WHERE DO WE FLOW FROM HERE?

How can we work better together as allies to address the risks and impacts of mining and build pathways to healthy community development?

On March 30th, 2019, 35 Mi’kmaq leaders, experts and settlers gathered at Millbrook Community Hall to share stories of resistance to past, existing and proposed extactive projects on unceded Mi’kmaq territory. We discussed common strategies to protect the water, land and air from mining impacts in the spirit of peace and friendship.

With the goal of supporting continued collective action, this summary report reflects on the opportunities and challenges of resistance to mining in Nova Scotia, where the provincial government is actively supporting the expansion of gold mining on the Eastern and North Shores, encompassing at least 7 major watersheds and 36 communities.

There is currently no requirement that watersheds be protected from mining activities and consultation with affected communities regarding proposed projects is minimal. The Mining Association of Nova Scotia is even lobbying against protection afforded by protected and wilderness areas, including a site sacred to the Mi’kmaq, Gloosecap or Kelly’s Mountain in Cape Breton.

In face of these growing threats to Mi’kmaq rights holders, the environment and sustainable livelihoods, this full-day workshop built the foundations of a strong network capable of supporting diverse voices in the fight for more just, equitable and ecologically sound futures.

Representatives from the Mi’kmaw Conservation Group, Ecology Action Centre, Sustainable Northern Nova Scotia, St. Mary’s River Association, East Coast Environmental Law and the Sierra Club were in attendance, as well as community members from Millbrook and Pictou Landing, and experts from Dalhousie and St. Mary’s universities.
WATER: THE MOST SACRED GIFT

Elder Patsy Paul-Martin graciously welcomed us with an opening prayer, encouraging a place of togetherness and emphasizing all of our relations. Dr. Don Julien, Executive Director of the Confederacy of Mainland Mi’kmaq (top right), shared powerful words on the importance of water as the life-sustaining blood of Mother Earth. Water connects all living things; it is alive and has its own spirit. Water is our relative and requires respect: it is not a commodity that can be bought and sold. "Consider all that water supports and all that supports water," Don opined. Water is critical for spiritual, emotional and physical life, but water is under threat and so too are our ways of life.

The first part of the day focused on sharing and learning from each other's experiences of working to protect water from mining activities. John Perkins (middle) of Sustainable Northern Nova Scotia (SuNNS) discussed the threat posed by the proposed Warwick Mountain project to the French River watershed. Through tireless political activism and civic engagement, SuNNS successfully encouraged the Municipality of Colchester to vote in favour of designating the watershed as a protected area. However, the province can overrule the decision of the municipal council, putting water and community livelihoods at risk.

Raymond Plourde (bottom right) of the Ecology Action Centre shared a hopeful story regarding a proposed gold mine in the protected Margaree River watershed in Cape Breton, which a community group successfully fought off after three years of organizing.
Scott Beaver (left), President of the St. Mary’s River Association (SMRA) described the diligent efforts of his organization to bring back salmon and promote eco-tourism in Sherbrooke and surrounding areas – efforts which were going well until a mining company arrived unexpectedly. Atlantic Gold proposes to build a large open pit gold mine (the size of 29,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools!) next to pristine river habitat. Rather than engaging in good-faith consultation, the company simply announced its imposition of the Cochrane Hill project. In response, SMRA created the ‘Friends of St. Mary’s River’ coalition and fought for a federal Environmental Assessment, which is must stronger than the provincial process, representing an important success.

In January 2019, Atlantic Gold experienced a tailings pipeline leak at its Moose River Mine. Approximately 380,000 litres of sludge escaped, yet CBC reported this event under the headline "200 Gold Bars Poured at Moose River Mine in Nova Scotia." Joan Baxter (middle), an investigative journalist reporting on the gold mining boom in Nova Scotia, said mainstream media promotes gold production and ignores tailings leaks. She urged us to read and support alternative media sources like the Halifax Examiner.

Cheryl Maloney (left), Treaty Advocate and Professor at Cape Breton University, held the room in rapt attention as she shared her story of resistance against Alton Gas. Called to action by the voices of her Ancestors, Cheryl helped to organize a highway shut down on Treaty Day and kept a sacred fire for four days alongside fellow community members. Allies wrote letters to provincial and federal politicians and posted on social media to raise public awareness. As a result of these efforts, the government was forced to act. Now everyone knows about Alton Gas, about the lack of proper consultation, and about the negative impacts on the river, fish and watershed.

The resistance against Alton Gas and the threat posed by its activities to the Subenacadie River is ongoing. Grassroots grandmothers have been protecting the water for over three years and will continue to do so. There are important lessons that can be learned from this movement for groups organizing against existing and proposed mining projects. These strategies are summarized on the next page.
INDIGENOUS-SETTLER COLLABORATION

STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE: PUTTING MINING IN ITS PLACE

Sadie Beaton of Ecology Action Centre eloquently raised the significance of the Peace & Friendship Treaties as a guide from the past that can help guide Indigenous-settler relations in present day. She emphasized the importance of working in partnership to tackle issues of mining injustice. With this sentiment in mind, this section summarizes potential strategies of resistance shared by experts.

Cheryl Maloney offered the following insights based off her experience resisting Alton Gas:

1. Current Environmental Assessment processes do not honour Aboriginal Treaty Rights. Avoid dedicating time and resources to colonial processes that do not respect the sovereignty of First Nations; focus on leveraging Treaty Law instead. Demand and assert rights to the land!

2. The powers of Chiefs and Councils are defined and limited by the Indian Act, making grassroots engagement and organizing within Indigenous communities essential. Recognize the role and rights of Aboriginal peoples as Treaty Holders. The role of women and Grandmothers is also critical.

3. Build broad alliances and strong networks so that mining is not seen as an 'Aboriginal issue,' but 'a Nova Scotia issue.' Educate the public about the social, economic and environmental risks of mining.

4. Create momentum and increase public awareness through the use of traditional and social media.

Joan Kuyek (right), co-founder of MiningWatch Canada, spoke to the group from Ottawa and highlighted three key strategies:

1. An alternative vision: develop a strong sustainable and community-driven economic development plan.

2. Targeted resistance: fight permits and delay projects through blockades and direct action. Increase the cost of extraction by requiring retribution to First Nations, the payment of taxes, better safety standards, and by demanding that the corporation cover unfunded risks and damages. Engage in shareholder activism and highlight the political privileges of the mining sector.

3. Solidarity: support each other and organize in good relations.

Dr. Melanie Zurba, Assistant Professor at Dalhousie University, provided practical guidance and ethical principles for collaborative environmental research between settlers and Indigenous peoples.

Melanie begins her work from the understanding that communities are the experts on their own lives and experiences. She prioritizes local knowledge and concerns, and brings in Indigenous voices to decolonize resource management.

Successful partnerships are built on relational trust and accountability. We must identify our common interests as well as the boundaries between us that prevent us from working together effectively. Co-led ‘boundary work’ is key to achieving mutuality and finding our shared values.

Lastly, legitimizing marginal perspectives means valuing diversity and integrating culture in our joint efforts.
Assessing Environmental Risks

Watersheds and communities are under threat from both past and existing mining projects. Dr. Linda Campbell (bottom left) discussed the impacts of legacy gold mine tailings in Nova Scotia, while Lisa Mitchell (top right), Executive Director of East Coast Environmental Law provided an overview of federal and provincial environmental assessments, including their benefits and limitations when it comes to stopping projects or mitigating their negative effects.

Lisa began her talk by describing the story of the Digby Neck Quarry, which was successfully stopped through the EA process and the decision of a joint federal and provincial review panel. However, the company (Bilcon) than sued the Canadian government for millions in damages. With this cautionary tale in mind, Lisa poignantly asked: how can we be effective inside and outside the legal process?

This is a critical question given that our current environmental assessment laws are under review at the federal level and facing pressure from the mining, oil and gas sectors. In 2012, Harper’s government gutted the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act to make it easier for projects to be approved. While Bill C-69, the new Impact Assessment Act, includes better laws on Indigenous engagement, public participation and social and health impacts, there are still barriers to achieving proper protection of the environment and communities. Federal EAs are only triggered by a narrow and ambiguous list of effects falling under federal jurisdiction. This is an important consideration given that provincial EAs are much weaker than federal ones (as Scott Beaver mentioned previously) and they also do not take into account Treaty Rights, as Cheryl Maloney pointed out.

Dr. Linda Campbell offered an illuminating presentation on legacy gold mine tailings, specifically the impact of mercury and arsenic contaminants on land and water. Her studies of aquatic invertebrates show that mercury has a higher impact as it travels up the food chain. Mercury also bio-accumulates through insects at a rate of 86%. In reflecting on these troubling findings, Linda said that often the inconvenient truth is obscured through a dearth of scientific research and data on these issues.

Linda believes we can learn from the past and its problems so that we don’t repeat the same mistakes in the future. There are 364 historic gold mining sites that continue to impact us today in Nova Scotia. Yet, the provincial government is enthusiastically supporting the contemporary exploration and exploitation of gold through a myriad of ways - through research, financial assistance and political support.
The following items represent common actions discussed at day’s end. Moving forward, we are looking for organizations and individuals to champion these tasks in pursuit of our shared goals.

**INFORMATION-SHARING**
- Understand the timeline for each mine and how each group and the broader public can help and participate.
- Create a shared drive of technical, financial, legal, policy and Environmental Assessment (EA) resources.

**RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING**
- Reach out to a greater diversity of potential allies, Mi’kmaq and settler alike.
- Compile a group of trusted journalists.
- Mobilize and empower young adults to participate in struggles against mining.
- Harness the power of celebrity.

**INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP**
- Support Mi’kmaq leadership and political participation at the local and provincial levels.
- Demand that the province respect the Peace & Friendship Treaties and the sovereignty of First Nations to make decisions about their lands as per the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- Decolonize space: ensure traditional laws and knowledge are recognized and valued in policy processes.

**DIRECT ACTION**
- Write and call to those in power and public office to hold them accountable.
- Participate in public protests to raise awareness and advocate for better laws to protect communities.
- Send representatives to the Prospectors & Developers Association Conference and other industry engagements.

**PUBLIC EDUCATION**
- Conduct outreach in communities and debunk claims of mining’s wide societal benefits: What is the truth regarding the jobs, royalties and taxes provided for by mining? What are the hidden costs and burdens?
- Create a calendar of public events to promote civic engagement on mining-related issues.

**ALTERNATIVE VISION**
- Develop sustainable economic development plans through settler-Indigenous collaboration. These visions should be grounded in the Peace & Friendship Treaties, along with Two-Eyed Seeing.
- Create a provincial source-water protection plan and advocate for research on cumulative effects.

**IMPROVE EA PROCESSES**
- Increase the bonds required of mining companies to cover disasters, reclamation and rehabilitation.
- Push for the codification of the right to Free, Prior & Informed Consent and demand comprehensive consultation processes.
- Encourage Indigenous-led management and decision-making throughout the project lifecycle.

**PROVINCIAL-WIDE NETWORK**
- Each organization to appoint one person to a provincial committee that meets once a month, with the goal of (1) keeping the collective informed, (2) facilitating collaboration, and (3) serving as a unified voice against industry-government collusion in the mining sector.
LOOKING AHEAD

POTENTIAL FUTURE WORKSHOPS & ACTIONS

- Two-Eyed Seeing workshop to educate groups about traditional laws and knowledge, and ways to implement integrative science.
- Media and communications training to enhance the effectiveness of ongoing efforts to resist mining in the province.
- Education in direct action, nonviolent resistance and peaceful protests.
- A Water Walk to raise public awareness and build Indigenous-settler solidarity.

Photo (top right) by Raymond Plourde taken at the rally against Atlantic Gold’s Cochrane Hill project.

NOVA SCOTIA GOLD SHOW

OCTOBER 17 - 19, 2019

Nova Scotia is in the middle of a gold rush. One gold mine opened in 2017, four are in the permitting process and there is a lot of exploration taking place.

Come learn about gold investment and exploration opportunities at the Nova Scotia Gold Show:

When: Thursday to Saturday, October 17-19, 2019
Where: Alt Hotel, Halifax Airport

The Mining Association of Nova Scotia, together with the Government of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Prospectors Association will be holding a 'Gold Show.' Let's stop this 'gold rush' and make our resistance known!

JOIN THE GOOGLE GROUP!

Join the 'Flowing Together Nova Scotia' google group to receive resources and updates related to direct actions, upcoming events, advocacy campaigns and various requests for support.

GET IN TOUCH

Do you have questions or comments? Do you have ways you can support? Email Charlotte Connolly at flowingtogethernovascotia@gmail.com
A SPECIAL THANK YOU
THE AWESOME PEOPLE WHO MADE THIS DAY POSSIBLE!

And thank you to all the participants, experts and elders for sharing your time, knowledge and experiences. Keep organizing!

Final thanks to the Western Mining Action Network for their generous financial support - and to the Loaded Ladle at Dalhousie University for feeding us!