

The Brief

Vol. 2 No. 1 A project of the NB Media Co-op

September 2010

nbmediacoop.org

NO FRACKING WAY! Natural gas drilling too risky for NB

By JEAN LOUIS DEVEAU

Oil and gas companies are flocking to New Brunswick to explore and extract the province's natural gas reserves embedded in shale rock. Five companies, Apache/Corridor Resources, Windsor Energy, PetroWorth Resources and SWN Resources Canada, are proposing to inject thousands of tanker truckloads of New Brunswick's freshwater, mixed with thousands of kilograms of toxic chemicals and sand, into the ground to extract gas.

The controversial hydraulic fracturing method, more commonly known as fracking, is underway in the southeastern communities of Penobsquis and Elgin, and will likely take place in many communities from Sussex to Sackville and from St. Stephen to Richibucto, in the next three years.

Squeezing gas from a rock under the ground is not an easy task but technology has made the process feasible for the industry. A well is drilled vertically into the ground and then horizontally about 2.5 km across a shale formation. Fracking fluid is then injected into a well bore under pressure sufficient to peel paint from a car. The pressure causes the shale to fracture and release gas from billions of pockets found in the rock. The gas then comes up the well, along with the fracking fluids

Gasland, a popular new film documentary directed by Josh Fox, shares the voices of people in the U.S. affected by fracking in their backyards. They share horror stories of how drilling and fracking have polluted their water and harmed their health. The film shows one man lighting his tap water on fire.

Scientists in the U.S. report that 65 of the approximately 300 compounds used for fracking are hazardous to humans, livestock and wildlife; some of the compounds, such as aromatic hydrocarbons and formaldehyde, cause cancer. In a 2008 story for ProPublica, investigative reporter Abrahm Lustgarten wrote that an emergency nurse in Colorado almost died from multiple organ failure after being exposed to fracking fluids. Safe disposal of toxic wastewater left behind from fracking is thus a major concern.



A well-head in the rural community of Penobsquis. Photo: Beth Nixon.

Apache, with operations in the Elgin area, has indicated that they need four million litres of water for one frac-job. In exploration alone, Apache has permits to frack their two wells five times each, which means they will use a total of 40 million litres of water -- an amount of water that could fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool sixteen times. By March 2013, Apache plans to have six to eight wells in their second phase of exploration. According to the United Nations, the world, including Canada, is heading towards a major water shortage crisis; this is partly due to industrial usage of water for such practices as fracking.

The oil and gas industry, however, appears unmoved and undeterred by citizens' concerns. On July 17th, 2010, The Daily Gleaner quoted Thomas Alexander, New Brunswick General Manager of SWN Resources Canada, at an open house in New Maryland saying, "Well-construction

practices and hydraulic-pressuring practices are designed to maintain the stimulation in the producing (hydrocarbon) reservoir and protect the integrity of the waters and that has been our experience."

Stephanie Merrill, the Conservation Council's Freshwater Protection Coordinator, is not so sure. According to Merrill, "site-specific assessments on a well-by-well basis are needed in order to take into consideration local geological and hydrological conditions. Natural fractures and fissures underground could possibly lead to migration pathways for methane if frack jobs go out of target formation." She also states that the long term effects, including migration of dispersing fracking fluid underground is not known.

"We need to ensure the safety of our groundwater, especially in a province where about 60% of people rely on well water for their drinking water," says Merrill. In 2008, ProPublica, reported that there were over 1,000 cases documented by courts and local governments in Colorado, New Mexico, Alabama, Ohio and Pennsylvania, where fracking is a suspected cause of drinking water contamination.

Citing environmental concerns, Sackville town council voted against further exploration by PetroWorth Resources in July but then reversed its ban in August when they were told

that the company would be using a horizontal drill just outside their town limits and they would not be receiving water testing data if a ban was in place. On August 24th, PetroWorth announced that they were abandoning their gas exploration plans in the area. Because of citizen mobilization against the risks associated with fracking, a one-year moratorium on fracking was announced in New York State, effective until May 2011, while the State reviews the environmental impacts and safety of drilling. Like the concerned citizens of New York State, New Brunswickers have the ability to push for a moratorium in the province in order to protect people and the from this well-documented and environment risk. For more info contact: unnecessary water@conservationcouncil.ca

Fredericton holds first Pride Parade

By CRAIG MAZEROLLE

Fredericton's annual Queer Pride celebrations have always been an exciting time of year for the city's queer community, but this year the community was particularly proud. In a unanimous vote earlier this year, Fredericton's City Council allowed the Fredericton Pride 2010 Committee to hold the city's first Queer Pride Parade on August 8th. The decision ended years of struggle by the queer community and allies to hold such a parade in the provincial capital because of City Council's opposition (similar marches have been happening for years in Saint John and Moncton). With over three hundred marchers in attendance, as well as several hundred onlookers lining the parade route, the march was both a celebration of the city's sexual and political diversity, as well as a way for straight allies to show support and solidarity with queer friends, family, and co-workers.

Led by former NB NDP leader and longtime Fredericton activist, Allison Brewer, the parade had many community groups and organizations marching in its ranks. These groups included: go-go dancers from boom! nightclub (Fredericton's local alternative lifestyles bar), the Fredericton Peace Coalition, Integrity Canada (a project of the Anglican Church to reach out to the queer community), the Public Service

Alliance of Canada and the Rainbow Family Network, just to name a few.

Though an historic first for the queer community of Fredericton, pride parades have become a fixture in queer pride celebrations around the world. In fact, this year marks the 40th anniversary of arguably the world's first major gay pride march. Several smaller marches had occurred in different cities throughout the 20th century, but many see New York City's 1970 Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day parade as the world's first gay pride parade. Born out of the anger many were feeling after the Stonewall Riots, American queer activist, Craig Rodwell, proposed taking to the streets in an act of defiance that would be known as Christopher Street Gay Liberation Day. The Stonewall Riots occurred when NYC police officers broke into a popular queer nightspot on Christopher Street, known as the Stonewall Inn, and arrested countless gays and lesbians back in 1969. By capturing the sound and fury that characterized the wave of queer activism that sprung up in the direct aftermath of the Stonewall Riots, the march acted in stark contrast to the quieter vigils that other queer activists had been proposing at the time. Similar events were held soon after in cities all over North America.

Canada saw its first gay pride march in the city of Ottawa in August 1971. Dubbed "Gay Day", the march consisted of about 100 queers marching to Parliament Hill with a list of demands known simply as "We Demand". One of the major



The Rainbow Family Network marches in Fredericton's first ever Pride Parade. Photo: Tiffany Campbell.

demands for the queer activists of the time was an end to workplace discrimination. While homosexuality had become legal in 1969, many queer Canadians still found themselves being fired from their jobs when their sexual orientation was made known to their bosses.