



Mining expert warns New Brunswickers about the company behind the Sisson mine project

By SOPHIE M. LAVOIE and TRACY GLYNN



Dozens of people visited the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers’ camp at the proposed Sisson mine site near Napadogan on May 26 to offer their solidarity to the grandmothers defending their traditional hunting territory from mining. The camp is located where the mine proposes to construct a huge tailings dam. Sister Maudilia Lopez from Guatemala, a Maya mam Catholic sister, (second from right), also visited the camp to share her struggles against Goldcorp, a Canadian mining company that operated in her community for 12 years. A group built a traditional longhouse at the site of the proposed open-pit while another group planted raised bed gardens so the camp can have food. Left to right: Wolastoqiyik grandmothers Hart Perley, Ramona Nicholas, Andrea Poliches, Sister Maudilia Lopez and Wolastoq Grand Council Chief Ron Tremblay. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

The company behind the Sisson Mine project, proposed in the headwaters of the Nashwaak Watershed, is known for starting up low-grade ore mines in areas of community opposition, according to Joan Kuyek.

Kuyek, a long-time mining analyst, says Hunter Dickinson Inc (HDI) specializes in bringing low-grade ores to market in the face of community opposition. She spoke to crowds in Stanley and Fredericton about the company in late April.

HDI Northcliff is the company advancing the Sisson open-pit tungsten and molybdenum mine project near Napadogan and Stanley. HDI is the subject of Kuyek’s report, “Behind the Pebble Mine: Hunter Dickinson Inc., the Canadian Mining Company You’ve Never Heard Of.”

Kuyek helped found MiningWatch Canada and has taught mining law and policy at Queen’s University Law School as well as community organizing at Carleton University. She began her investigation of HDI on the invitation of communities affected by HDI’s Northern Dynasty Pebble Mine in Alaska.

“A mine is really a huge waste management project,” said Kuyek, who went on to describe the complicated process of metal mining.

Metal mining often involves extracting the desired metallic minerals from ore rock that may also contain toxic compounds such as arsenic and mercury. The metallic minerals are separated from the ore using large amounts of process water laced with dissolved reagents, which can include cyanide or other additives.

Low-grade ore bodies like the proposed Sisson Mine project require especially large tailing ponds to contain the massive amounts of waste.

The tailings impoundment would have to be maintained forever, which Kuyek noted was something that is likely to be financially unfeasible.

HDI is a company that specializes in finding low-grade marginal ore deposits and getting a mine to the point of production, Kuyek noted. The company then usually sells the project before the mine enters the production phase. Before production, the company must go through a long

process of exploration, permit acquisition, and procurement of a social license to operate.

A social license has become one of the largest obstacles for the resource extraction industry because of community opposition.

According to Kuyek, HDI has developed expertise in removing all barriers to investment, including regulatory hurdles, and indigenous and community opposition. The company has gone so far as to file lawsuits against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ensure that its Pebble Mine could move ahead. The company has sued First Nations and environmental groups, which has tied up community resources, while creating a culture of fear.

A key strategy of HDI is to externalize the costs of the mining operation, and making it appear profitable on paper. Meanwhile, the company tries to get community support by making philanthropic donations, a practice that can divide communities.

While the public and the environment are saddled with long term risk management, HDI’s senior management have much to gain from specializing in these types of mining projects.

Northcliff Resources President and CEO, Christopher Zahovskis, is paid an annual salary of about \$300,000, plus a number of stock options and other perks. The chairman, Marchand Snyman, earns \$63,000 for Northcliff but is the CFO for a number of other HDI companies, bringing his annual cash compensation to almost \$600,000 not including options and other benefits.

According to Kuyek, projects supported by HDI have been “fought ferociously by local communities.” Projects developed by HDI have required government subsidies to proceed. On one project, the government subsidy was more than the company’s own investment in the project.

The proposed Sisson mine would be five times larger in scale than most of the other tungsten mines in the world (not including China) while the ore grade is three to seven times lower. The company behind the Sisson project claims the mine would have a lifespan of about 27 years but the

More than 1,000 new studies verify fracking causes serious health and environmental harm

By DALLAS McQUARRIE

A library of more than 1,000 scientific studies since New Brunswick’s 2014 moratorium on fracking show there is a consensus that fracking cannot be done safely.

A summary of those studies, made public this year, states bluntly that there is “no evidence that fracking can be practiced in a manner that does not threaten human health.” Along with the alarming damage to human health from a variety of diseases and conditions, longer-term studies present evidence that fracking also poisons water sources above and below ground, causes widespread air pollution, and contaminates land.

The March 2018 “Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking (Unconventional Gas and Oil Extraction),” published by Concerned Health Professionals of New York and the Physicians for Social Responsibility, a group of scientists and health professionals in the U.S., details widespread, long-term damage from fracking to people and their environment.

The Compendium notes that “as the number of gas wells increase in a community, so do rates of hospitalization Drilling and fracking operations are also correlated with increased rates of asthma . . . ambulance runs and emergency room visits.” As well, “two dozen chemicals commonly used in fracking operations are endocrine disruptors that can variously disrupt organ systems, lower sperm counts, and cause reproductive harm.”

An example of air pollution from fracking is the “benzene levels in ambient air surrounding drilling and fracking operations [that] are sufficient to elevate risks for future cancers in both workers and nearby residents, according to studies.”

“Animal studies show numerous threats to fertility and reproductive success from exposure to various concentrations of oil and gas chemicals, including at levels representative of those found in drinking water.”

The suspicion that fracking causes earthquakes, once ridiculed by shale gas promoters, is confirmed in the findings. Those earthquakes can occur long after, and far away from actual fracking sites. On top of everything else, radioactive waste material from fracking is now known to cause lung cancer.

One of the report’s most alarming discoveries is that pregnant women, infants and children are particularly vulnerable to fracking.

Even a single shale gas well “reduces health among infants born to mothers living within 3 km of a well site during pregnancy.” For mothers living within 1 km of a well



Pregnant women, infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to fracking. Shown here at the Trappist Monastery near Rogersville are (left to right) Hugo and his mother Rebeka Frazer-Chiasson with Alice and her mother Emily Shapiro. Babies born in fracking areas are more likely to have health problems like low birth weights, congenital heart defects and leukemia. Photo by Dallas McQuarrie.

Panhandlers need income assistance, not policing

By SYLVIA HALE

The solution to the “problem” of panhandlers in Fredericton, if there is any problem, is to increase income assistance rates, not to increase policing. The rates are currently set at very low levels, supposedly sufficient to cover food and shelter, but not much else. So what else is there?

First, transportation. One city bus pass costs \$80 a month, or \$2.50 each way for single tickets. A taxi ride costs between \$5-7 each way, inside the city. Virtually every service that is available “free” in Fredericton requires transportation money to get there.

The Community Kitchen does an admirable job providing three free meals a day for between 45-65 people. That’s great for people who live within 15-20 minute walking distance of the corner of Smythe and Woodstock Road. When I volunteer at the kitchen, I get there in my own car. Otherwise it would be a brisk half-hour walk in each direction—more than I would like to commit to, especially in bad weather. People with health issues who find walking difficult, or who live on the Northside, way over town, or up the hill, face a \$14 taxi fare to get to each “free” meal. There are no city buses, to my knowledge, that would get people from central bus transit points to and from the Community Kitchen at the precise times when the doors are open to serve food.

The same issue applies to using the Fredericton Downtown Community Health Centre’s generous free laundry service. The cost of getting to and from the laundry is greater than the cost of a commercial service that might be closer, or washing clothes by hand in the shower and drying them on racks.

Even with a bus pass, a taxi may be the only workable way to get to medical and other social service appointments through the month.

People also need to buy clothes. Fredericton has good used-clothing stores, but getting to stores located long distances away entails transportation costs, before calculating in the cost of buying items, assuming the stores happen to have suitable clothing on offer.

A maximum of two taxi rides per week adds up to monthly costs of about \$100.

Then there are the costs of other “basic” services that are not calculated into income assistance rates. Cell phone service costs about \$60 a month. Apartment buildings, including subsidized residences, routinely connect the doorbell to a telephone number. Residents need a functioning telephone to acknowledge and open the door to a visitor. Access to the Internet and cable

have now become basic channels linking people into mass media and social networks. They are particularly important for people with physical and mental health issues who easily become isolated and disconnected from the social world around them. Basic service for Internet, cable and home telephone costs about \$150 a month. This is before taking into account the costs of buying a working computer, television, and telephone, or replacing broken ones.

Added to that there are the incidental costs of personal items not included as food: toothpaste, toothbrush, hand soap, shampoo and conditioner, laundry detergent, toilet paper, other sanitary items, over-the-counter medications for colds, headaches, indigestion, band-aids, stationary, postage stamps, and on and on. Each is individually a small-cost item, but collectively add up to \$50 a month or more. Now, add in some expenses that are pure luxuries—a 6-pack of beer once in a while, an evening at the movies, a ticket to a sports game, a hair-cut . . .

Some of the less frequent, bigger-ticket items hit low-income people especially hard: the need to replace a broken set of dentures and/or eye-glasses, orthotics, replace broken furniture items, worn-out kitchen pots and utensils, routine veterinarian treatment for a companion animal, and the extra costs around visiting an out-of-town relative or having them come to visit you once a year. All these bigger-ticket items easily add up to \$1,200 a year or \$100 a month that has to be carefully saved up.

These monthly expenses, all falling outside the “basic food-and-shelter” costs calculated into income assistance allowances, already come to over \$500, and I have not counted anything usually derided like alcohol, cigarettes, or stronger drugs. Nor have I counted in the cost of food, for people whose unsubsidized rent+utilities+heating costs alone swallow up almost all their monthly income assistance allowance. Nor have I counted the costs of struggling with debt burdens.

In short, the relentless monthly struggle of trying to stretch inadequate income assistance rates over relentless living costs, helps to explain why some people beg in the street. If New Brunswick taxpayers were successful in pressuring our government to raise the minimum income assistance rate by \$500 a month, then we would likely not have any panhandlers in the streets. Only then might I be persuaded that policing panhandlers would be reasonable policy.

Sylvia Hale is a retired professor of Sociology at St. Thomas University.

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Fracking harm confirmed in studies

site, there is a “25 percent increase in the probability of low birth weight, as well as declines in other measures of infant health.”

The terrible damage fracking does to newborns was discovered by a 2017 Pennsylvania study that examined the birth certificates of every one of the 1,100,000 babies born in Pennsylvania from 2004 to 2013. The birth data was then analyzed in relation to where and when shale gas wells were drilled.

Analysis of that data revealed that mothers living near fracking operations “consistently find impairments to infant health, including: elevated risks for low birth weight and preterm birth, neural tube defects and congenital heart defects.”

As well, “dozens of known endocrine-disrupting chemicals” used in fracking harm “fertility and reproductive success . . . [and are linked to] miscarriage, prostate cancer, birth defects, and decreased semen quality and counts.”

The health studies also note higher rates of leukemia “among children and young adults living in areas dense with oil and gas wells,” along with increased frequency of asthma attacks.

Denise Melanson is a retired medical social worker living in Kent County. “Study after study after study now confirm that fracking makes people sick,” she said. “Low birth weight babies also experience all kinds of physical and intellectual difficulties.”

In 2012-13, Melanson analyzed fracking leases in New Brunswick and determined that about 250,000 New Brunswickers lived in potential fracking areas.

“We know from Pennsylvania that hospitalization rates are significantly higher in fracked areas,” Melanson said. “That’s because people in fracked areas are more likely to have cancers, heart problems, and neurological and dermatological issues.”

There is a significantly increased likelihood that people in fracked areas will suffer lifelong health problems that will continue to plague families and to burden the healthcare system long after the gas companies have left.

Read part two of this story on nbmediacoop.org.

Dallas McQuarrie covers the environmental beat for the NB Media Co-op from the unceded Mi’kmaq territory of Siknuktuk.

Fredericton rallies for elm trees at Officer’s Square

By TRACY GLYNN



Markus Kingston addresses a crowd of approximately 100 people gathered at Fredericton City Hall to voice their opposition to the city of Fredericton’s plan to remove old trees from Officer’s Square on May 28, 2018. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

Fredericton residents are voicing their opposition to imminent plans to cut down 19 elm and maple trees at Officer’s Square in the city’s downtown.

More than 100 people gathered at Fredericton City Hall on May 28 during the City Council meeting to voice their disapproval of the city’s plan to remove the trees. Instead, the residents want the city to work with the trees as part of its revitalization plan for Officer’s Square.

After the rally, several residents gathered in the gallery while the city council meeting was in session. Councilor Kate Rogers attempted to get the tree issue on the agenda but did not have the support of the other city councilors to proceed with the agenda addition. The meeting was disrupted by audience members. City councilors left the room during the disruption. Councilor Rogers stayed behind.

Mayor Mike O’Brien said that the four-year plan to revitalize Officer’s Square will continue but that he will consult with staff to see if some of the trees can be saved.

Markus Kingston, one of the rally organizers, encouraged people to contact their city councilor and demand that the trees be saved.

Mining expert warns New Brunswickers

mine is likely to experience shut downs when tungsten and molybdenum prices drop. In all likelihood, metal prices will continue to be volatile.

Critics worry that the project relies on optimistic estimates for future prices for tungsten and molybdenum. Although tungsten prices have increased recently, Kuyek says they will likely go down as soon as China’s tungsten mines come back online following clean up of pollution problems there.

Lawrence Wuest, an ecologist who lives 15km from the proposed mine site near Stanley, has been following the Sisson Mine project since it was first proposed ten years ago. He described how the Expert Review Panel of the project’s New Brunswick Environment Impact Assessment were worried the mine would likely experience periodic shut-downs or financial failure during its lifetime, which would pose risks to the public and the environment.

According to Wuest, over the past ten years successive governments have, in their haste to move this mine forward,

violated a number of laws and regulations, including the Clean Water Act, the Clean Environment Act, and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Wuest expressed concern about the government’s ability to follow its own regulations given its haste to find new revenue streams. “How can we possibly expect the government to properly regulate the mine when they do not follow laws and regulations before building it?” Wuest asked the audience.

Wuest described the Mount Polley tailings dam disaster that occurred in 2014 in the Caribou region of British Columbia. The Mount Polley tailings dam is a centre-line dam built on glacial till, which are features shared by the proposed Sisson tailings dam.

“If you don’t want the Sisson mine, make sure you tell the government,” Kuyek told attendees at her two public talks.

Sophie M. Lavoie and Tracy Glynn are editorial board members of the NB Media Co-op.

Community Calendar

To list your community event, email **info@nbmediacoop.org**. For an updated listing of events, check **nbmediacoop.org**.

19th annual St. Mary’s First Nation Powwow. June 15-17 at the Old Reserve on Union Street along the Wolastoq River.

Masuma Khan on Building Solidarity and Resilience While Surrounded by Fragility. Masuma Khan will speak about her experiences with racism and censorship as a student leader at Dalhousie University when she spoke in solidarity with indigenous people in 2017. Masuma Khan will be the NB Media Co-op’s keynote speaker at its ninth annual members’ meeting in September in Fredericton. Stay tuned for the details. For more information, contact: info@nbmediacoop.org.

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