

Environmental Wins & the Power of Communities in Mi'kma'ki

by **SHREETEE APPADU** /// EAC Volunteer

Nothing says resilience quite like communities rallying together to protect the environment. Communities around the world, especially Indigenous communities, have played a huge role in protecting the environment. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 2021 stated that around 80 per cent of the Earth's biodiversity is protected by Indigenous communities, even though they only make up around 5 per cent of the world's population.

The urgency and need to protect our environment have never been felt so strongly. Unpredictable weather and disasters have been happening around the world at unprecedented levels. All of this can be very disheartening, but there is always hope as long as we work together.

This article will highlight some of the environmental wins that have happened in Mi'kma'ki/Nova Scotia in recent years and will showcase the power of communities working together. We are social beings, and when we fight together and support each other, magic happens and hope blooms.



Drone photo of Owl's Head, Eastern Shore, Nova Scotia. PHOTO: Nova Scotia Nature Trust

The Decommissioning of the Alton Gas Underground Storage Caverns

After eight years of resistance, we received the wonderful news that the Alton Gas project in Stewiacke had been halted. Alton Gas, a subsidiary of Calgary energy company AltaGas, proposed building underground salt caverns to store natural gas along the banks of the Shubenacadie River. In order to create these caverns, they planned on releasing highly concentrated salt brine into the river. At full operation, they would have been releasing approximately 10,000m³ of brine each day.

The impacts of salt brine being released into the river was not properly researched and Mi'kmaq communities were not properly consulted, prompting the Mi'kmaq Grassroots Grandmothers and their allies to advocate against the project. They built capacity and raised awareness on the issue, set up the Treaty Truckhouse near the river and even went to court to fight the project. After years of resistance, the Alton Gas project was finally stopped, and is set to be decommissioned by the end of 2022!

The Protection of Owl's Head

Owl's Head, on the eastern shore of Nova Scotia, was a proposed provincial park before the Nova Scotia government secretly removed it from the Parks and Protected Areas (PAPA) plan in 2019 in order to sell the land to a developer who aimed to turn it into a golf course.

Owl's Head is home to several endangered species and is rich in biodiversity. Once the delisting of the park was known, people all across Mi'kma'ki/Nova Scotia mobilized to stop the sale. They created the group Save Owl's Head Provincial Park to advocate for its protection. After many legal struggles, the developer eventually removed its offer, leading to the cancellation of the sale. Although the sale of the land has fallen through, Owl's Head still needs to be formally protected by the provincial government to ensure that a backroom deal like this can never happen again!



Northern Pulp Mill in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. PHOTO: Gerry Ferrel

Northern Pulp's Mill Closure in Pictou

The pulp mill at Abercrombie Point (currently owned by Northern Pulp, a Paper Excellence company that belongs to the corporate empire of the Widjaja family of Indonesia) opened in 1967. For over a half century the mill dumped toxic waste into a tidal lagoon called A'se'k (or Boat Harbour), next to the Pictou Landing First Nation.

Once a pristine area for fishing, hunting and foraging, the effluent from the mill poisoned the land and water of A'se'k, and caused the Pictou Landing First Nation untold pain and suffering – including a massive effluent spill on sacred burial grounds in 2014. For decades, the community fought to save A'se'k, and in 2015 the Boat Harbor Act was passed, stating that Northern Pulp was responsible for creating a proposal to operate without the use of the Boat Harbour treatment facility. After five years, the only proposal the company offered was to build a pipeline that would have pumped up to 90 million litres of toxic pulp effluent each day into the Northumberland Strait.

Following massive grassroots mobilization and solidarity between the Pictou Landing First Nation, their allies and fishermen, whose livelihood would be threatened by the dumping of effluent into the Strait, the pipeline proposal was declined, and Northern Pulp was ordered to stop dumping in A'se'k by 2020.

Although Northern Pulp is trying to revive the mill and is attempting to sue the Nova Scotia government, the closure of the Boat Harbour treatment facility is a massive win for communities standing up to corporate power.

Shreetee is a graduate in environmental studies and is passionate about environmental justice and community-based environmental solutions.



More than 10,000 people march down Spring Garden Road during the youth-organized School Strike for Climate Halifax on September 27, 2019. PHOTO: Ben Lemphers

School Strike 4 Climate Halifax

School Strike 4 Climate is a global youth-led movement for climate action. School Strike 4 Climate Halifax is led by students in Kijipuktuk/Halifax who have been organizing rallies demanding leaders take action to address the climate emergency.

It is very powerful when we have youth getting together, organizing, and fighting for a better future. They are demanding that appropriate actions and policies are implemented and are holding the government accountable for its lack of climate action. Youth are our future, and having a climate movement led by youth creates hope.

So much so, that in 2019, School Strike 4 Climate Halifax and their allies led one of the largest marches in our province's history, with over 10,000 people taking to the streets as a part of a global effort to demand climate action.

The urgency of the climate, biodiversity and equity crises can often feel overwhelming. But there is always hope as long as we support each other. It is in our connections to our communities that we can find the power to make a better future, and there are many ways one can get involved. It can be as simple as talking to your friends and family members or sending an email to your local representatives. When we get involved with our communities, we have the power to demand change.

TAKE ACTION

All of the wins above were helped by Nova Scotians contacting decision-makers to voice their support for the communities involved. Is there an environmental issue in your area that you want to bring to the attention of your representative? Find their contact info below!

Find your MLA at bit.ly/FindYourMLA-NS
Find your MP at bit.ly/FindYourMP-NS