



Mining Coxheath: The Dark Side of Copper

The area threatened by the proposed copper mine.
PHOTOS: FlyHi Productions

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Just north of the Sydney River on the Island of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, lies the small yet vibrant, tight knit community of Coxheath. Renowned for its rich history and nature trails, Coxheath is a sublime example of Cape Breton's natural beauty. It supports important aquatic and terrestrial habitat for a large variety of species, including foxes, pheasants, eagles and fish.

Hidden beneath the soil, CoxHeath has a natural copper reserve that has caught the eye of mining exploration firm Nova Copper Inc. The firm is looking to explore, re-open and greatly expand a century-old copper mine for the extraction of copper and other metals. The possibility of mining metals around key water sources in the area, located less than 200m from homes, has the community quite concerned.

That's where the Keep Coxheath Clean Association (KCCA) comes in. KCCA was formed to raise awareness and educate the public about the potential impact of mining on the community and the environment, including bringing evidence to decision-makers about the risk of metal mining. KCCA has conducted research over the past two years to respond to this particular mining project, looking into the way the project is being handled by our government and the toll it will take on the environment and people of Coxheath and surrounding communities.

The proposed open pit sulfide ore copper mine works by using explosives to remove massive amounts of rock from the surface of the earth, followed by extracting and processing copper ore using chemicals and large machinery. Once metal mining begins, it's not a question of whether it will cause contamination, but when. Mining for metals has yet to be carried out without environmental contamination, which is why it's important to ensure selected sites are far away from vulnerable areas. Otherwise, there is a high risk that contamination will cause irreparable damage to local ecosystems.

Copper is an essential mineral in the production of batteries, electric vehicles and renewable energy systems. As we transition towards creating and using more clean, renewable energy, the global demand for copper is rising. This makes it more important than ever to establish good practices that safeguard the land, water and air for future generations without disrupting the careful balance of nature.

With approximately 1,482 mm of precipitation annually, the proposed Coxheath mining site is in one of the wettest climates in Canada, making it a very vulnerable location. According to research undertaken by KCCA, the further development of copper mines on the hills of Coxheath is very likely to result in environmental contamination that would threaten both residents and ecosystems. KCCA spoke with local Mi'kmaw leaders about the project, resulting in Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall writing a letter against the mining project.

Even mines that boast of being sustainable and having practices in place to reduce emissions can jeopardize everything from property values to water access and air quality. This particular mine has the ability to have a severe impact on the environment of Coxheath and the quality of life for its citizens. It will lead to the introduction of toxins into air and water, cause deforestation and disrupt natural ecosystems. Developing a mine in this area would threaten water that hundreds of residents depend on through contaminating wells, rivers, watersheds, aquifers and lakes, including the Bras d'Or Lakes UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

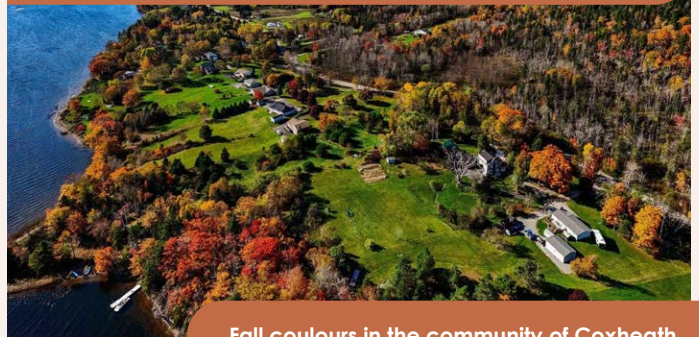
It also threatens habitat for hundreds of species. Coxheath's Blackett's Lake is home to numerous fish species, including the northernmost known population of Yellow Lampmussel, a species of freshwater mussel crucial to maintaining the lake's ecosystem. With only two watersheds left in Canada for them to call home, the proposed mining within the watershed puts this vulnerable population of mollusks in a precarious position.

The reasoning behind further developing copper mines in Nova Scotia is the same used to justify most resource extraction; to help boost the economy, yield crucial minerals and provide jobs. But Coxheath has been through this before. The site at Coxheath Hills was previously mined for brief periods in the 1800s and early 1900s but was ultimately deemed as unproductive and abandoned. Despite multiple unsuccessful attempts to revive the project and the Department of Natural Resources and Renewables confirming that this site is a low-grade copper-ore deposit, there are once again threats of industrial mining development.

TAKE ACTION

Sign the Keep Coxheath Clean Association online petition at keepcoxheathclean.org to show support and share with others.

Reach out to relevant decision-makers to share your concerns about the wide-reaching effects of the proposed copper mine and its effects on waterways in the area, including in the Bras d'Or Lakes UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.



Fall colours in the community of Coxheath.

This site has proven over the years that it is not a viable mining location. This means the economic benefits will likely be short-lived, resulting in environmental costs that could last for generations. So, why is it being proposed for mining development? The people of Coxheath refuse to let their community become a sacrifice to pad the pockets of investors and help politicians save face by bringing mining jobs to the region. But what's the point in bringing jobs to a community that will be irreparably harmed in the process?

Current data suggests the demand for copper will keep growing, increasing to 350 per cent by 2050 if the world continues at this trajectory. The increase in global demand for these metals will put increasing pressure on small communities with copper deposits. As more large companies will want to acquire the resources beneath these communities, the communities will need to be prepared to advocate for themselves and their environments.

KCCA and the people of Coxheath are working tirelessly to halt this process before it begins and have demonstrated the importance of community-led advocacy in protecting the health and future of local communities. The Keep Coxheath Clean Association continues to raise awareness of the potential impact of this copper mine on the people and the area, while also bringing scientific evidence to decision-makers and the public about the risk of metal mines on Coxheath Hills.

Belle (she/her) is a communications professional with a specialty in environmental storytelling. She is a visual artist with a passion for the natural world and is an avid hiker, paddler and scuba diver.