Why we marched against shale gas on New Brunswick Day

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 way 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 Wolastoq territory, academics 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.

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 millied 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.”