What the Mount Polley tailings disaster has to teach us to protect the Nashwaak from the Sisson mine

By TRACY GLYNN

One of the world’s largest tailing dams is proposed to be constructed next to the Nashwaak River, and the government has permitted the proposed Sisson mine operation. With catastrophic mine waste spills on the rise and the fact that the Sisson mine’s permitting process did not adequately examine the possibility of a tailings breach, there is reason to worry about the future of the Nashwaak Watershed.

Jacinda Mack notes that the lives and landscape of the Secwépemc territory in the heart of British Columbia forever changed on August 4, 2014, the day the Mount Polley tailings dam breached. Mack was the Natural Resources Manager for the Xat’sull First Nation when 25 million cubic metres (10,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools) of contaminated process water and tailings poured into Polley Lake, Quesnel Lake and, eventually, the Fraser River Basin.

Before the Mount Polley disaster, Xat’sull families harvested and processed up to 200 salmon per family. The Quesnel Lake watershed supported a lucrative sport and commercial fisheries and a tourism industry while also being home to resource extraction in the form of mining and logging.

For the losses suffered by the worst mine waste spill in North America’s history, the Xat’sull First Nation at one point received tins of salmon to compensate for the loss of wild salmon contaminated by the spill. The company that operates the Mount Polley mine and tailings dam, Imperial Metals, was not held accountable by government.

“Tons of toxic substances were dumped into waterways. Fish habitats were destroyed. People’s drinking water was affected. Yet, nearly three years after the disaster, and despite clear evidence of violations of Canadian laws, no charges have been brought forward by any level of government. This is wrong, simply wrong. It sets a terrible precedent for other mining companies, for other governments.”

From the Argus Daily, published in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, this August 13-15, it will be a time for us all to discuss the social practice of creative writing and its role in social justice.” The Fredericton CCWWP/PPCCL Conference was organized by Sue Sinclair, of the UNB Department of English, and Tracey Lindberg, of the UNB Department of Literacy Studies, with funding from the New Brunswick Arts Council (now the New Brunswick Foundation for the Arts and Culture) and is based in Halifax where she was the 2013-15 Halifax Regional Municipality’s Poet Laureate. At the event she called: “a collaborative effort by CCWWP and Tracey Lindberg and a growing number of donors.” From the Kelly Lake Conservation in B.C. LAPPOINTE, FATTY LEGS, and Whose Is It Anyway?

Lessons from Mount Polley to Protect the Nashwaak

By Jacinda Mack, Joan Kuyek and Ugo Lapointe on August 14 at 7:00pm at St. Mary’s First Nation Cultural Centre, 25 Detham St. All welcome.

This story was first published in the Conservation Council’s EcoAlert magazine.

Ginger Carson, Kayla Paul and Kyler Paul (left to right) accepting the Indigenous Youth Writing Award.

St. Mary’s students win inaugural indigenous youth writing award

By SOPHIE M. LAWIE

Two Devon Middle School students were awarded the first Indigenous Youth Writing Award on June 9 in Fredericton. The Indigenous Youth Writing Award was created by the Canadian Creative Writers and Writing Programs (CCWWP/PPCCL) as a way to give back to the communities where it is based. The Call for Nominations came from the Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and of the recent scandals that have rocked the Canadian literary establishment.

Devon Middle School students Kayla Paul and Kyler Paul and their teacher received the foundational award at the opening ceremony of the conference, in the presence of First Nations attendees as well as distinguished guests, writers and featured speakers El Jones and Herménégilde Chiasson.

The Devon Middle School students, representatives of their entire class, received recognition for their workshop in learning about Canada’s notorious Residential Schools. The project was conceived by Ginger Carson, a First Nations Literacy Teacher, and Perry Constantine, a Social Studies teacher. Students read two books by Residential School survivors, Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fend, Fatty Legs and Whose Is It Anyway?

After reading the novels, the Grade 8 students from St. Mary’s First Nation were curious to know about the outcomes of the characters’ lives.

“They were left wondering how Olemaun’s (the main character’s) life unfolded with her siblings, her parents and friends if there would be a third book. At this point students were inspired to write Margaret Pokiak-Fenton letters to ask her questions that their teachers could not answer,” said Robert Buddle, Chair of the Board of Directors of the CCWWP/PPCL. Speaking of this student-driven initiative, he said that the association “loves what the class did and felt they should be recognized.”

The students accepted a cheque for the establishment of an indigenous student writing prize, something Buddle called: “a collaborative effort by CCWWP and Tracey Lindberg and a growing number of donors.” From the Kelly Lake Conservation in B.C.

Locals affected by the Mount Polley tailings spill say it devastated their watershed. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

B.C. made some amendments to its mining code in relation to the disaster. With Jacinda Mack, Joan Kuyek and Ugo Lapointe on August 14 at 7:00pm at St. Mary’s First Nation Cultural Centre, 25 Detham St. All welcome.

The Conservation Council of New Brunswick brought together experts to examine and comment on the mine’s environmental assessment reports. Based on the experts’ assessment of the project and environmental assessment, the Conservation Council argues that the Sisson mine should not be approved. Important questions about the mine’s impact on the natural environment remain unanswered.

The Canadian government announced approval of the mine’s environmental assessment based on the company meeting conditions on June 23. Previously, in 2016, the New Brunswick government approval of the mine’s environmental assessment based on the company meeting 40 conditions.

When Ministers responsible for mining from provinces and territories across Canada meet in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, this August 13-15, it will be a time for us all to discuss the social practice of creative writing and its role in social justice.” The Fredericton CCWWP/PPCL Conference was organized by Sue Sinclair, of the UNB Department of English, and Tracey Lindberg, of the UNB Department of Literacy Studies, with funding from the New Brunswick Arts Council (now the New Brunswick Foundation for the Arts and Culture) and is based in Halifax where she was the 2013-15 Halifax Regional Municipality’s Poet Laureate. At the event she called: “a collaborative effort by CCWWP and Tracey Lindberg and a growing number of donors.” From the Kelly Lake Conservation in B.C.

EcoAlert magazine.

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Heavy rains and winds did not dampen the commitment of the approximately 80 people gathered to protect their communities and the Bay of Fundy from the proposed Energy East pipeline on June 17 in Red Head, New Brunswick. The rally and picnic, organized by the Red Head Anthony’s Cove Preservation Association, was the final “Hands Across The Water” event held in the province in June. “This gathering is about the future of our communities and the future of our young people,” said Lynaya Adebepin, spokesperson for the Association. “We want to live in a safe, healthy community and we want to prevent runaway climate change. A rapid transition to clean energy and efficiency will create more jobs and local prosperity than a massive urban evacuation.”

Red Head is the terminal point for the proposed Energy East tar sands bitumen pipeline. Up to 13.2 million barrels would be stored in the middle of this rural community at the shore of the Bay of Fundy, and over 280 super tanker exports would cross the Bay of Fundy and Gulf of Maine on their way to U.S. refineries in New Jersey, Louisiana, and Texas. The rally and picnic on the beach took place beside Anthony’s Cove Road, near the location for the proposed tank farm. TransCanada is proposing to level the hill and forest adjacent to the road. A total of 22 storage tanks is proposed to be built for the tank farm, each one approximately 18 m high and 62 m in diameter. This industrial landscape would dramatically alter the quiet, picturesque neighbourhood of homeowners and threaten their safety.

“I’m worried about the prospect of a spill or fire at the tar storage farm,” said Adebepin. “The deputy fire chief in Burnaby, B.C., has issued a scathing report on the risks presented by a similar oil tank storage facility on the West Coast. The chief warned that a fire at the expanded tank farm could create a ‘nightmare scenario’ resulting in a massive urban evacuation. Solidarity with the local lobster fishermen, there was a maritime lobster boil on the beach to remind everyone of the importance of the Bay of Fundy that supports thousands of fishery jobs. Both fishery and tourism jobs would be in jeopardy if there was a spill of tar sands bitumen in the Bay of Fundy. Bitumen which has the highest and fastest tides in the world.

Well water from Red Head was served at the picnic to highlight concerns over the safety of the water supply. Unlike conventional oil, tar sands bitumen in a water spill will form tar balls that sink to the bottom. Montreal Mayor Denis Coderre stressed that the cost of a major spill in the Metropolitan Montreal region could reach $10 billion. A 2013 consultant’s report for the BC Ministry of Environment estimated that a bitumen spill on the saltwater ocean would leave more than 50% of the volume of oil in the water, due to viscosity, sinking and submergence of the tar.

The critically endangered North Atlantic right whale would also be in jeopardy if the Energy East project was approved. These and the other magnificent whales in the Bay of Fundy and Gulf of Maine would suffer the fate of increased noise/disturbances, ship strikes, and whale entanglement from fishery gear loss. Entanglement in lost fishing gear is a major mortality factor to whales in the Bay of Fundy and Gulf of Maine since pieces of fishing gear silently move through the water and can travel for large distances.

The participants stood in solidarity with Quebec organizations such as Coule pas chez nous! and other communities opposing the Energy East pipeline, as well as the rail transport of tar sands bitumen, including the proposed oil-by-rail marine export project ending in Belledune, New Brunswick.

We will stand shoulder to shoulder to protect the water to secure a future for our children and our grandchildren that is healthy,” said Brooks. "Hands Across the Bay of Fundy" for the future we want.

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Community Calendar

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Publications

NB Media Co-op’s 8th Annual General Meeting & Keynote Speaker Bruce Livesey

Join the NB Media Co-op this Sept. 21 at 5:00 pm to review milestones of the past year and plans for the future. Bruce Livesey, award-winning journalist for The National Observer, will deliver the keynote on the need for investigative journalism at 7:00 pm at Kinsella Auditorium, McCain Hall, St. Thomas University. All are welcome but you must be a member to vote at the meeting. Contact: info@nbmediaacoop.org.

About 80 people lined up along the shore of the Bay of Fundy at Red Head on June 17 to draw attention to the opposition to the proposed Energy East pipeline. Photo by Mark D'Arcy.

Lives Lived: Saint John’s working-class heroes

By DAVID FRANK

Almost all of them were born before the end of the First World War, several as early as the 1870s and 1880s. Their formal education was limited, and they entered the workforce well before they were out of their teens.

None of them started out to become leaders or win a place in history, but here they are – more than a dozen of the often anonymous local heroes who worked long and hard for the social reforms and citizenship rights that are now considered part of the Canadian way of life.


Most of these names are not well-known in Saint John today but others, most notably John Melvin and the Frank and Ella Hatheway Labour Exhibition Centre, make it possible to learn about some of the people who earned public respect for their part in the long struggle to improve conditions and raise standards for working people.

Whatever their background and wherever they employed, they came to prominence because fellow workers wanted them on their side.

They were often chosen as local union officers, and many went on to serve on the labour council and at the provincial and national level.

Some later worked at the national and international levels. Some were elected to represent labour on common council. One even became the province’s Minister of Labour. Meanwhile, as their stories also show, they were active in many other ways in the social movements and institutions that make for a strong community.

It is notable that all of them are men – not surprising given the dominant male breadwinner ideology of their time. And, although a number of them were immigrants to Saint John, almost all of them share the dominant anglo-celtic background of the city. Today’s working class is more diverse, more than the much more equal numbers of women and men in the workforce.

Taken together, these stories demonstrate the energy, confidence and intelligence that have made Saint John one of Canada’s most resilient working-class communities. We still have a long way to go to make the workplace a more harmonious, more productive place.

Lives Lived: Saint John’s working-class heroes – lives lived, shared in the past, hope for the future. Bruce Livesey, award-winning journalist for The National Observer, will deliver the keynote on the need for investigative journalism at 7:00 pm at Kinsella Auditorium, McCain Hall, St. Thomas University. All are welcome but you must be a member to vote at the meeting. Contact: info@nbmediaacoop.org.

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Author George Vair examines a new exhibit at the Frank and Ella Hatheway Labour Exhibition Centre. Photo by David Frank.