On the eve of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s first official visit to the U.S. to meet with President Barack Obama, RAN activists released a vivid 70-foot banner from the bridge overlooking Niagara Falls. Symbolically set amidst the most well-recognized border between Canada and the U.S., the banner was intended to send a clear message that Canadian tar sands oil threatens North America’s clean energy future.

Harper has signaled that he intends to protect the tar sands oil industry from climate regulation despite the fact that tar sands oil production produces three times the level of global warming pollution than conventional crude oil.

The Alberta tar sands are the largest single source of U.S. oil imports. Mining oil from tar sands destroys large tracts of boreal forest and pollutes clean water with poisonous chemicals that have caused severe health impacts to Alberta’s First Nation communities.

Continued reliance on tar sands oil from Canada will prevent any real progress on climate change. In September, Rajendra Pachauri, head of the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), stated that the tar sands should be shut down.

Opposition to tar sands oil has been rising on both sides of the border. In Canada, RAN has been pressuring the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), which is Canada’s largest bank and the largest financier of the tar sands. We are calling on RBC to stop financing the tar sands and to start investing in a 21st century clean energy economy.
On October 27 RAN confirmed that Massey Energy began dynamiting Coal River Mountain in West Virginia—the site of a proposed 328-megawatt wind farm—to prepare for a massive mountaintop removal (MTR) coal mining operation.

Coal River Mountain can be a wind farm that provides 85,000 households with electricity, 700 long-term green jobs, gives back $1.7 million in annual county taxes and stands as a model for clean energy across the region. Or, it can be a 6,000-acre dirty energy wasteland.

At Rainforest Action Network we know that the fate of Coal River Mountain is up to us and up to you. On October 30, RAN held a national day of action to demand the end to MTR in Appalachia. With dozens of planned events and hundreds in attendance we held demonstrations at the Environmental Protection Agency headquarters in DC and across the country as well as at JPMorgan Chase bank branches, the biggest financier of the destructive form of strip mining.

But we aren’t stopping until the blasting stops. As this Panther goes to press, we are preparing a day of action to stop dynamiting. Call the EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and urge her to stop blasting on Coal River Mountain and preserve our nation’s clean energy resources.

IN WEST VIRGINIA THEY ARE BLASTING OUR CLEAN ENERGY FUTURE

PHOTO: BRANDEN BARBER/RAN

Dear friends,

For the past ten days, the beaches have been closed a few blocks from where I live in Alameda, California due to an oil spill in San Francisco Bay. I’m a passionate environmentalist but I’m also an optimist, so I’ve been trying to identify a silver lining – even in an oil spill! And I think I may have found one: we are making progress, in at least some locations, dealing with oil-related catastrophes.

Early in the morning on Friday, October 30th, a mechanical failure during a routine refueling caused up to 800 gallons of bunker fuel to be spilled into the bay. Although the release was much smaller than the Cosco Busan oil spill, in which more than fifty thousand gallons were spilled under the Bay Bridge in 2007, it’s still a serious issue. Shipping fuel, like all oil-related contamination, is a threat to life, whether to birds, marine wildlife, or children playing on the beach.

Knowing this, the response from the Coast Guard and other agencies has been swift and effective. All local beaches were closed. More than two dozen ships were quickly deployed in the bay to skim oil from the water’s surface. Thirty-six thousand feet of oil-soaking boom was installed to help contain the spill, and more than 3,000 workers began combing miles of beaches to clean up the oil that washed ashore.

Not all spills are treated like this. Last month, I traveled to the rainforests of Ecuador to examine first-hand the impacts of one of the largest cases of environmental contamination in history. Over a period of twenty-six years in northern Ecuador, Texaco, now owned by Chevron, dumped more than 18 billion gallons of oil and other toxic waste directly into unlined pits and local waterways. Much of this waste is still untreated, even though the company left the country more than seventeen years ago. During my visit, I saw how these pits were designed purposely to leach toxic runoff water directly into streams and rivers used by local communities for drinking, bathing, fishing and recreation. I met with community leaders, many of whom are suffering from cancers, sudden miscarriages, childhood leukemia and other ailments. At last count, more than 1,400 people have died due to the contamination.

The tragedy in Ecuador has been compared to the Exxon Valdez spill and called the “Amazon’s Chernoby.” This might be true in terms of environmental impact, but there’s one major difference. Unlike the Exxon Valdez spill, Chernoby – or even the recent spill in the San Francisco Bay – the oil dumping in Ecuador by Texaco was not an accident, nor even a case of negligence. It was intentional. Before Texaco began operations in Ecuador, oil companies commonly re-injected toxic “formation” waters into underground wells, to prevent contamination of local water and soils. Texaco never did this in Ecuador, despite doing it the U.S. and other countries, and despite even holding a patent on the technology.

Cleanup efforts in both locations appear to be in inverse proportion to the size of the spill. Hundreds of workers in Hazmat suits were scouring the beaches on Halloween in Alameda to clean up 800 gallons. An investigation of the spill is pending. Meanwhile, the captain of the Cosco Busan was jailed for ten months. In Ecuador, Chevron claims that the 378 contaminated well sites and separation ponds were fully remediated. However, in judicial inspections of 94 sites, 100% of them were found to be contaminated with hydrocarbons, some at levels thousands of times greater than standards designed to protect human health.

If this cleanup effort was at, best, inadequate, then accountability is even more difficult to obtain. Chevron has been fighting a lawsuit since 1993 that would mandate a more effective remediation. Rather than showing remorse or taking responsibility for its actions, Chevron has shown an uncommon arrogance, vowing to refuse to pay for a cleanup even if found guilty. A Chevron spokesperson said, “We’ll fight this until hell freezes over. And then we’ll fight it on the ice.”

The spills in Ecuador and Alameda should be added to the true price we pay for oil. But there’s also good news. We can take solace in the fact that, in some locations, important lessons have been learned about how to respond rapidly to oil spills that threaten health and the environment. Now we must take the next step to ensure that oil companies don’t have one set of standards in the U.S., and a completely different standard in countries where they hope nobody is watching.

For a better world,

T H E  P A N T H E R  F A L L  2 0 0 9    |    R A I N F O R E S T  A C T I O N  N E T W O R K

Michael Brune
Executive Director

RAN is gearing up to launch a campaign against Chevron in order to bring accountability to the people of the Ecuadorian Amazon who have been suffering from the damages left behind by Chevron for 15 years – and we need your help.

We’ve received a three-year commitment for an $800,000 challenge grant with a 1-to-4 match in support of our campaign against Chevron – that means, for every $1 you give RAN, we’ll receive another $4. Contact our Membership office for more information.

PHOTO: DANIEL BRENNwald

FROM THE CANOPY
By Michael Brune, RAN Executive Director

T H E  P A N T H E R  F A L L  2 0 0 9    |    R A I N F O R E S T  A C T I O N  N E T W O R K

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For inquiries, comments, suggestions, please email panther@ran.org.

Toben Dilworth
Executive Director
**FASHION INDUSTRY LEADERS COMMIT TO PROTECTING INDONESIA’S RAINFORESTS**

There’s a new fashion trend this fall: saving Indonesian rainforests. The Gucci Group, the prestigious conglomerate of fashion and luxury brands that owns Yves Saint Laurent, Alexander McQueen, Stella McCartney, and Balenciaga, has decided to eliminate all paper made from Indonesian rainforests throughout their supply chain. Gucci Group’s policy puts it at the front of a list of major companies — including Tiffany & Co., H&M Group, Hugo Boss and Ferragamo — that have decided they don’t want their brands associated with the destruction of rainforests or causing climate change. By December 2010, the Gucci Group has pledged to reduce the amount of paper it uses, eliminate filter from high-conservation-value forests, and only purchase recycled products or those certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

RAN has been urging the fashion world to closely examine their supply chains and sever any connection with paper suppliers like Asia Pulp and Paper who are actively destroying Indonesia’s rainforests. On September 15, during New York’s prestigious Fashion Week, RAN co-hosted an event with Tiffany & CO., the first brand to take action to protect Indonesia’s rainforests and the climate by switching their iconic blue shopping bags (and all the other paper it uses) to environmentally preferable paper certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

In September, RAN traveled to Boston to attend the Natural Products Expo East, one of the largest gatherings in the country for retailers, pioneers and entrepreneurs in the natural and organic products industry. Rainforest Agribusiness Campaign Director Leila Salazar-Lopez joined industry leaders in a panel discussion titled “Little Seed, Big Problem, Bold Solution” explaining to an audience of palm oil users the problems palm oil poses to the world’s tropical rainforests, communities and the climate. Joining Leila on the panel were Jeffrey Holander, CEO of Seventh Generation; Michael Beacanson, Global Vice President of Purchasing, Distribution and Marketing of Whole Foods Market; and Matilda Piaçapio, land owner and human rights advocate from Papua New Guinea.

Seventh Generation recently announced an industry-leading commitment to obtain 100 percent of the palm oil used throughout its product line from certified sustainable sources by 2012. This follows an announcement earlier this year by Whole Foods Market concerning their private label brand products by 2012 and Lush Soaps committing to forego palm oil from their product line entirely.

**WHOLE FOODS AND SEVENTH GENERATION COMMIT TO ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALY RESPONSIBLE PALM OIL**

Worldwide, the degradation and destruction of tropical rainforests is responsible for 15 percent of all annual greenhouse emissions. In Indonesia, which supplies much of America’s paper, a lot of this deforestation is driven by the pulp and paper industry — notably the notorious paper company Asia Pulp and Paper (APP).

This hurts the climate as well as the forests. The carbon emissions resulting from Indonesia’s rapid deforestation account for up to eight percent of global emissions — about equal with the combined emissions from all cars, trucks, buses, planes, and trains in United States.

The Gucci Group’s new policy commits all its brands to one of the strongest paper standards in the industry, and ensures that even their stationery will be rainforest destruction free. This new policy signals an industry shift that is poised to sweep the rest of the sector off the runway while helping to make a difference for rainforests and for the climate. Over the past couple of weeks, RAN members have generated more than six thousand emails to other leading fashion industry brands that could still be doing business with APP, challenging them to meet or beat the new bar set by Gucci Group. This couldn’t have happened without your help.

**TELL CARGILL TO STOP DESTROYING TROPICAL RAINFORESTS**

Palm oil is in roughly half of all supermarket goods, from lipstick to breakfast cereal. It is only grown in tropical countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. Increasing demand is pushing palm oil cultivation into the rainforests — destroying habitats for unique species, displacing communities, and making Indonesia the third largest greenhouse gas emitter on Earth as carbon from felled forests is released into the atmosphere.

Cargill, a Minnesota-based agribusiness company, is the largest privately-held company in the United States and the largest U.S. importer of palm oil. Cargill says that it is committed to “sustainable palm oil,” but it continues to source palm oil from suppliers who are clearing and burning rainforests to make way for palm oil plantations. Their current policies are threatening the rights of local communities, destroying some of the world’s last rainforests and contributing to climate change.

Your help is needed to convince Cargill to adopt and implement a comprehensive global forest policy that will stop them from destroying the rainforest, communities or the climate.
In December, world leaders will be gathering in Copenhagen, Denmark for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in an attempt to forge an agreement that will succeed the Kyoto Protocol. People across the planet are joining in this debate to demand justice for climate-impacted communities and a dramatic reduction in worldwide greenhouse gases. Included within the overall framework of these negotiations is an agreement on REDD, or “Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation.” This critical component initially presented the hope of an unparalleled opportunity to focus global efforts in ways that could save millions of acres of the world’s dwindling rainforests. That hope is increasingly at risk and RAN has been engaged in the complex dance of an inside-outside strategy around REDD.

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As part of the run up to Copenhagen, the United Nations has been holding preliminary rounds of negotiations all over the world following the adoption of a two-year action plan in Bali in December 2007.

In October, the United Nations gathered in Bangkok, Thailand for its next step. Negotiators from every country on the planet gathered inside the U.N. convention center, while thousands of Indigenous people, peasants, farmers, and fisherfolk gathered outside to speak truth to power. People from across Asia came to share stories of the floods, typhoons, droughts, famines, and hurricanes that are all intensifying because of climate change.

When it was first developed, REDD proposals had the promise of carbon credits for forests. In the current state of the REDD negotiations represents a reversal of its original mandate. Instead of defending the rights of Indigenous and forest peoples and addressing the underlying causes of deforestation, REDD now appears heavily weighted toward the demands of extractive industries and open market carbon speculators. This situation is putting Indigenous peoples at risk of losing their traditional territories and ultimately subsidizing the destruction of rainforests instead of protecting them.

Later that week the official United Nations Indigenous Peoples Caucus organized a demonstration outside and inside the convention center. With matching shirts declaring “NO RIGHTS?? NO REDD??” native leaders from across the planet gathered outside, and supported by RAN and other groups.

Throughout the day, advocates wore the same shirts inside the convention in silent protest, making a powerful visual statement to all negotiators.

Every living person on this planet depends on forests for our survival, and the 60 million Indigenous peoples who live in forests worldwide have been the primary guardians of the forests for time immemorial. In these negotiations we must insist that “forest” is not a code word for “monocrop plantation.” “Indigenous rights” does not mean “right to participate” in these discussions. It means communities with rights over their own land, rights to their forests and livelihoods. It means the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the respect for the principles of free, prior and informed consent must both be in the text.

In our final sprint to Copenhagen, RAN will continue to support the efforts of the International Indigenous Peoples and work inside and outside of negotiations for justice in the climate negotiations.
YEAREND GIVING

For your family and friends this holiday season, give a gift that has real impact. You can’t buy the world’s rainforests in a store— but you can help protect them by giving a gift to Rainforest Action Network.

RAN MEMBERSHIP

Give the gift of environmental activism. We’ll notify the recipient with a personalized card announcing your gift. Then throughout the year, they will enjoy all the benefits and privileges of our regular membership.

Make your gift online at www.RAN.org/give, or by calling our membership department at (415) 659-0542.

PROTECT-AN-ACRE PROGRAM

Since 1993, RAN’s Protect-an-Acre program has distributed nearly $1 million in small grants to traditionally underfunded organizations and communities in forest regions.

Recipients will be sent a certificate of recognition in their name informing them of your generous donation, along with a description of the projects they are supporting.

To learn more and make your gift online, please visit www.RAN.org/PAA, or call our membership department at (415) 659-0542.

RAN RECOMMENDS:

CRUDE THE REAL PRICE OF OIL

Three years in the making, this feature from acclaimed filmmaker Joe Berlinger tells the story of one of the most extraordinary legal dramas of our time, described as the “Amazon Chernobyl.”

Over the course of three decades of oil drilling in the Ecuadorian Amazon, U.S. oil giant Chevron deliberately dumped more than 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater into the rainforest, leaving local people suffering a wave of cancers, miscarriages and birth defects.

Crude is a real-life high stakes legal drama that offers a ground-level view into the lives of those directly impacted by this tragedy while revealing a behind-the-scenes look at one of the most extraordinary legal dramas of our time, one that has the potential of forever changing the way international business is conducted.

Check out a Crude at a theater near you or visit www.CrudeTheMovie.com.