The Brief

Vol. 10 No. 4 | A publication of the NB Media Co-op | December 2018/January 2019 | nbmediacoop.org

Opposition to shale gas returns as Progressive Conservatives threaten to lift moratorium

By TRACY GLYNN

This woman and child took part in the rally against shale gas in Moncton on Nov. 15, 2018. They are holding a sign that says, "Protégez notre futur! Non au gaz de schiste" (Protect Our Future! No Shale Gas). Photo by Greg Cook.

Two dozen people rallied against shale gas in New Brunswick outside a natural gas conference in Moncton on a frigid November 15th. They waved colourful signs and moved their bodies to the beat of a drum.

The rally was a forewarning that rural New Brunswick may soon again become the site of conflict as residents determined to protect the health and integrity of their rural environment oppose the will and power of the provincial government.

"We are extremely disappointed and alarmed about recent statements from the incoming New Brunswick Premier, Mr. Blaine Higgs, that his government intends to lift the moratorium on fracking for shale gas in Sikniktuk," said Kenneth Francis, spokesperson for Kopit Lodge at Elsipogtog First Nation. Kopit Lodge is tasked with working on resource development issues for the First Nation.

Sikniktuk is the traditional land of the Mi'kmaq people. "It has never been ceded or surrendered to the Crown," says Francis.

Blaine Higgs' Progressive Conservative cabinet was sworn in on Nov. 9 after Brian Gallant's Liberal government lost a confidence motion to govern on Nov. 2. The Progressive Conservative throne speech on Nov. 20 made no mention of shale gas, however immediately afterward the new Premier began giving media interviews in which he suggested his government would move forward to allow fracking in some communities. The opposition Liberals have introduced an amendment to the throne speech that would keep the moratorium in place across the province. At press time that vote had not been held.

One of the places that Higgs sees open for shale gas is the rural Sussex region, part of the unceded Sikniktuk territory.

While the Conservative MLA for Sussex-Fundy-St. Martins, Bruce Northrup, supports lifting the moratorium by Christmas, a number of community groups across the province are opposed to fracking for shale gas. The New Brunswick Anti-Shale Gas Alliance wants the government to support the development of green energy sources instead.

Corridor Resources stands to gain the most from the lifting of the moratorium. Corridor operates the McCully gas field in Penobsquis, a farming community next to Sussex.

Penobsquis is not only home to farms; its landscape is dotted with closed potash mines, gas well pads, gas wells, natural gas compressor stations, a drill rig site, a grouting station, an oil well, pipelines and gravel pits.

Penobsquis made headlines in recent years after residents lost their water. They link the loss of their water to seismic testing done by Corridor Resources in PotashCorp's potash mine.

Jonathan Richardson, a former Penobsquis resident who represents the NDP at the federal level for Atlantic Canada, wrote on Facebook: "I am 100% against fracking in my province – period! I remember when I lived near Corridor in #Penobsquis and our water became contaminated. Months I had to take sponge baths using boiled water and carry down water for the houses. Because of fracking, my family lost our horses and we had to move away from the farm to Ontario."

Corridor has drilled 39 wells in its McCully Field in Penobsquis to obtain natural gas for markets in the Maritimes and northeast US. Corridor's McCully F-58 well in Elgin was fracked in 2008 and could be re-fracked for gas production. Their Frederick Brook shale gas prospect is one of "two high impact – high reward exploration prospects," according to the company's website.

Patrick Colford, president of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour, joined the rally outside the industry conference in a demonstration of solidarity between labour and groups working to protect the rural environment. "We need to stand shoulder to shoulder with our brothers, sisters and comrades to send a clear message to the new Progressive Conservative government that fracking has no place in New Brunswick."

"I am yet to find out what economic benefit it would bring to our province. Shale gas is basically worthless. It is another example of our province giving away our collective wealth to multinational corporations," says Colford.

Ray Ritcey, CEO of the Maritime Energy Association, was at the Moncton conference while the protest against shale gas was outside. He told CBC that he was in favour of lifting the fracking moratorium: "We're really trying to find short, mid-term solutions to a gas supply gap that exists today and is only going to increase by Dec. 31 of this year." The Sable Island natural gas deposit has been depleted and offshore drilling off the island is expected to conclude at the end of the year.

Shale gas opponents remain committed to keeping the province frack-free.

"Initially there was regret that we have to fight against fracking again, but as all the familiar faces showed up, it felt amazing. It was heartwarming to see that the solidarity between Anglophones, Francophones, and Indigenous people is alive and well," said Pamela Ross, one of the organizers of the rally and a member of the Moncton chapter of the Council of Canadians.

Francis agrees with Ross: "In 2013, the entire community of Elsipogtog First Nation stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Francophone and Anglophone neighbours and allies to successfully defend this area from fracking."

Francis and Elsipogtog Chief Arren Sock are the plaintiffs on a 2016 Statement of Claim that seeks Aboriginal title to Sikniktuk.

"Kopit Lodge will take whatever steps are necessary to protect our water from practices like fracking," says Francis.

This article was produced with the support of RAVEN – Rural Action and Voices for the Environment.

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"Children have to hear another story": Alanis Obomsawin, filmmaker

By SOPHIE M. LAVOIE

Filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin was in New Brunswick on Oct. 24, 2018, to present her film *Trick or Treaty?* as part of the Indigenous Film Series held by St. Thomas University's Senate Committee on Reconciliation.

Obomsawin was introduced by film scholar André Loiselle, Dean of Humanities at STU. Loiselle highlighted Obomsawin's many accomplishments, recognitions, and prize-winning films and initiated a conversation with the filmmaker after the screening.

Looking back on her 51 films and her beginnings as an activist, Obomsawin said: "My battle was education." She had started reading a lot as a teenager and she "was so angry about what was being taught. Books were designed to create hate against our people. The children have to hear another story." This was how Obomsawin became involved in documentary film: "I came in with a different story."

Obomsawin was invited to join the National Film Board in 1967. When she started to make films, one of her first battles was to have voiceover for people who couldn't read English or French. Obomsawin insisted on the voiceover being done by Indigenous people from the community but the union insisted that only their members could do voiceover. Obomsawin went to see the president of the union and demanded that the regulations be changed: "if you are intimidated and afraid, you're finished. Everything is possible. Don't give up."

The documentary she presented, *Trick or Treaty?*, from 2014, is especially concerned with Treaty 9 concerning the Cree and Ojibwa people of northern Ontario. The film describes how the signatories were not correctly informed of the meaning of the treaties by those explaining the treaty and requesting their signatures in 1905. The film also covers the Idle No More Movement, the six-week hunger strike by former chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation Theresa Spence (2012-2013) as well as the two-month Journey of Nishiyuu by 6 youths from the Whapmagoostui First Nation, from the northernmost Cree village in Québec on Hudson's Bay to Parliament Hill in 2013.

For Obomsawin, "Canadians have no clue, they think [the Treaty] has no meaning. It's the contrary for our people." Discussions of Treaty 9 were ongoing at the time she made the film and people were able to get a clear picture of the Treaty through a conference she filmed in Moose Factory by a noted treaty historian John Long, author of *Treaty No. 9: Making the Agreement to Share the Land in Far Northern Ontario in 1905*. Long's conferences were crucial "for teaching and making people understand how things were done, [through] cheating and lying."

Confidently, Obomsawin declared: "I won't be here but I'm sure there will be justice" for Treaty 9 peoples, through its renegotiation. She sees the current context as positive and got emotional when describing it to the public: "I'm very happy. We are going somewhere where we've never been before. More and more our people are respected. Canadians want to see justice to our people. Everywhere in Canada there's such interest. Young people are doing incredible things. If ever there was a time for our young people, it's now. It's a very special time."

The last 6 films directed and written by Obomsawin

Alanis Obomsawin spoke in Fredericton on Oct. 24, 2018. Photo by Shanthi Bell.

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Filmmaker exposes corporate capture in forestry in New Brunswick

By TRACY GLYNN

Charles Thériault reveals how corporate capture is devastating the forest and forest-dependent communities in rural New Brunswick through a series of films that can be accessed online at *isourforestreallyours.ca*.

Filmmaker Charles Thériault's passion is observing. His troubling encounter with a young man in the northern rural New Brunswick community of Kedgwick made him turn his camera on the forest. The result: a popular web series documenting decades of forest mismanagement and what he calls "corporate capture" of our forest.

Thériault's impression that all was fine in New Brunswick's woods was shattered when he met a 26-year-old man who had tried to commit suicide. The man was $1 million in debt, a debt he had accrued from working as a contractor cutting wood for J.D. Irving, the largest forestry player in the province. According to Thériault, the contractors are in a perpetual debt cycle of taking out loans to buy new machines.

Thériault spoke with several contractors whose loans for new machines were co-signed by J.D. Irving, Ltd. These types of systems, in which workers have their financial affairs tied to the company they work for, are ripe for exploitation. "It's a system of slavery-like control over the workers," claims Thériault.

New Brunswick's land base, which has never been ceded by the Wolastoqiyik, Mi'kmaq and Passamoquoddy peoples, is carved out as 50 per cent public land (also known as Crown land), 30 per cent private land and 20 per cent freehold. The New Brunswick government has the responsibility of managing the public forest in a way that benefits all New Brunswickers but many, like Thériault, argue that private interests are largely benefiting from forestry practices today.

Forestry has been a main source of jobs and way of life in many rural communities across New Brunswick for generations. The closure of several mills across the province in the early 2000s devastated many forestry-dependent communities. However, as mills closed and people were thrown out of work, wood continued to be cut from New Brunswick's public forest in record volumes. The Conservation Council of New Brunswick reported that timber harvested from public land reached a record high of 5.4 million cubic metres from 2006 to 2007.

Thériault was raised in what he describes as an "Acadian ghetto in Moncton," Georgetown. He recalls the paved roads and services ending just outside Anglophone Moncton. He eventually settled in the rural northern New Brunswick community of Kedgwick with his wife, Betty St. Pierre, who he says, "taught him how to stand up." In 2009, St. Pierre organized a petition to stop spraying the forest after she said she and other forestry workers were sprayed with a glyphosate-based herbicide.

Forestry companies spray herbicides to establish softwood plantations after they have clearcut a forest. Glyphosate-based herbicides, VisionMax, Forza and Weedmaster, stop the growth of hardwoods and plants.

In a story reported by the NB Media Co-op in 2009, St. Pierre said, "A man reported fish kills along a stream here after the last spraying. It is not normal to do that to the forest. We can't prove we are sick because of the spraying but cancer and pesticides have been linked. People are starting to question why do so many people in our community, in Northern New Brunswick, have cancer and rare cancers."

"Where were the journalists?" questions Thériault. "I approached several reporters in the province about these stories of forest mismanagement. I was told that I was too controversial. I spoke the truth. They were too afraid," says Thériault.

"I knew I had to report on what was happening in our woods because the press was not doing it," says Thériault. He set out to do what he calls a "social awareness raising experiment." Supported by the New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners, the filmmaker produced a number of online videos with people who had critical things to say about forestry practices in New Brunswick.

Outdated forestry legislation that benefits large industrial interests is a main culprit behind forest mismanagement in the province, according to forestry experts, conservation groups and woodlot owners as reported in the Conservation Council's 2017 Forest Report Card. However, getting the story of forest mismanagement told has been difficult in a province where J.D. Irving, Ltd. owns a large portion of the media.

The popularity of Thériault's short videos and NB Media Co-op's stories on spraying the forest reveal that people are hungry to hear the points of view of the small woodlot owners, forestry workers, scientists and conservationists. "After my first few videos, I started getting contacted by retired Deputy Ministers of Natural Resources who were now free to talk," notes Thériault.

Besides J.D. Irving, "other private interests are making tremendous amounts of money from our forest while we, the public, feel the pain," says Thériault. The Auditor-General's 2015 report affirms Thériault's claim: Kim MacPherson's audit of the Department of Natural Resources finances, from 2009 to 2014, revealed that the province had lost between $7 to 10 million each year on our public forests.

In perhaps his most popular video, Thériault tells the story of how forestry management was redesigned in ways that benefited companies that are associated with Bud Bird and Frank McKenna.

According to Thériault, Bud Bird, a well-known businessman and former Progressive Conservative politician, while Minister of Natural Resources under the Hatfield government, "essentially privatized the Crown forest by dividing the land into ten timber licenses in 1982."

In response to concerns of woodlot owners, the Crown Lands and Forest Act was amended in 1982 to require that the industry's primary source of wood fibre had to come from private woodlots. The big players in the forestry industry objected to the new power given to woodlot owners and their marketing boards but Bird was able to console the industry by consolidating 483 parcels of Crown land into ten licenses. Today, only four companies, all large, multinational corporations, control New Brunswick's Crown forest with J.D. Irving being the largest. Theriault argues, "This system has impoverished New Brunswick."

Frank McKenna, while Premier, changed the Act by striking the woodlot owners' guarantee of primary source of wood supply to the province's mills. Woodlot owners have been fighting since 1992 to have the market advantage returned to them. They say they are not able to compete with cheap Crown wood and they point to the overcutting of the public forest as one symptom of a broken forest management regime.

McKenna and Bird entered again in Thériault's storytelling of New Brunswick's forest history. In 2009, Fraser Papers, that owned the mill in Edmundston, filed for bankruptcy protection with the Canadian and American governments so that it could restructure. At the time, Brookfield Asset Management was the majority shareholder of Fraser Papers. McKenna is a long-time board member of Brookfield, a company that denied 450 retired mill workers in Edmundston their full pensions.

The restructuring of Fraser Papers involved splitting the company into two new companies: Acadian Timber and Twin Rivers. Bird is a former board director of Acadian Timber. According to Acadian Timber's website, the company today is the "second largest timberland operator in New Brunswick and Maine." Twin Rivers operates the Edmundston mill and is one of the companies that the Alward government signed a controversial and unprecedented contract with in 2014 that allowed the company to cut an increased amount of wood through their Crown land license every year.

Frustrated by a political system that is captured by corporations, Thériault ran in the last two provincial elections, first as an independent and in the September 2018 election, as a Green Party candidate for Restigouche West. In that election, he came in second, with 31.5 per cent of the vote.

Thériault's says that local decision-making bodies must have more power and responsibilities over resources such as the forest as well as health care and other public services. He says rural New Brunswick also needs to grapple with climate change.

This article was made possible with support from RAVEN – Rural Action & Voices for the Environment.

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"Children have to hear another story"

have continuity because they are centered around James Bay. After Indigenous people became Canadian citizens in 1960, an office opened and people were encouraged to write to identify their territory. The government wanted to try to renew the treaties, and some land was returned to the people, along with financial incentives. This was the beginnings of renegotiation and, for Obomsawin, "In some places it was done quite well and in others not."

Reflective of Obomsawin's outlook, her recent film, *Our People Will Be Healed* (2017) is more optimistic. This film features the Helen Betty Osborne Ininiw Education Resource Centre in Northern Manitoba as a model for all Indigenous learning places. There, she filmed 500 children playing the violin: "The mind and the heart of the people [are] in this 12-year-old school. Children are so happy there."

Obomsawin also interviewed the principal of the school who was making innovative change and told her: "We're lucky if we have 15 people graduating. We made a new rule, we added buses at 9 and 9:30 which has made a significant change in the number of students graduating. We prefer to have them late than not have them at all."

During the discussion, Obomsawin was asked about the two films she made about New Brunswick's Indigenous communities.

Incident at Restigouche was about the raids on the Listuguj Mi'kmaq First Nation by Quebec police to impose restrictions on Indigenous fishermen. When she made the film, Obomsawin "was very angry because the Minister treated the Mi'kmaq very poorly." She added: "I had a hard time making that film. I was fighting the whole time. It was a calvary to make." It was filmed in 1981 and came out three years later.

The film contains a famous scene where Obomsawin grills then Quebec Minister of Fisheries Daniel Lessard who had ordered the raids. Obomsawin joked that "The Minister had the courage to come" be interviewed, despite the fact that he had been forewarned about her methods.

Obomsawin has a frank approach when interviewing politicians, "If they're insulting our people, I'm going to show them how I feel." She added: "I've been at it for 50 years. At the beginning it was very different." Relaying anecdotes from her beginnings doing research for a film, she said "the minute it was an Indigenous person, [federal bureaucrats] made things very difficult." Obomsawin believes that would never happen today.

On March 13, 2019, Obomsawin's film *Is the Crown at War with Us?*" (2002) will be screened by the Indigenization committee at STU. It was made about the Esgenoopetitj First Nation (Burnt Church) and features federal officials' confrontations with fishermen. For the director, racism was a huge obstacle: "It was a difficult film to make in terms of the reaction of the non-Indigenous people towards the Indigenous people. It was tough to see." Again, Obomsawin mentioned the larger context: "you have to deal with the government's oppressive laws. It's important to document these stories because they are history."

Obomsawin is currently working on a film about Jordan's Principle, a policy named after Jordan River Anderson, a 5-year old boy from Norway House Cree Nation, Manitoba, who passed away from a rare medical disorder. This policy would require that Indigenous children receive equitable access to all government services without jurisdictional barriers getting in the way. Obomsawin has been working on this film since 2010 and said: "it's fantastic! It's more than encouraging!" She added that she sees this Principle as a very positive change: "In general there's a good feeling between other nations and ours."

Loiselle noted that the *Trick or Treaty?* story shifted when music began to be included. Obomsawin noted that music and song is really a central part of her peoples' life: "music really goes to the heart of people. It's so much easier to receive the story." Along with her recognition as a documentary filmmaker, she has also been a singer since the sixties: "I never stopped singing but I wasn't doing concerts." Her album Bush Lady has had a long journey: it was written in 1960, recorded in 1985, re-recorded in 1988 and remastered and re-released in 2018. Last year, Obomsawin sang in a festival in Holland at the age of 85 and, in September 2018, she sang in Montreal.

Obomsawin is from Odanak, Quebec, part of the Wabanaki Confederacy, about halfway between Montreal and Quebec on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. On the album, Obomsawin sang a song about Odanak, and specifically about taking care of the place, about strangers coming and Indigenous people losing their land, and a warning told by a beaver to a woman washing clothes at the river.

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