The Brief

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Is it a quarry or a mine? Upham residents challenge J.D. Irving project not compliant with environmental regulations

By TRACY GLYNN

Upham residents at the proposed quarry site in May 2019. Photo submitted.

People living along the Hammond River near Saint John are worried about how a proposed gypsum quarry will affect their wells, wetlands and quality of life. The project contravenes regulations designed to protect the environment and local residents from this kind of disruption.

Hammond River Holdings, a J.D. Irving company, plans to extract an estimated 2.5 million tonnes of gypsum, metres away from the Hammond River in the rural community of Upham, over a 10-year period, beginning this spring. The gypsum will be transported to the nearby Atlantic Wallboard plant, also owned by J.D. Irving, for processing. Atlantic Wallboard manufactures drywall used by the construction industry.

According to the project's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), yet to be approved by the province of New Brunswick, the proposed quarry will destroy 13 wetlands and three fish-bearing tributaries of the Hammond River. The Hammond River is home to Atlantic salmon, brook trout, smallmouth bass, rainbow smelt, striped bass and shortnose sturgeon.

Cheryl Johnson is one of many Upham residents concerned about how the quarry will affect her country lifestyle. "I love life in the backwoods. We have a large garden where we grow much of our produce. We hunt and fish from the land," says Johnson, a music teacher and member of Friends of Hammond River.

"J.D. Irving has bought several chunks of land downriver from us and has proposed a large industrial gypsum mine. There would be 25 explosions per year to loosen the rock, 35-40 trucks traveling the roads per day, and 6-10 jobs created on site that would be hired from within the company," according to Johnson.

Sarah Blenis, another Upham resident, found out about the project when she witnessed core drilling operations in her area in the spring of 2018. She created the Protect Upham Mountain Facebook group to share information about the project.

Residents are concerned by how the province is flip-flopping on the definition of the proposed project. The EIA designates the project as a quarry but the province says it's a mine. The lack of clarification seems designed deliberately to avoid the province's local development regulations.

"The community has been told that the project will be a quarry, not a mine. As a quarry, the project must follow the Quarry Siting Standards, prohibiting operations within 600 metres of residential wells. There are multiple homes within 600 metres, some as close as 250 metres to the proposed quarry," argues Blenis.

Jenn Sherwood's father's home is about 500 metres from the proposed blasting zone for the quarry. "Everyday my father is out on this land, taking care of his animals and garden, and hunting. We live off the land here," says Sherwood.

"I have planned my whole life around building my forever home in Upham. I have been saving to start to build my home this spring and now I have had to stop because of how close it will be. I will now have to look to buy elsewhere because it will disrupt my water and foundation. This is something I can't risk. I have planned my whole life to raise my children where my ancestors have all lived and now cannot. I am very angry with Irving," says Sherwood who was planning to build a home that is about 150 metres from the proposed quarry site.

Blenis notes that the province's quarry standards also prohibit operations within 60 metres of watercourses and regulated wetlands. "These setback limits are also being ignored," affirms Blenis.

"When the community questioned these violations of Quarry Standards, residents were told by the government that the project will be subjected to the Mining Act, not the Quarry Standards, because of how the gypsum will be used off-site," explains Blenis, "When we asked about the regulations under the Mining Act, like royalties, we were informed by the Minister of Natural Resources and Energy, Mike Holland, that gypsum is a low-value mineral, and that royalties are not imposed on quarry operations."

Upham residents are questioning whether the province's lack of clarity on whether the project is a quarry or mine has to do with the province's reneging of a contract to supply Atlantic Wallboard with gypsum.

The J.D. Irving company was supposed to receive synthetic gypsum from NB Power's Coleson Cove Generating Station in Saint John until 2020. Last year, the province announced that the power plant would not be able to fulfill the contract and supply the plant with gypsum. With the province now owing millions of dollars in shortfall penalties to Atlantic Wallboard, Blenis suspects that the province will give the Upham quarry the green light and not charge royalties. CBC reported in 2015 that in the previous six years NB Power had paid Atlantic Wallboard more than $12.3 million in penalties and contract renegotiation fees.

Similar concerns regarding the environmental harm and lack of economic benefit from quarry operations have been raised throughout the province by residents in Fredericton, Norton, Bayside, Memramcook, Estey's Bridge, and British Settlement.

"The Upham quarry project is not adhering to any setback limits to protect the environment or local community. It will not

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"Doing nothing is going to cost more": transitioning to a low-carbon economy

By LAUREN R. KORN

New Brunswick's "Canadian Energy Watchdog" Chris Rouse presented his Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) on May 9 to a nearly packed house at the Wilmot Church sanctuary in Fredericton. His presentation, "A Sustainable Business Case for the Transition to a Low Carbon Economy in New Brunswick," followed reminders that climate change has already reached the province; coastal erosion, flooding, and storm surge events have been a reality for some time now.

Rouse, of New Clear Free Solutions in Summerville, said his methodology relies on modelling from NB Power and the Pan Canadian Wind Integration study, as well as his own, and was reviewed and verified by UNB Saint John Associate Professor of Economics, Dr. Rob Moir.

His presentation examined the business case for public investment of the Climate Change Fund revenue through NB Power into renewables, efficiency, and fuel-switching, with a goal of transitioning 95 per cent of the province's total energy needs to renewables by 2040.

Rouse stressed that his long-term plan guarantees "low rates, clean energy, and profitable power." The IRP utilizes "least cost" environmental, social, and economic principles, based on the three pillars of sustainability (planet, people, and profit), and requires no new legislation or technology to implement. It relies heavily on public investment and the compound interest accrued over the course of the 20-year transition period. The plan seeks not only to serve NB shareholders and ratepayers but also to eliminate NB Power's debt, currently at 95% according to Rouse.

Rouse encouraged attendees to consider his presentation at a NB Power shareholders meeting. He routinely asked for feedback and engaged attendees in a post-presentation question period for nearly an hour. Skepticism of the plan seemed to centre on investment sources and the scale at which the IRP could realistically be implemented.

The plan requires the public to continually reinvest the income from its investments. This would provide all the capital needed to transition NB to a low-carbon economy. Savings would come from displacing fossil fuels and purchased power, increased sales from fuel-switching of the automotive and industrial sectors to electricity, as well as increased revenue from efficiency investments. The efficiency investments would generate $1.8 billion in net earnings over the next 10 years, providing the economic infrastructure for the transition.

The alternative, efficiency subsidies, will cause NB Power to lose nearly $700 million over that same period. "Doing nothing," said Rouse, "is actually going to cost [us] more."

When asked if his plan could be implemented on a larger, global scale, Rouse said only that he was certain the province holds enough resources to implement the plan sustainably.

Rouse asked attendees to sign a form letter to Gaëtan Thomas, NB Power's President and CEO; the New Brunswick Energy and Utilities Board; and Premier Blaine Higgs. The letter requested an update of NB Power's current IRP to include a publicly-funded investment in line with 2015's Paris Agreement.

Climate action continued in Fredericton the next day, May 10, with a climate strike outside the New Brunswick Legislature.

Lauren R. Korn is a researcher on the RAVEN project and a graduate student at the University of New Brunswick.

Kent Hills Wind Farm in Elgin, NB. Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

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bring in royalties; it is not planning to do any revenue sharing with First Nations. What is the benefit to the environment, First Nations, the local community, or the province? This proposed project, if approved, will only benefit J.D. Irving," states Blenis who believes that recycling of construction waste is a more responsible source for gypsum.

J.D. Irving is the province's largest forestry player and has significant holdings in numerous sectors including agriculture, food, construction, consumer products such as toilet and tissue paper, retail, shipbuilding and transportation.

Besides receiving provincial government support, J.D. Irving has also benefited from the Canadian government's lax taxation schemes and funding programs.

In 2018, the Canadian Press revealed that the federal government agency, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) quietly gave Atlantic Wallboard more than $40 million in funds that were 'conditionally repayable' or what critics call subsidies or handouts. From documents obtained through an access-to-information request by the Canadian Press, the company has repaid only 1.3 per cent of the loan: about half a million dollars.

The power and influence of the Irving group of companies often leaves opponents to their projects feeling disempowered. For Johnson, the J.D. Irving open house about the gypsum quarry was unnerving. "A J.D. Irving employee videotaped me with his phone three times without asking. Twice I asked him to stop because he was making me feel uncomfortable, and he refused. I felt bullied, belittled and intimidated in my own community by this outside company. I was given the impression that this project was a done deal and there was nothing that could be done to change that," recounts Johnson.

"I am not opposed to industrial development and economic growth. I am opposed to large companies coming in, literally proposing to bulldoze our neighborhood, and doing it with disrespect and an arrogant smirk," says Johnson.

The Upham quarry project is not the first controversial J.D. Irving quarry or mine in the province. A quarry owned by J.D. Irving that operates in Memramcook was the subject of opposition by local residents in 2006.

The province's lack of clarity on the Upham project as well as its apparent willingness to bend the rules for the company contrasts with the government in the neighbouring U.S. state of Maine, where J.D. Irving also has significant business operations. Despite J.D. Irving's efforts to weaken Maine's mining rules to allow it to blast an open-pit mine on Bald Mountain in Aroostook County, state senators approved the banning of open-pit mining and wastewater impoundments in the state in 2017, effectively stopping the project.

According to an unnamed person at Hammond Rivers Holdings in an email to the NB Media Co-op, the project is subject to the Mining Act and the EIA process and, if approved, the company plans to "mitigate potential impacts to residential wells to which we will be held accountable."

Environment Minister Jeff Carr did not respond to a request to comment on this story within the three-day deadline given by NB Media Co-op.

With files from Sarah Blenis.

Read part 2 of this story, "Why is the RCMP monitoring community opposition to a quarry?" at nbmediacoop.org.

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The Winnipeg General Strike at 100

By DAVID FRANK

A new monument, by Bernie Miller and Noam Gonick, to be unveiled this summerin Winnipeg on the hundredth anniversary of Bloody Saturday. Photo submitted.

It is the most famous single event in Canadian labour history. For six weeks in the spring of 1919, some 30,000 workers in Winnipeg went out on a general strike that brought the city to a standstill. It ended in arrests, shootings and defeat. One hundred years later, the Winnipeg General Strike is recognized as an event that helped shape modern Canada.

The demonstration of solidarity was extraordinary. The strike was led by the unions, but at least half of the participants were not union members. And they came from many occupations and backgrounds. Almost everyone was a recent immigrant to this booming western city, whether from Eastern Canada or Eastern Europe, the British Isles or elsewhere. There were notable numbers of women among the strikers, including the telephone operators who were the first to pull the plug on the morning of the strike.

Supporters included many returned soldiers, men who came back from the Great War knowing that the "war for democracy" was not over. All these people came out in support of union members who were attempting to settle contracts in the construction and metal trades but most people had nothing to gain directly from the labour disputes that started the strike. They had their own concerns about exploitation – conditions such as low wages, high prices, bad housing, long hours, low standards of public health. They knew that a better world was possible and that action was needed. For these reasons, the general strike is sometimes described as "a community strike" and "a rebellion of hope."

The other key element in these events was the high level of repression directed against the strikers. The local establishment claimed the general strike was the beginning of a revolution led by anarchists and Bolsheviks. Local, provincial and federal governments seemed to agree. Parades and demonstrations were banned. Special police were signed up. Strike leaders and supporters were arrested and held under threat of deportation.

The turning point came on a day remembered as Bloody Saturday. A large crowd gathered in front of City Hall for a protest march. Meanwhile, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police prepared to clear the street. When the crowd stopped a streetcar operated by a strikebreaker and pushed it off the tracks, the Mounties charged up Main Street, clubs ready and revolvers drawn. Dozens in the crowd were beaten or wounded by gunfire. Two were killed.

General strikes are unusual events in Canadian history. Apart from the one-day strike against wage controls in 1976, there has never been a country-wide general strike, but in 1919, the Winnipeg General Strike drew attention across the country. Some workers went out in sympathy, and some launched their own local general strikes, including one at the factories in Amherst, Nova Scotia. When the Winnipeg strike leaders were denied bail, unions threatened a national general strike before the authorities backed down.

Historians now understand the period from 1917 to 1925 as a long wave of social unrest, a time when rising expectations met strenuous resistance. Some workers became interested in new forms of labour organization, such as the "one big union" idea. Others looked to socialist ideas and the Russian Revolution for inspiration. Farmer and labour candidates won elections. Political parties promised reforms but failed to implement most of them.

Some unions made lasting gains during this period, but most did not. In that sense, the Winnipeg General Strike was the thunder before a storm. It took the Great Depression, the Second World War and another long upsurge of popular unrest before some of the changes promised to Canadians at the end of the Great War were written into Canadian law.

What did New Brunswickers know about the Winnipeg Strike in 1919? Local newspapers told readers the strike was a threat to law and order. They warned that "anarchistic elements" had gained control of the labour movement, but they were hopeful that "saner elements" would prevail once the strike ran its course.

For those who wanted to know more, there was a visit by a Winnipeg labour leader. Fred Tipping, a former president of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council and a member of the Strike Committee, toured the Maritimes in the summer of 1919 to raise funds for the arrested strike leaders. He was an English-born immigrant, with a background as a preacher and a carpenter, who taught industrial arts in the Winnipeg schools. Like many of the strike leaders, he was a socialist but did not think of himself as a revolutionary.

At public meetings in Saint John and Moncton, Tipping explained that the strike was about defending labour solidarity and resisting government reprisals. Speaking at the Seamen's Institute in Saint John, he said that the strike started as a fight for union recognition but turned into a larger struggle. When so many workers came out in support, it proved they were no longer going to be "docile." At City Hall in Moncton, he told listeners that the government seemed to be trying to "do away with labour organizations" but that workers were "out to fight for their rights, as the producers of the world's wealth."

In Moncton, a vote of thanks was proposed by Célime Melanson, the Moncton machinist who was the first Acadian to serve as president of the New Brunswick Federation of Labour. Only a few months earlier, delegates to the annual meetings of the Federation had adopted a Reconstruction Programme calling for major social reforms and improvements in the rights of workers. In its call to "open the doors of opportunity" for all citizens, this historic document reminds us of the part organized labour has played in promoting social progress in the province.

Meanwhile, back in Winnipeg, seven of the strike leaders were convicted on sedition charges and sent to jail. Two were acquitted. One of their supporters, J. S. Woodsworth, was charged with seditious libel for publishing reports and comments on the events of Bloody Saturday. He was never brought to trial. Instead, Winnipeg workers sent him to Ottawa as a labour Member of Parliament. A decade later, he was a founder of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, the forerunner of the New Democratic Party.

The court documents in Winnipeg in 1919 included a long list of alleged co-conspirators from across Canada. This was part of the "red scare" fantasy that implied that the general strike was the start of an attempt to overthrow the Canadian government. Four of the names on the list were from New Brunswick, all of them members of the Socialist Party of Canada, a party that was generally more "evolutionary" than "revolutionary" in its approach to social change.

A century later, the legacy of 1919 is highly visible in Winnipeg, where there are public memorials to the strike and a school is named after one of the leaders. A popular musical about the strike has been revived for the outdoor stage this summer and will also be released on film. There is a new edition of the strikers' own history of the strike, originally published in 1920, as well as a new graphic history to introduce the story to a new generation of readers.

The battles of Winnipeg are not over. A tour of the city or a walk through the streets is enough to show that insecurity and inequality remain part of the Canadian way of life. Rights to union membership and collective bargaining now exist in law, but most workers are not in a position to benefit from these provisions, and those who try to exercise their rights are often under attack and prevented from using them. Still, organized labour has remained central to the history of social progress in this country. At their best, unions have challenged the inequitable distribution of wealth and power under the prevailing economic system. They have not always succeeded, far from it.

As in 1919, time and again unions have served as catalysts in building coalitions and promoting changes that benefit all workers. That is one of the reasons they have often attracted support well beyond their numbers. To follow this story, the Winnipeg General Strike is a good place to start.

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In memory of Peter deMarsh

The NB Media Co-op extends its deepest sympathies to the family of Peter de Marsh. Peter was one of the 157 people who lost their lives when Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 crashed outside Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The NB Media Co-op relied on Peter as a resource person and often quoted him in stories about rural New Brunswick. A resident of Taymouth, Peter was a champion for small woodlot owners and worked across borders for family forests and farms. Trained in economics, forestry and international development, Peter combined what he learned at university with his passion for rural New Brunswick to effectively organize woodlot owners and organic farmers into associations to better support their interests. A past president of New Brunswick Federation of Woodlot Owners as well as the Taymouth Community Association, Peter also facilitated the creation of the Canadian Federation of Woodlot Owners and was an early member of the International Family Forestry Alliance. He was the president of both organizations at the time of his passing. He represented small forest owners at the UN Forum on Forestry. Peter loved his family, birdwatching, organic gardening and reading philosophy.