



The Brief

Vol. 3 No. 1

A project of the NB Media Co-op

September 2011

nbmediacoop.org

Why we marched against shale gas on New Brunswick Day



Hit the Road Frack! Approximately 1,500 people march against shale gas in Fredericton on New Brunswick Day. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

By DEBBIE HOPPER

While New Brunswick Day is often celebrated by enjoying some of the province's sandy beaches, picturesque rivers and lakes, and vibrant wilderness, around 1,500 of us chose a different way to honour New Brunswick this year: we marched and rallied in the province's capital in defence of our water, lands and way of life. What better day to send a strong message to our provincial

government that fracking to extract shale gas is not welcome here or anywhere!

Only recently did we become aware of the threats posed by shale gas extraction: from the contamination of our groundwater (the source of drinking water for 60 percent of New Brunswickers), to the sheer magnitude of industrialization planned for our countryside. As we became aware of the dangers of hydro fracking, we began to inform our neighbours and take action. Approximately thirty anti-shale gas groups formed all over the province. Our efforts made the August 1st

march against shale gas a huge success. Young couples pushing babies in strollers, seniors, indigenous peoples of the Wabanaki territory, Acadians and others rallied in support of clean water and air, and the rights of all human beings to live in a secure and safe environment.

Despite the seriousness of the threats posed by the shale gas industry, we still took the time to laugh and enjoy each other's company on this very different New Brunswick Day. We appreciated the chance to reunite with old friends and make new friends. We sang along to the satirical choruses of the Raging Grannies and the folks songs of Taymouth's Jim Emberger. We rocked in rhythm to the Wulustukyeg Singers. We shed a tear at the poignancy of Maliseet elder Alma Brook's plea for Mother Earth. It was a time to bask in the warmth of solidarity.

Marcher Denise Melanson from Our Environment, Our Choice/Notre Environnement, Notre Choix whose members are from Kent and Northumberland Counties was thrilled by the turnout.

"With the short period of planning time, I was concerned that if there was a small turnout it would reinforce the industry and government's position that only a small but vocal group are opposed to the shale gas industry," she said. "The fact that more than 1,500 people chose to protest on one of the few hot sunny days of the summer instead of going to the beach or attending a family or community event, was a testament to the concern the population feels about this practice and their commitment to stopping it.

"I now feel hopeful that we can mobilize many times this number as we move through the province. I would like to suggest that once we've had rallies in the major centres that we call a province-wide Anti-Fracking Day when people in every community in the province march to their town centres at the same time," said Melanson.

Indeed, those of us opposed to shale gas are not a "small, but vocal group." We are a large and growing legion of people who are networking, researching and sharing resources. As we have proven time and time again with the defeat of uranium and the proposed sale of NB Power, a people united cannot be defeated. Taking on the multi-billion dollar oil and gas companies means we face a tough fight ahead to protect the air we breathe and the water we drink. We need you to join us.

Debbie Hopper is from Rexton. She is a member of Our Environment, Our Choice; Notre Environnement, Notre Choix.

"It's not over," say shale gas opponents at Stanley blockade

By TRACY GLYNN

Stanley/Fredericton - A two-day blockade of SWN Resources' seismic vibrators on Route 625, a dirt road north of the village of Stanley, ended after supper time on August 10th. Worry of arrest and concern over strategy weighed heavily on the minds of the blockade participants as they discussed whether to continue or halt the blockade. As rain poured down, participants, including many who stayed overnight in tents, were mostly in favour of discontinuing the blockade because they felt they had made their point that opposition to shale gas in the province of New Brunswick is serious. They planned to take their opposition to the politicians and grow the anti-shale gas movement.

"We should be proud of what we've accomplished here today," said Susan Levi-Peters, former chief of Elsipogtog. "We have come together to oppose this industry."

An immediate demand of the blockade participants was to have a meeting with Conservative Premier David Alward at the blockade site. The Premier refused. Visiting the blockade in his stead was York North MLA Kirk MacDonald. Before the announcement that MacDonald was on his way to the blockade, the shale gas opponents had already decided in a round circle meeting to discontinue the blockade.

MacDonald arrived at approximately 5:00pm with a bag of food for the blockade participants. He was greeted with a cautious applause. MacDonald was seated next to Maliseet elder Alma Brooks, Sandy Brewer of Stanley and two RCMP negotiators. Over 50 blockade participants gathered around them while about another 50 milled around the blockade site.

Brooks spoke of the importance of protecting the water and gave MacDonald a warning, "We had 1,500 people last time on the streets in Fredericton. We will be 10,000 or more next time."

"How do you drink gas polluted water?" asked one of the Stanley blockade participants.

"I have been taking your concerns to government," responded MacDonald. "People are taking time to research and become experts on this issue."

MacDonald's ongoing meetings with some of the opponents is noted while his counterparts, the government ministers responsible for oversight of the shale gas industry, Minister of Environment Margaret-Ann Blaney and Minister of Natural Resources Bruce Northrup, are criticized for dismissing legitimate concerns and defending the shale gas industry.

Levi-Peters told MacDonald, "We don't want these machines in Kent County. The companies say they will sue us. We will sue them if they come on Crown land. It's not their land." The crowd erupted in cheers and clapping.

"It's pure pollution and destruction of wilderness," said Vicki Oland, a woman from Durham Bridge. She was also greeted with applause when she said, "New Brunswick is looking for a new message for its license plates. It should be New Brunswick: a nature's wonder."

The drive to the blockade site through picturesque Nashwaak River Valley, a hotbed of shale gas resistance, emboldened the shale gas opponents as they viewed not only the local opposition marked by the number of houses with anti-shale gas signs but also what is at risk—the winding Nashwaak River, tall pines and fields of potatoes, raspberries and goldenrod. "New Brunswick is not Alberta. It's not a wasteland," continued Oland.

MacDonald seemingly concurred with the crowd's concerns when he said, "We were able to live thousands of years without oil and gas. We can't live without water."

A woman from the crowd responded to MacDonald's claim that he is taking their message to government, "But are you defending our message?" A man said, "If you go to government and defend us, we'll defend you! We elected you!" Another man shouted, "Run as an independent!"


In response to MacDonald's assertions that the government is putting into place regulations for the industry, Brooks said, "There are no guarantees. They're experimenting. The government can't control these companies."

One man questioned whether the industry wrote the regulations, which mining companies have done in the past in countries like Indonesia and Guatemala. In response to a man calling New Brunswick a third world country, MacDonald said that such destructive practices are actually sometimes banned in third world countries. Another man, with tears in his eyes, pleaded with MacDonald to realize that their protest is

huge for Stanley, normally a conservative village.

Moon Joyce, an instructor at Renaissance College in Fredericton, asked MacDonald, "What are the terms of agreement with these companies? What are the lengths of licenses in this area?" MacDonald did not know the answer to these questions and others that followed from the crowd but promised to get the answers.

Louise Melanson, a Fredericton teacher, asked MacDonald, "Are we bounded by NAFTA?" The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) includes proportionately clauses over exports such as energy, which many free trade critics say means that New Brunswick could be on the hook for losses incurred by companies if the province decided to reduce the original amount of exports of (*continued on page 2*)



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