



# **The SPP Undead**

**A Global Justice for Animals and the Environment Report on the Legacy of the Security and Prosperity Partnership**



# The SPP Undead

by Alexander Reid Ross

Recently put to pasture, the SPP was described by the U.S. government's website, [spp.gov](http://spp.gov), as “a dialogue to increase security and enhance prosperity among the three countries. The SPP is neither an agreement nor is it a treaty. In fact, no agreement was ever signed.”<sup>i</sup> As such, the SPP is a loosely designated concept of a close economic and military alliance between the US, Canada, and Mexico, which was formulated between high-ranking members of the executive branch of government and business elites, including Campbell Soup, Chevron, Ford, Lockheed Martin, GE, GM, Merck, and NY Life Insurance. A neo-liberal project tantamount to the extension of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the SPP circumvented Congress in order to avoid popular opinion while heightening industrial development hazardous to the environment and intensifying the militarization of society. Met with expanding dissent from civil society organizations, environmentalists, unions, and human rights activists, the SPP was put to rest at the 2009 North American Forum in Guadalajara, but activists must stay vigilant to ensure that the projects it has embarked upon are also defeated.

Since the secretive meetings surrounding the SPP in Crawford 2005, Cancun 2006, Ottawa and Quebec 2007, and New Orleans 2008 exempted congressional representation from their 'dialogue,' the SPP became quite controversial even in the halls of government. Seeing the SPP as a challenge to democracy, Fourteen States in the US worked on legislation to challenge the SPP (AZ, UT, ID, OR, WA, MT, SD, OK, MO, IL, TN, GA, SC, VA). Even with its recent demise, however, there is no assurance that the SPP's plans to facilitate the infrastructure of corporate domination are not still in the works. The Alberta Tar Sands, the NAFTA Superhighway, and the Border Wall still loom on the horizon like the walking dead of the SPP.

To generate advanced economic integration, the SPP worked through a de-centralized foundation of several 'sister organizations', or, 'parallel structures,' in the words of U.S. Consul General John Nay These complimentary groups, such as the exclusive North American Forum, which meets yearly to discuss continental integration, design the architecture for deeper corporate expansion into industrial projects for resource extraction in precious ecosystems, freeway construction through protected land, and maquiladora factory construction throughout Central America.<sup>ii</sup> Until recently, the U.S., Mexico, and Canada had used the North American Forum to inveigle political integration through a process described in the notes of former US Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, as “evolution by stealth.”<sup>iii</sup> Since the recent North American Forum in Guadalajara, however, political agreements have taken a back seat to the increased corporate exploitation of natural resources.

## Alberta Tar Sands

Among the several projects undertaken through the SPP is the projected five-fold expansion of the oil drilling of the Canada Tar Sands. The “Oil Sands Experts Working Group,” was founded along with the SPP in order to evaluate “the sustainable development of the oil sands resources,” which, according to the working group, elicits expanded “integrated long distance pipelines” to facilitate “the certain doubling of oil sands production to two million barrels per day by 2010,” with the intention of eventually quintupling the production of the tar sands project.<sup>iv</sup>

The Canadian Tar Sands sit beneath the Boreal Forest which composes 25% of the earth's original forests. Canada's largest ecosystem, the Boreal Forest covers 58% of the country; wetlands lay over 30% of the terrain, draining into an estimated 1.5 million lakes and some of the country's largest river systems. The expanse of freshwater in the Boreal ecosystems represents the largest expanse in the world. More than 80% of the world's liquid freshwater is found in the Boreal!

Animals love the Boreal. More than 30% of North America's bird population relies on the Boreal for breeding. In total, 325 bird species depend on Boreal shelter during their lives. More than 13 million ducks and waterfowl nest and breed in Canada's Boreal each year. Labrador's George River caribou herd is the largest in the world. Also, the Boreal is home to large populations of wolves, bears, moose, and a number of smaller animals.

4.3 million hectares of the Boreal Forest cover the carbon sink known as the tar sands. To say that this carbon sink is difficult to access would be to completely underestimate the environmental cost of industrial extraction of the oil at the bottom of the 'tar sands'. An area the size of Florida is slated to be clear cut out of the Boreal Forest for the sake of pluming the tar sands. Yet this natural splendor of the Boreal to be destroyed conceals a dangerous secret: more than 186 billion tones of carbon stored within the trees, soils, water, and peat. Eradicating this space, seen as the largest terrestrial carbon

“bank account” on the planet, would result in the release of what is equivalent to 913 years’ worth of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.<sup>v</sup>

Producing a barrel of oil from the tar sands produces three times more greenhouse gas emissions than a barrel of conventional oil, and processing the oil sands uses enough natural gas in a day to heat 3 million homes. This is because much of the oil sits in shallow deposits, where the soil is loose and mixed in with the oil. Elaborate procedures for extracting the oil bears heavily on the resources of the area. After use, at least 90% of the fresh water used in the oil sands ends up in tailing ponds so toxic that propane cannons are used to keep ducks from landing. The toxic tailing ponds are considered one of the largest human-made structures in the world. The ponds span 50 square kilometers and can be seen from space. Indeed, if Canada were to cease and desist all other industrial projects within its borders except the exploitation of the Alberta tar sands, it still would still fail to meet Kyoto Protocol requirements.

A five-fold increase in this project would not be wise. Increased reports of cancer and lupus have already been reported in the areas near the tar sands, while low water levels in aquifers, rivers, streams, and wetlands have been blamed on the tar sands’ voluminous water withdrawals from the Athabasca River. According to STOP: Stop Tar Sands Operations Permanently, the SPP’s projection of increased industrialization, combined with the TILMA’s investor protections spell out a connection to creating an integrated North American economy that excludes democracy.

### **NAFTA Superhighway: No, Really!**

The maelstrom of free trade and environmental exploitation also involves the promotion of a unified, commercial Superhighway that would expedite commercial traffic from Alberta through the United States, Central America, and to Panama City (as well as other locations in Canada). Among other concerns, the SPP website addresses this claim directly, insisting that it is determined to “facilitating multimodal corridors, reducing congestion, and alleviating bottlenecks at the border that inhibit growth and threaten our quality of life...” and it insists that the U.S., Mexico, and Canada must, “develop mechanisms for enhanced road infrastructure planning, including an inventory of border transportation infrastructure in major corridors and public-private financing instruments for border projects.”<sup>vi</sup> This quotation seems to tacitly adumbrate a program to direct trans-North American traffic along a special route.

Myriad environmentalist, animal rights, and other activists have been fighting the slow but precise progress of this secret passageway. Though its existence is denied by nearly all political leaders in North America, the so-called NAFTA Superhighway marks crucial terrain in the SPP’s plans to increase the exploitation and traffic of natural resources. Like the SPP itself, this freeway cannot be proclaimed as a single proposal, because its enormity warrants serious democratic oversight.

Already completed in some parts of the U.S.A. and still under construction in others, the NAFTA Superhighway is being built in a piecemeal fashion in order to avoid drawing attention to the communities it undermines, the populations it separates, and the ecosystems it disrupts. In Indiana, for instance, four hundred families are to be evicted from their homes to clear the 7,000 acres of land (approximately acres of 5,300 farm land, 95 acres of wetlands, and 1,500 acres of forest) slated for the highway. 400 acres of karst features, which include underground waterways, caves, and sinkholes, will be disturbed during the construction of a highway that will bring increased traffic to an already polluted area for the sake of 10-15 minutes of saved travel time. This superhighway, which already exists from the Canada-Michigan border to Indianapolis, is part of the larger SPP plan, which includes IIPSA in Latin America, Atlantica in Canada, and Plan Pueblo Panama in Central America. Each of these projects boasts unique environmental consequences which would prove catastrophic to the Western Hemisphere. Even still, as activists attempt to put a stop to the devious plan, they are forestalled by State repression, which casts their tactics of civil disobedience and passive resistance as mafia-style crime (Cf: [Roadblock EF!](#)).

The boost that this Superhighway would give to environmentally disgraceful industry in the developing world is only the start. The SPP has also put forward an inchoate proposal for the “establishment of a grant fund for development with US and Canadian resources to finance the development of physical resources in Mexico.”<sup>vii</sup> This resolution would act like a stimulous program in Mexico, using U.S. tax dollars to invest in more environmentally irresponsible and anti-democratic industrial development in Mexico in order to better compete with China and other industrialized nations.

Although the SPP has indefinite power to direct the course of continental economic policy, the economic part is only a shadow of the military expansion projected. According to former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., John Bolton’s Rapporteur Notes taken during the second meeting of the North American Forum, the SPP is 90% security, 10% prosperity.<sup>viii</sup>

## **The Border Wall**

In an internal memo in 2005, Secretary of Defense, Michael Chertoff, explained further the role of the SPP: "...The [Security and Prosperity Partnership] has, in addition to identifying a number of new action items, comprehensively rolled up most of our existing homeland security-related policy initiatives with Canada and Mexico, and ongoing action and reporting in the various U.S.-Canada and U.S.-Mexico working groups led by DHS [Department of Homeland Security] should now be driven by a single agenda: the SPP."<sup>xix</sup> The implications of this memo are staggering when considering the militarization of the Western Hemisphere, sponsored by the US to protect corporate profits.

The so-called "Plan Mexico", also known as the Mérida Initiative, manifests an important chapter in the progression of the SPP. In 2008, the Senate approved, as an amendment to the Iraq supplemental appropriations bill, \$350 million dollars to fund the training and equipment for the Mexican military for the "strengthening of military-to-military cooperation between the United States and Mexico." In fact, the Mérida Initiative has already had a terrible affect. According to a recent letter sent by 72 Mexican Non-Governmental Organizations and one Brigadier General of the Mexican Army, human rights abuses have increased 6 times over the last two years. This is particularly important considering the expansion of the unpopular Mexico-U.S. Border Wall, another pet project of Chertoff and the SPP, which provides a clear indication that victims of human rights abuses will not be afforded asylum or sympathy in the US.

Like the NAFTA Super Highway and the SPP's plans for an integrated North America, the Border Wall is coming together as a piecemeal operation of a series of interconnected projects. The wall, dedicated to keeping Mexican immigrants from sneaking across the border without documentation, once again exemplifies the attitude that protection means repression. Due to the Real ID Act, Department of Homeland Security may bypass any and all federal environmental protections in order to build its wall, allowing the SPP to turn the US into a veritable fortress for business elites. As a result, the jaguar and an abundance of other endangered species will be hazarded. The 3,141 kilometer long Mexican-U.S. border spreads out along a diverse expanse of terrains – from wetlands to deserts, and the prevention of transboundary movement is separating animals from their livelihoods.

In Nogales, Mexico, the border wall caused severe flooding with waters up to six feet high. In Texas, the wall blocks people and animals from accessing the Rio Grande. Even after the construction of 600 miles of border wall, at 4.5 million dollars a mile, immigration maintains its steady rise into the USA, but, as immigrants crossing the border are only funneled deeper into the desert, the number of deaths by dehydration and exposure are rising. According to Gerardo Ceballos, of UNAM's Institute of Ecology, the wall is a violation of international treaties, and Mexico is considering filing a complaint against the U.S. in the International Court of Justice.<sup>x</sup> Still, this suit is very dangerous, as the US may use the Mérida Initiative as leverage against Mexican dissent. If the Mexican government moves against the border wall, the US may threaten to refuse to grant funds to Mexico in the future.

Since the Border Wall is, ironically, an aspect of economic integration and the SPP, it is questionable as to what extent the authority of the Mexican government can over-ride it. Furthermore, since the SPP was wrapped up in industrial issues from what leaked SPP documents describe as "the establishment of a grant fund... to finance the development of physical infrastructure in Mexico" and the Alberta Tar Sands, challenging any single aspect of its regime might be considered an attack on the overall structure, and, therefore, a barrier to trade.<sup>xi</sup>

Herein lies the greatest problem concerning the SPP: without oversight, there was no limit to its power; now that it has fallen apart, it is time to dismantle those programs which it had put into effect. The populous of North America is still arrested by the SPP's vision, about which we only have an inkling. It is time to take the power back, and affirm a democratic program with environmental accountability and justice for all.



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- iii John Bolton's Notes, <http://www.judicialwatch.org/archive/2007/POLADBoltonNotesBanff.pdf>.  
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- iv <http://stoptarsands.wordpress.com/2008/01/14/tilma-the-spp-and-the-tar-sands/>, January 14, 2008
- v "Threats", STOP: Stop the Tar Sands Operations Permanently, <http://stoptarsands.wordpress.com/threats/#a>
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- viii John Bolton's Notes, <http://www.judicialwatch.org/archive/2007/POLADBoltonNotesBanff.pdf>. September 12, 2006
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