-know basis." Other members of the group didn't know there would be a lockdown, or who would do it.

Activists, some like Pedersen who knew they might be arrested, and others who preferred to be "nonarrestables" and help get the message out in other ways, piled into vans, trucks and a small painted school bus EF!ers had driven from Maine.

Local law enforcement appeared ready for some sort of action; at least one of the vehicles in the caravan that rolled slowly out of the mountains and through Missoula was given a traffic warning. The truck the *EW* reporter rode in was followed by police for several miles outside of Helena, but the two-hour trek from the Rendezvous site to the state Capitol was largely uneventful.

At 11 am the protesters marched to the Capitol building and poured in through the doors that were opened by EF!ers who had arrived earlier. About 20 or 30 people stayed outside to chant and sing under large banners that had been hung from the flagpoles outside the building.

"I'm really impressed at your climbing skills," one of the police officers at the scene told an EF!er. "That wasn't me," she said. "Oh," said the cop. "I just wanted to compliment you."

The EF!er, regardless of whether she was one of the climbers, wasn't going to fall for that trick. "I wish I could say it was," she said with a smile, "but I can't."



Adrian Guerrero of Rising Tide and Earth First! tells the crowd the tar sands and their infrastructure are an attack on the environment, indigenous peoples and the working class

PHOTO BY MURPHY WOODHOUSE

Meanwhile, inside the governor's suite, six protesters locked arms through the devices called sleeping dragons. They slid arms into PVC pipes and locked their wrists together with carabiners. The pipes were wrapped in chicken wire, tar and duct tape to make extraction more difficult. Each pipe was painted black and in white letters that proclaimed "No Megaloads" and "No Pipelines."

The activists said they were there to see Gov. Schweitzer. He passed the message on that he was willing to meet one-on-one. "No thanks," said EF!; "meet with all of us."

The governor agreed to meet in the historic reception room. EF! decided through a consensus process that the group would dialogue with the politician.

It seems impossible that 70 to 100 protesters could reach consensus in any amount of time, but the decision, was reached within minutes. Decision by

consensus is something EF! does often, sometimes in gatherings of hundreds. Opinions are conveyed by hand signals — a twinkling of the fingers on both hands means yes. The direct action session at the Rony practiced enacting high-stress, short-time-limit scenarios and asked small groups to reach consensus quickly and fairly, then critiqued the process.

The group gathered around the table. Schweitzer, known for his "folksy" attitude, stood and spoke in media-friendly sound bites to try to persuade EF! and the public of the safety of newer pipeline technology and its use of horizontal drilling techniques, and of his concerns about Exxon's handling of the Yellowstone spill.

EF! and Rising Tide had nuances to the issues they were bringing to the table — the poisoning and exploitation of indigenous peoples, concerns over the rivers the XL pipeline will cross, effects on

the ecosystem — but the essential message was clear and succinct: Kick Big Oil out.

"No, that's probably not going to happen today," said Schweitzer.

"Then we're not going to leave," Granger responded. From the back of the room, someone called out, "We're here to establish a no-compromise position. That's our job."

Spontaneously, one of the protesters played a ragtime tune on the piano, and members of the group began to dance, some on the table. The governor left, and the six protesters with their arms in the sleeping dragon locked themselves in a circle in front of the governor's offices.

Helena's Civil Disobedience Team was called in. Helena Police Assistant Chief Dave Jeseritz said the joint city-county CDT was created in about 2005 and trains every other month, but this was "the first deployment since 2006 when we had to use our hands-on experience in the field."

In contrast to protests in Eugene, where the police have been known to overreact — once repeatedly Tasing an activist doing street theater about pesticide sprays — the CDT stayed in dialogue with EF!'s police liaison, giving warnings that the protesters would be arrested and what the charges would be. EF! also had media liaisons, a legal observer, support to keep the locked-down protesters safe and hydrated, and videographers.

The CDT allowed the liaisons and support to stay, though the other protesters were told to take their activities to the rotunda instead of the offices, or risk arrest. "That's our methodology," said Jeseritz, "not to be heavy handed from the start." He added, "That's not to say we can't ramp it up if we need to."

One protester unlocked and left. The five remaining had made a solidarity pact to face the same charges, Pedersen said. The officers offered the protesters the opportunity to unlock themselves and not face a charge of obstruction. They declined.

The CDT slowly cut through the first sleeping dragon; the team took an hour to make its way through the first device. After that it went faster, and before the Capitol closed its doors for the day at 5 pm, the five protesters were freed of their own locking devices and placed in handcuffs. They were taken to Helena Municipal Court where they entered not guilty pleas to misdemeanor charges of criminal trespass and obstructing a peace officer and were released without bail.

The story of the protest was picked up nationwide, from *USA Today* to the Associated Press. Granger said "the national media chose to report on our action in a reasonable and even sophisticated way — focusing on the issues at hand, on the informed and intelligent questions raised by the demonstrators, and on Schweitzer's disingenuous and hypocritical dealings with the Montana public vis-à-vis the pipeline spill and proposed fossil fuels infrastructure projects around the state."

Pedersen said such protests from Oregon to Montana are a response to "the tremendous amount of money and time thrown by the elite at squelching knowledge of environmental and social justice."



Johannes Pedersen of Eugene is led away by the Helena police to the cheers of other protesters

PHOTO BY CAMILLA MORTENSEN

Here in Eugene, Cascadia Forest Defenders will be putting on an action camp to skill-share in areas related to direct action and strategic campaigning in Oregon's public forests from July 22 to the 25 in the Elliott State Forest, the site of an ongoing battle over old-growth logging. More info, including ride-share information, can be found at www.forestdefensenow.com