



*Mi'kma'ki Water Symposium*

*October 9-12, 2016*

*Sipekne'katik District*

*Summary Notes*

*Compiled by: Sadie Beaton*

## **Introduction**

The Mi'kma'ki Water Symposium was a four-day event organized by Grassroots Grandmother Dorene Bernard to explore and share Mi'kmaq and settler knowledge about issues affecting water across Mi'kma'ki.

The Symposium theme was “Water Brings Unity”. The arc of the agenda led participants towards a place of togetherness so that we can act effectively together to protect our waters for future generations. Throughout the four days, traditional knowledge, history, action stories, and successful strategies were shared by grassroots organizers, water protectors and allies. The ultimate goal was to develop our capacity to take unified action to protect our water.

Elder Anishinaabe Grandmother Josephine Mandamin was the honoured guest at the Symposium. A Mother Earth Walker from Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Mandamin came to share her Water Journey, along with teachings about the sacredness of water, and women's role in protecting it.

Other speakers and presenters from across Mi'kma'ki shared knowledge and stories about the many issues impacting our water throughout the Symposium. There were also prayers, songs, and a Thanksgiving feast and water ceremony that helped to root our learning and actions in sacredness and ceremony.

The Symposium emphasized action, and many participants attended an Idle No More Indigenous Day of Action rally to defend and protect the Shubenacadie River from the proposed Alton Gas natural gas storage project as part of the roster of events.

At the close of the conference, our water ceremony was completed and a sacred water bundle was placed into the Shubenacadie River at the Treaty Truckhouse site. Of course, there were songs, jokes, and heartfelt goodbyes for Elder Josephine Mandamin as we sat around a fire on the river's edge.



Figure 1 Elder Josephine Mandamin at the Symposium

### ***Water is Unity***

*“Water is Unity”* was the overarching theme explored over four days, inspired by an impressive variety of speakers and approaches to water protection represented by Symposium presenters and participants.

Elder Grandmother Josephine Mandamin’s teachings were a powerful reflection on this theme. As she explained to the participants, “We have to be united as one, and it has to start with the water.”

This theme is underlined by the fact that we all need access to safe water in order to live. As Gerald Gloade reminded us, “The Mi’kmaq have been here over 13,000 years. We know that you can live without money, but that you can’t live without water.”



Figure 2. Gerald Gloade, Mi'kmawey Debert Cultural Centre

Of course, water is under threat all over the world, including throughout Mi'kma'ki. Of particular concern for many of the participants has been the Alton Gas Natural Gas Storage project, proposing to solution mine salt caverns for storing pressurized natural gas, and dumping the brine waste into the vitally important Shubenacadie River.

Elder Catherine Scoby didn't mince words. Describing the impacts of the colonial resource extraction mentality on our water, and by extension on Mi'kmaq cultural survival, she said, "If you abuse water, it will kill you."



Figure 3 Elder Catherine Scoby, Millbrook First Nation

Participants shared various perspectives from Indigenous cultural history and archaeology, traditional fisheries, community health, intersectional analysis, community organizing and sacred teachings. With graceful agility, Grassroots Grandmother Dorene Bernard hosted these conversations, connecting each of

the perspectives back to the overall idea that we must listen to the water to find unity, and build on this unity to better protect water.



Figure 4 Mandamin is interviewed as Grandmother Dorene Bernard looks on

### ***A Few Highlights***

**On Sunday**, the Symposium gathering focused on the sacredness of water. We began in ceremony, with Sipekne'katik Elder Isabelle Knockwood providing firm, warm grounding and protection for all participants.

Grandmother Josephine Mandamin talked about her own journey to become a water walker. She prayed and listened to the water for two and a half years, sitting with the question of what she should do to protect the water. The water told her, "We are ready, when you are ready to listen."

When Mandamin got her answer, she began to walk for the water. Starting on Easter Monday back in 2003, she began walking with a copper pot and only \$80 worth of gas money for a support vehicle. From this humble beginning, a 17,000 kilometer journey (and counting) was born.

Mandamin also provided teachings on the role of women in the sacred protection of water. As water is provided by Mother Earth, and mothers grow and nurture their children in a watery amniotic sac, Josephine taught of women's responsibility to take care of this life giving relationship with water. This sacred responsibility is commonly ascribed to women in Indigenous societies and has made women the traditional inheritors of water knowledge, protection and management. Mandamin referred to this responsibility as our "bundle", which we have a responsibility to look after.

Later in the afternoon we heard from Sipekne'katik Elder Joe Francis, who described his perspective on the sacredness of water and his role as an elder and healer. Francis also shared tales from the front lines of protecting the Shubenacadie River from Alton Gas, with ceremony and direct action.

**On Monday**, we thanked the water with a beautiful water ceremony led by Grandmother Josephine Mandamin, as Mother Nature delivered buckets of rain outside.



Figure 5. Idle No More Day of Action at Alton Gas Headquarters

It was also the Idle No More Indigenous Day of Action, and many of our participants, including Grandmother Mandamin rallied outside the nearby Alton Gas office in the pouring rain, demanding action on water protection and indigenous rights.

Afterwards, we celebrated the bounty of the season with a beautiful potluck meal, drumming, song and dance.



Figure 6 Excellent potluck feast with contributions from the Loaded Ladle.

Tuesday's theme was "sharing."

There was so much to share! The packed agenda included Mi'kmaq and settler guests sharing their knowledge, perspectives and relationships with the water along with experiences fighting to protect the water. The first two presentations of the day grounded participants in the Mi'kmaq cultural connection to water and waterways, connecting naturally with Mandamin's sacred Anishinaabe teachings on water.

Mi'kmaq artist and cultural educator Gerald Gloade provided an impressive picture of the integral, sacred connection between Mi'kmaw people and culture and water. The cultural importance of water to the Mi'kmaq people cannot be overstated, but it can be summarized by the current day refrain of Indigenous water protectors across Turtle Island- "Water is Life."

Ethnology Curator Roger Lewis tied this theme together beautifully by describing in more detail the historical and cultural significance of river systems to Mi'kmaq peoples. "Landscape is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing," he explained. He also provided perspective on the cultural significance of the Shubenacadie River, relevant to the Alton Gas resistance, noting that the environmental assessment process lacks a way to value landscapes as a cultural artifact.



Figure 7 Roger Lewis

Cheryl Maloney honed in on the Shubenacadie River, describing her experiences in helping to lead the resistance to Alton Gas at the Treaty Truckhouse site. Maloney underlined the importance of keeping ceremony at the centre of the resistance, and the role of the Ancestors. Indeed, she was able to share news that the Shubenacadie River's "mixing channel" created by Alton Gas to disperse their brine waste was rapidly filling in with mud. "The river is healing itself," she proclaimed, to prayerful applause.

Weir fisherman Darren Porter connected the fight to protect the mouth of the Shubenacadie River out to the Bay of Fundy, where he and others have been fighting a tidal energy development that threatens species at risk, sustainable livelihoods and indigenous rights. He asked why Indigenous folks are left to fight tooth and nail for even their treaty rights to fish for food for their families, while large industrial projects get government go ahead with relatively little intervention.

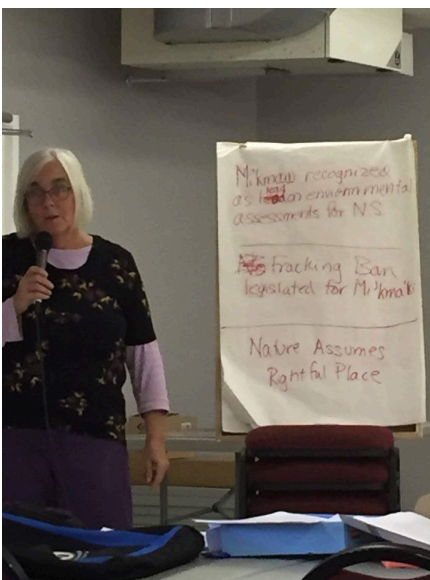


Figure 8 Ann Pohl



Ann Pohl of the Council of Canadians Kent County chapter has long experience in building movements to protect water and fight colonial resource extraction, including the allied fight against fracking in Elispogtog, New Brunswick. She shared some of her strategizing tips, which included the importance of clearly defining a Basis of Unity, and clearly defining your goals and allies.

Finally, Dalhousie's Dr. Ingrid Waldron provided important perspective around these fights for water and justice in terms of environmental racism. As she stated, "Environmental racism is one form of colonial violence." She also discussed the importance of building solidarities among Mi'kmaw, African Nova Scotians and other racially and culturally diverse communities in the fight against environmental racism in this province.



Figure 9 Dr. Ingrid Waldron

On Wednesday, the sharing continued, moving towards action. Stacey Rudderham of the Fall River Quarry Fight gave the first presentation. She spoke about her awakening to the larger pattern of Federal and Provincial government inaction regarding threats to our water. Beginning with her fight to stop a quarry near her home in Fall River, she highlighted struggles around the province. Please see Appendix A for links to more information about these issues, which include contaminated drinking water, quarries, straight pipes, tidal energy projects, and frack water storage, in communities all over Nova Scotia.

This presentation concluded in an invitation to join a grassroots protest action at Province House later in the week to demand action from the provincial government, starting with listening to the communities most affected.

Bernadette Marshall then shared her story about the Potlotek community's drinking water crisis and tips on what helped bring attention and action to their situation. She also warned that attention from Health Canada was not enough. Although they have been promised a new drinking water system, they need to hold government accountable to these promises, "now, not in two years."



Figure 10 Bernadette Marshall, Potlotek First Nation

The last two speakers of the day were Sam Krawec and Sadie Beaton, part of a group of Halifax-based allies called “SWAGR: Solidarity with Alton Gas Resistance.” They hosted a short discussion - seeking greater clarity and consensus on what constitutes responsible allyship – for settler folks wanting to help Indigenous Water Protectors on the front lines at the Treaty Truckhouse.

This discussion underlined the importance of taking leadership and cues from Mi’kmaq communities at the Truckhouse, and respecting the role of ceremony and the Sacred in this resistance, including the use of Talking Circles. Communication and patience emerged as the challenges we must address: the need for patience as we build bridges between our cultural differences, and the necessity of both using plain, common language and avoiding settler “sanctimony.” (See Appendix B for full discussion notes.)

Participants also identified fundraising as an priority action allies can undertake to support the Truckhouse resistance. Beaton and Krawec promised to take this direction back to Halifax to formulate a plan.

## **Next Steps – Plans and Ideas**

At the close of the Symposium, a sacred bundle was released into the Shubenacadie River. Participants went their separate ways, bringing home their own “bundles” of gratitude, of new ideas and connections, along with the seeds of new plans for action. The River continued to flow by, perhaps with its own ideas and plans for action.

In the days following the Symposium, news of the “River healing herself,” as described by Cheryl Maloney (above) was shared in the media. (This was also described as the Alton Gas’ “mixing channel” filling with thick Fundy mud.) In subsequent weeks, there were reports that some of the salt caverns that Alton Gas was attempting to hollow out had failed. A few weeks later, Alton Gas announced it would be delaying their plans to release brine waste into the Shubenacadie River until the following spring.

The Truckhouse resistance community has since taken some time to rest and and even celebrate. At the same time, Water Protectors are committed to holding space at the Truckhouse site full time to ensure there is a sacred presence and an eye on operations at all times.

Meanwhile, in early November, a Provincial government lawyer incredulously claimed that the Mi’kmaq communities of Sipekne’katik district were in fact a “conquered people” and not owed consultation on the Alton Gas project. This baseless assertion served as a reminder that colonialism is still the driving force of our government, and that resistance must remain strong, both at the River and throughout Mi’kma’ki and beyond. This argument was subsequently struck from the court arguments, and the Nova Scotia government lost their appeal.

A group of Sipekne’katik and Halifax-based protectors and allies gathered in mid-November as part of a traveling community art project known as Four Lands, which explores our relationships to land and water, including “neglected histories, urgent themes and personal perspectives, especially about the fractured history between Indigenous and other Peoples in Canada.” Through this process participants identified goals and barriers and explored strategies to working in allyship for the water, peace, and justice.



Figure 11. Tree figure created by Four Lands participants, as led by Jumbliies Facilitator Ruth Howard and popular education facilitator Ann Pohl.

In December 2016, there was a highway slowdown in solidarity with Standing Rock, a BioBlitz to gather baseline data about species living along the Alton Gas pipeline route, and a silent auction fundraiser to support winter needs at the Treaty Truckhouse and at Standing Rock.

Public awareness about the resistance to Alton Gas continues to grow. Water Protectors have continued to occupy the Treaty Truckhouse. At the same time, there is broad agreement among Water Protectors and allies that the Fall and Winter seasons should also be used to recharge and plan for Alton Gas' likely reappearance in the Spring 2017.

Meanwhile, a core of Mi'kmaq and Allied water protectors have stepped up to organize the above actions and events, and forthcoming ones, which will enhance crosscultural relationships and awareness. These initiatives will also help unify grassroots power, as everyone awaits the next round of threats against our sacred relationships with the Shubenacadie River.

Some activities that are planned over the colder months include a series of workshops, podcasts, and a travelling townhall event to raise awareness about Alton Gas and, of course to help decolonize and build relationships and connections across Mi'kma'ki.

A gathering of Mi'kmaq land defenders and allies called the "Peace and Friendship Alliance NS also plans to meet monthly, in the hopes of furthering the work of decolonization, building relationships, in the spirit of reconciliation and creating a unified focus for the springtime. The first meeting since the summer of 2016 will happen on February 11, 2017, at the Eagles' Nest in Sipekne'katik at 44 Eagles Nest Ave. In Indian Brook, from 10:00am – 4:00pm.

Of course, ceremony and prayer is ongoing as well. Water is sacred, and we all have a responsibility to look after water and our Mother Earth, from decolonizing our relationship with water, with working to restore our connection and roles in protecting the water, and restoring respect for Indigenous water stewardship and management practices. In this way, water can lead us to a place of togetherness, of unity, and peace.

## APPENDIX A

### Speaker's List

Dorene Bernard - Grassroots Grandmother, Water Protector and Cultural Educator

Isabelle Knockwood – Elder, Scholar and Author of 'From the Depths', Sipekne'katik First Nation

Josephine Mandamin, Elder, Water Walker, Anishinaabe

Joe Francis, Elder, Healer, Sipekne'katik First Nation

Gerald Gloade, Artist and Cultural Educator, Mikmawey Debert Cultural Centre

Roger Lewis, Curator of Ethnology, Nova Scotia Museum,

Cheryl Maloney, President, Nova Scotia Native Women's Association,

Catherine Sorby, Elder, Elder, Millbrook First Nation

Ann Pohl, Organizer, Council of Canadians Kent County Chapter, New Brunswick

Darren Porter, Weir Fisherman, Bramber

Ingrid Waldron, Research Coordinator and Head of ENRICH Project

Stacey Rudderham, Concerned Citizen, Stop the Fall River Quarry, Fall River

Bernadette Marshall, Elder, Potlotek First Nation

Sadie Beaton, Researcher and Activist, Ecology Action Centre, Halifax

Sam Krawec, Organizer, Solidarity Halifax, Halifax

## APPENDIX B

Take leadership from Mi'kmaq communities at the Truckhouse:

- Respecting front line communities
- Respecting Indigenous worldviews, including the importance of prayer and ceremony
- Recognizing what Indigenous-led talking circles have to teach about respect, unity and connection and understanding.
- Respect for range of perspectives and input.
- Help linking newcomers with the Indigenous perspectives and experience so each can decide their role in building relationships and unity
- “We are all Treaty people”
- Remembering that government and corporations are allied to one another too, another kind of allyship to be aware of.

Sharing experiences of working with allies:

- L'nu, and other indigenous folks, tend to have better sense of community than settlers.
- Connecting relevant scientific studies with strong cultural roles of land/ water protectors makes the fight to protect water stronger.
- Also helps us know how/ when to challenge policies.
- We need people to know that every little thing helps and matters.

Challenges:

- Bridging cultural differences with patience
- Sanctimony
- Translation in communication – the need to use plain, common language.

What has worked well/ could work:

- When sharing actually happens (i.e. money and information)
- When mutual/ united goal is shared
- When talking circles are used to build trust and common ground
- Some of the above things have happened with #IdleNoMore, Elispogtog and now with the resistance to Alton Gas.
- Use of conference calls for regular updates
- Live video and facebook posts are great for updates too
- Helping Indigenous folks access post-secondary programs related to science and Indigenous studies (longer term strategy).

How to avoid co-optation:

- (First, get a better word to describe it.... See common language point above. :P)
- “Be careful of who call themselves allies and use us.” - Bernadette Marshall.
- “Sometimes the ally voice is stronger than the voice of the Indigenous group. Even if the ratio is 1 to 100, directions still fully needs to be taken from that Indigenous person. Mobilize our numbers, but in the right direction. Our indigenous worldview and spirituality is often what guides us to the answer, so respecting that worldview is important and very necessary.”

## APPENDIX C

Ann's Shortlist of Strategic Organizing Tips: [annpohl@explornet.ca](mailto:annpohl@explornet.ca), 5067852998

- Outreach and networking:
  - wide
  - welcome
  - watch
- Getting to know and learning to support each other: always debrief afterwards (“what did we learn about us?”), there are many such exercises, but here are three I like:
  - crossover (you can exchange yarn or coloured paper)
  - yarn web (world's largest dream catcher)
  - secret admirer (see: page 46 of A Popular Education Handbook, link below)
- Keeping interested people involved: -- use a variety of media and communication approaches – let people know what's happening and how to support!
  - **Attention:** housekeeping-security >>> guard communications paths – mandate a communications working group/subcommittee – or at least co-spokespeople AND others who handle social media; gain confidence for media/public speaking with role play
- It can take forever to name a group, but much more important than the name is:
  - a Basis of Unity or Statement of Purpose, also known as a Mission Statement
  - every group/person joining must agree to this, beyond that there may be differences
- Strategic Planning:
  - Establishing goals: short-term, medium-term, long-term – with time frames for short and medium. You will always have more short than medium or long, as it is easier to see what needs to be done now to start to get to “there”.
  - See Seize the Moment (cited just below on page 2 of this handout), for exercises Political Weather Report, What's Happening, and Analysis/Action (StM pp18-21). Use these exercises to collectively analyze:
    - 1) impact of local, regional, national, international events that have happened or are happening or are going to happen, and
    - 2) who is with us, who is not, who is the middle, weak allies, strong allies, what is needed to encourage those who are weak allies or sitting on the fence to become more committed?
  - Come to agreement on campaign objectives and tactics for at least short (medium) term.
- Public events and fundraising are both essential for gathering resources – events recruit new supporters – funds are always needed – many volunteers are “do-ers” not “talkers” so they can be help best in a working group or subcommittee mandated for events/fundraising, that will continue its work on its tasks, with one person reporting to general meeting



- Important – the difference between tactics and strategy (see glossary on page 4):
  - Strategy: a general approach or path chosen for action towards a goal; based on an analysis of forces, the “free space,” and potential alliances with those who share the goal
  - Tactics: specific activities designed to mobilize people to carry out a chosen strategy

*Most recommended resource:*

**Seize the Moment: A Popular Education Process of Analysis and Action for Social Change** found online at [http://www.web.net/~story/RC/stm\\_booklet1c.pdf](http://www.web.net/~story/RC/stm_booklet1c.pdf)

*Further reading:*

**Pedagogy of the Oppressed (especially Chapter 4)**, by Paulo Freire, originally written in 1970 in Brazil in Portuguese, first translated into English in 1973 but the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition is recommended; context is very different and language complex – if you haven’t read it already, the effort will certainly develop your analysis of: a) the importance of revolutionary literacy; b) how The Power Structure system operates; c) the principles/skills that “revolutionary” facilitators need to support popular movements. To tempt you, here are some major points from Chapter 4:

1. **The Power Structure cannot permit The People to unify**, a process that begins when they talk among themselves. Through building trust and self-confidence The People start to share truths about their world, and begin to question myths that divide and dominate them.
2. **The Power Structure uses a variety of tools to keep The People from reaching critical levels of unity:**
  - a. **Alienation:** Tactics used to keep people alienated from their natural capability are:
    - keeping on reinforcing the myth that The People are too ignorant to know what is good for them or how to accomplish anything positive regarding their situation – this tactic is assisted by low literacy skills;
    - encouraging an isolated view of the problem/s – it is only affecting “you” and “yours” not everyone, so you can’t get strong enough to overcome it;
    - leadership grooming, training courses, opportunities – promoting some over others in the social-political world severs those with the most skills from those in the grassroots part of communities
  - b. **Manipulation:** the dominant elites try to conform The People to the Power Structure’s objectives using “pacts,” a tactic that works very well when a portion of The People consider themselves to be the ones “in the know” and believe they are entitled to be treated in a privileged manner by the Power Structure:
    - words like “be realistic” and “dialogue” are frequently used

- deals that involve trips and gifts also are common
  - usually the ones singled out for these pacts are actually the less aware and intelligent, certainly most lacking in consciousness
  - this form of manipulation always results in further subjugation of The People
- c. **Cultural Invasion:** the most advanced stage of non-physical oppression is also what has been called cultural genocide in Canada:
    - the Power Structure invaders penetrate the cultural context of The People and in total disrespect of The People, impose their own dominating world view
    - to succeed, The People must first be convinced of their own intrinsic inferiority
    - this happens because, before they unify and learn their own strength and capacity, the minds and hearts of The People are occupied by The Oppressor's ideology
  - d. **Repression:** scooping, relocations, Indian Act residential schools, arrests, massive police presences, firing people from jobs, vandalism on your property, etc.
  - e. **Oppression:** physical attacks

**Wise Fools Basics – A Handbook of our Core Techniques** – this resource has an excellent brief section on “consensus” decision-making techniques: the “Working Together” chapter can be found at [http://cril.mitotedigital.org/sites/default/files/content/ruby\\_working\\_together.pdf](http://cril.mitotedigital.org/sites/default/files/content/ruby_working_together.pdf); this resource focuses on the use of the arts as a social transformation medium. Great activities and exercises that help group process enormously. You can order the complete handbook on line.

**Convivial Research & Insurgent Learning** – I just found this website recently and I can't stay away from it! The sections on **Facilitation**, **Direct Action**, and **Guerilla Media** are most immediately useful in a practical way. The rest of the site is dedicated to thinking about how we think about this sort of work. Freire's work (my personal favourite) is only one model rigorously explored. IF thinking about this stuff excites you, jump in.

**The Barefoot Guide Connection: Tools and Exercises** – a treasure trove of resources for those who want to consider a wide variety of popular education and action approaches; caution: it's easy to get lost trying too many at one time, if not yet experienced at pop ed, start with Seize the Moment, and then go to <http://barefootguidecontent.weebly.com/tools-and-exercises.html>

**A Popular Education Handbook** – an ancestor of Seize the Moment (cited pg. 2), an oldie but goodie, lots of ideas: [http://www.popednews.org/downloads/A\\_Popular\\_Education\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.popednews.org/downloads/A_Popular_Education_Handbook.pdf)

**Mi'kmaw Spirituality – Talking Circles** - The talking circle is a traditional way for Native American people to solve problems. It is a very effective way to remove barriers and to allow people to express themselves with complete freedom.

<http://www.muiniskw.org/pgCulture2c.htm>