



***Hidden Lakes, Willmore Wilderness, PO443***  
 38"x53", acrylic on canvas  
 © EILEEN RAUCHER-SUTTON

## **Two Cheers for the Defenders of Rural Montana**

The ripples from exploiting Alberta's tar sands travel far and wide. Imperial Oil's Kearl Lake project is one good example of how both the industrial and environmental dimensions of this development are globalized. Imperial contracted with South Korean fabricators to build modules for its \$11 billion first phase of its Kearl mining project. The plan called for the modules to be built in Korea, shipped to Vancouver Washington, barged up the Columbia River to Lewiston Idaho, and then shipped as more than 200 over-size loads of plant equipment (too large for interstate highways) over some of the most scenic

highways in Idaho and Montana to the Canadian border. The intent was to create a permanent corridor for shipping such loads to the tar sands (See Joyce Hildebrand's article in the February 2008 issue of the *WLA* on this proposal when it was first hatched.).

These plans sparked intense grassroots opposition. For nearly two years an eclectic assortment of more than three-dozen organizations in the Pacific Northwest fought this proposal. Missoula County joined conservation groups in launching a lawsuit to prevent the loads from moving over non-interstate highways. They won a preliminary injunction in 2011 stopping the shipments until the Montana Department of Transportation completed a thorough environmental assessment of the Project. This preliminary injunction was upheld in February 2012.

Exxon/Mobil (Imperial's majority shareholder) responded to the legal

challenges by disassembling the over-size project modules. Smaller components could be transported over interstate highways. Most were then reassembled in the Edmonton area before being shipped north of Fort McMurray.

In June of this year Exxon/Mobil announced it was abandoning the proposal to use Highway 12 to ship its over-sized loads. Two cheers go out to the landowners, conservationists, and municipal officials for their success in defending the character of the places they love and call home. We are saving our third cheer until we see a more responsible approach to exploiting the tar sands, one that won't require the shipment of any loads at all from Lewiston to Fort McMurray.

*- Ian Urquhart*