



Wild Lands Advocate, February 2009, Vol. 17. No. 1

ERCB Denies Pipeline Applications

The Energy Resources Conservation Board (ERCB) has denied permission to two companies seeking to build gas pipelines in Alberta. In October, OMERS Energy Inc. (OMERS) was denied permission to construct a 1.6-km sweet gas pipeline, which would have crossed Highway 16 east of Edmonton. Local landowners argued successfully that other alternative pipeline routes had not been adequately investigated; other, shorter route options that would have tied into an existing Paramount pipeline would have involved considerably less surface disturbance. The Board ruled that, although OMERS would have had to address some regulatory issues before it could have tied in to the existing pipeline, “sufficient information was not provided by OMERS to demonstrate that other feasible alternatives were adequately pursued” (Decision 2008-092).

In December, ERCB’s predecessor, the Energy Utilities Board (EUB), issued its decision (2008-127) denying Shell Canada permission to drill a sour gas well and construct two pipelines and a central facility close to the town of Beaver Mines in the Castle area of southwestern Alberta. Shortly after the initial EUB hearing into Shell’s proposals ended in October 2007, a nearby Shell pipeline ruptured, causing a sour gas leak that forced the evacuation of 10 homes, with other residents ordered to stay in their homes. Subsequently, the Board delayed its decision on the Shell application until investigation of the pipeline leak was complete; the final report on the leak was published in October 2008.

In its decision on the Shell applications, the EUB ruled that “sufficient details have not been provided on how Shell will operate and monitor the proposed pipelines to ensure their integrity over the long term.” Interveners, including the Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition, argued that the ERCB should convene a public inquiry into the whole Shell Waterton gathering system.

According to *Oil Week Magazine* (January 30, 2008), a staggering 895 pipeline leaks were recorded in Alberta in 2006, up from 875 the previous year.

– *Nigel Douglas*

