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Line in the Sand

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Back in 2010, ambition got the better of Enbridge, operators of the largest network of oil and gas pipelines in the world. Following a series of hastily-enacted public consultations, plans were announced to supply emerging East-Asian markets with a steady supply of bitumen through a proposal which it dubbed the Northern Gateway. The project demanded an unprecedented amount of planning and capital, and called for the construction of a twinned-pipeline 1,177km in length, in addition to a marine terminal capable of processing half a million barrels of oil per day.

As the federal Conservative government lobbied aggressively for the project's approval, debates over the potential displacement of those living in the pipeline's path bubbled to the surface. But as well-founded fears were drowned out by the predictably didactic rhetoric of economy versus environment, an abstracted vision of Northern Canada as uninhabited terra nullius took hold. In the process, the thousands of Canadians whose land, cultures, and livelihoods were at stake were forgotten, painted into the margins as little more than a colorful detail of a remote past. This documentary, *Line In The Sand*, follows the path of one of the most controversial development projects in Canada's history, and engages with the many ranchers, farmers, and Indigenous peoples whose very selfhood and identity remains tied to an increasingly contested geography.

Over the course of filming *Line In The Sand*, I came to understand that while resource development projects are typically framed in a purely geophysical or economic-industrial context, it's equally as important to consider the psychosocial dimension: how place and identity share a visceral linkage, how collective histories are mediated through direct experience of land, or how the inherently impositional nature of a pipeline weighs on the psyche of its host like an uninvited guest. Grassroots resistance has done much to stall construction of the Northern Gateway, but a heavy sense of imminence and uncertainty still hangs in the air. Alongside direct actions and open resistance, text-based scholarship can do much to elucidate the social and political implications of resource development. Still, I'd like to think that film – and all time-based media, for that matter – offers an altogether different, more affective, mode of commentary that can better accommodate the mundane,

the unfamiliar, and the emotional. By committing these stories to film, I would hope that we've made some small contribution toward expanding the conversation around resource development beyond market-driven discourses, and to have succeeded in recasting local epistemological outlooks into a place of privilege.

Producing *Line In The Sand* involved two years of field work and editing. What began as an online travelogue made up of photo essays and short snippets of writing eventually grew to include a full-length film whose production relied on personal savings and crowdfunding campaigns. To date, the film has been screened at film festivals in the US, Canada, Australia, Germany, and Scotland, and has picked up a handful of awards along the way. The full documentary, along with additional interviews and a road-map of our travels, is available for free at: www.lineinthesand.ca