

## Workshop – “Uranium: Coming to a Lung near You”

### *Speech by Donna Dillman*

It's coming to the point that it doesn't matter anymore where you live on the planet. The air we breathe, the land on which we sit and the water we drink is threatened. That isn't news to anyone here this weekend.

Thanks to Phillip for inviting me.

I'm pleased to be here to speak to a case in point, when in October of 2006 Frank and Gloria Morrison discovered that, without notification, a uranium exploration company had staked their property.

The land in question, had never been ceded to the Crown, and is therefore protected under Aboriginal land claim title and the Supreme Court has deemed that governments have a "duty to consult" where First Nations are concerned. With that in mind, on June 28th, last year, the Ardochs Algonquins and the Shabot Obaajiwon First Nations secured the gate at the mine site near Sharbot Lake on Hwy 509, upriver of Ottawa and upwind of Kingston, Ontario. The site is the gateway to a 30,000-acre parcel of land that had been staked, claimed and explored for a potential uranium mine.

The Community Coalition Against Mining Uranium (CCAMU) was quickly organized to educate about the dangers of uranium; to raise awareness; to support the Algonquins in their non-violent protest; to call for a moratorium on uranium exploration and mining in the Province; and to pressure the government for an overhaul of the Mining Act.

Hot on the heels of the creation of CCAMU, the Uranium News was started, and has a subscriber list of about a thousand people eager to keep up with ongoing events at Robertsville, and with uranium and nuclear news around the world.

For blocking their access to the site, on July 24, the exploration company, Frontenac Ventures, filed a \$77 million dollar lawsuit and named four First Nations leaders and the two bands, collectively.

Information nights and rallies were organized, fundraisers held, pamphlets were printed and distributed, buttons, bumper stickers and signs were made available, petitions were signed and volunteers attended at fairs and festivals. As well, individuals took on various initiatives on their own. I'm only scratching the surface with this brief history. The CCAMU website at [ccamu.ca](http://ccamu.ca) has the full history. Please take a brochure home with you.

The word "settlers" became an accepted term to identify us as non-Natives. Our success, to date, would not have been possible without the joint efforts of settlers and First Nations.

Early on, the Ontario Provincial Police's Major Events Liaison Team (MELT) and Aboriginal Relations Team (ART) became an integral part of the story. The teams arose out of the Ipperwash Inquiry and worked with us to maintain a peaceful environment. At one point ART members actually lived on site behind the gate with the, mostly Native, protesters. That ended when Frontenac Ventures subpoenaed the officers to name names, which they were reluctant to do. Instead, Natives and Settlers voluntarily admitted their participation in the blockade and were, subsequently, charged, in civil court, with contempt.

The police manned a parked patrol car near the site 24/7 from the beginning and several other cars were on parole during the blockade and well beyond. When, after the first injunction was brought down, it looked like the blockade might be forcefully taken down by the police, a Tent City was initiated by supporters. It was located just outside the gate of the protest site and people from all over Ontario participated. The energy generated was uplifting in spite of the seriousness of the situation.

On August 30, the First Nations were served with a second injunction and, courtesy of CCAMU's Quick Response Phone initiative, - a pager system that came through for us, after several failed attempts due to our rural geography - over 200 non-Native supporters showed up on very short notice - as did the media. We were on a roll, but we knew we had to keep the pressure on.

Fundraisers put on by local musicians, including Bruce Cockburn and Juno award winning, Terry Tufts, and, just last week, by David Suzuki, in support of the First Nations, have raised tens of thousands of dollars to help with legal costs.

The Christian Peacemaker Teams, whose role is to protect human life, safety and human rights, sent their first team to the blockade early in September. The team maintained a fairly steady, and much appreciated, presence at the protest site and is still around the area on occasion.

On September 1, CCAMU held a press conference on Parliament Hill to demand that Premier McGuinty bring about an immediate moratorium in Ontario. A rally took place outside, and a petition scroll of over 2,500 names was unrolled down the steps of the Parliament Building.

September 22 marked the beginning of the 7-day Algonquin Canoe protest. - a ceremonial canoe trip from the headwaters of the Mississippi watershed through to Ottawa. The First Nations took water from their starting point at Crotch Lake and, on their arrival on, poured it onto the steps of Parliament Hill, to send the message that the waters of the Mississippi are not so far away. An Algonquin proclamation demanding a moratorium on uranium exploration and mining was delivered to the Government of Canada and was accepted by local Conservative MP.

During the summer, I'd been to the protest site fairly regularly. At first, I aimed to support without getting too heavily involved. However, when it became obvious that more needed doing, I opted to attend a CCAMU meeting. Big mistake. I was promptly made facilitator and had to learn how to say Shabot Obaadjiwan.

Later, when I overheard Chief Doreen Davis make the comment that, "One can go a long time without food, but clean water is essential to all life," I saw the writing on the wall.

To help raise public awareness and to keep up the call for a moratorium in Eastern Ontario, I moved into a tent trailer outside the protest site and on Thanksgiving Monday, October 8 last year, I began refusing food.

A fairly drastic action, most would say. Perhaps, but uranium and its ability to alter life on the planet should be a wake up call for all of us.

Many of you will have heard of Elliot Lake, where uranium mining took place from the '50 through to the 90's.

The communities in the Serpent River Watershed are faced with the reality that 170 million tonnes of tailings from the uranium mines "present a perpetual environmental hazard." Because the half-life of the radioactive hazards in those tailings is hundreds of thousands of years, the management of the sites will always be a challenge. Not an endearing legacy to be leaving for our children's children.

Nuclear waned and because the price of uranium was very low, mining operations closed down and the miners moved away. With the Serpent River system dead, the town, having emerged as a result of uranium mining, went bust, only to re-emerge as a retirement community in 1987, billing itself as the 'Jewel in the Wilderness.'

From an economic perspective, with the infrastructure already in place, there are reasons why it makes perfect sense to create settlements for seniors from such a place:

- They will not be giving birth any time soon.
- Seniors have already taken on most of their lifetime body burden of toxins.
- They will die of something long before the cancers, that they are at risk of attracting, manifest.

This means that they will not add to the statistics that would keep others from wanting to settle there. It's an economic development plan, after all.

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Two and a half years ago, I had the honour of participating in the birth of my youngest grandchild.

It all happened very quickly at around 1 a.m. Zephyr popped out, and was immediately placed in my waiting hands, as her Dad and big brother looked on. It remains one of the most profound moments of my life.

My generation is responsible for the world Zephyr was born into. My relationship with my grandchildren brought me to 'enough' - to the point where I would stop eating to make that point.

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So there I was, at the side of the road, in the middle of no-where last fall. The media took to the story because of the human-interest component and it got lots of attention across the country and beyond. I spoke on radio stations from Texas to Ottawa and from Vancouver to Saint John's, and I'm told the story touched hearts and minds around the planet.

When, after three and a half months, the blockade inside the gate was voluntarily dismantled - in good faith as the court-ordered negotiations were to proceed - the large trailer was moved to the road allowance outside the gate. Much to my relief, a woodstove was installed. I'd been finding it impossible to keep warm with nothing in my stomach to metabolize. And finding a way to address the cold was THE big issue, up until that point.

Supporters began to camp out in the trailer as the nights got colder, although a couple of die-hards stayed in their tents well past when the snows came. In almost 7 weeks at the site, I was alone for a total of 40 minutes. Some nights we had a half dozen people on site, and never less than two. And keep in mind that it was not about supporting me, though people certainly wanted to do that and without people from all over the world sending their energy, in numerous ways, I'd not have lasted as long as I did. It was about stopping the drills, first, last and always.

More small trailers arrived at the protest site and a small cabin was built near the gate. While some on Township council expressed their dissatisfaction, we weren't interfered with.

Given the publicity, the Premier had a letter couriered to my home. In it he suggested that I should eat. I responded that he'd missed the point; that looking ahead, I wanted there to be edible food, and clean air and water for my grandchildren when both he and I were gone.

Reading his words, I realized that it was time to move the action to Queen's Park, Ontario's Legislature. Once there, Premier McGuinty and his Northern Development and Mines Minister, Michael Gravelle, met with us.

When I asked him directly why we needed uranium upriver of Ottawa, McGuinty responded that he was obligated to 'keep the lights on in Ontario.'

Remembering the dead Serpent River system, I expressed surprise that low-grade uranium was needed, up-riber of Canada's Capital - when Canada exports over 80% of what it extracts currently.

Both he and Gravelle expressed their ignorance of that fact and McGuinty made a commitment to get back to me on it.

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I've come to believe that extracting uranium is not actually about nuclear generation at all, tho it is possible that Premier McGuinty believes that it is. Nuclear energy is not as hyped - it is not green, not clean, not safe and certainly not affordable. And in asking myself time and again, what the hype was covering up; knowing that a grade 8 student could see through it simply by researching the information that is readily available. At first, I thought it was about big money, but in the end, while big money is undoubtedly involved, if you take it to its natural conclusion, it is much more sinister than simple greed.

I believe, rather, that the nuclear generation story is being propagated to give the moral high ground to extraction, so that uranium remains available for use in weapons. Weapons of mass destruction for the war machine.

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But, back to my particular action: Peter Tabun's, the NDP Environment Critic facilitated my stay at Queen's Park and day after day I sat in the member's gallery, watching, as McGuinty studiously ignored my presence, while failing in his stated commitment to meet with me. I suspect that that was because, once he'd done his homework, he'd discovered that Canada actually exports over 85% of its uranium, 76% of it to the US, where it finds its way into those aforementioned bombs.

On the night before the legislature was to recess, I received a phone call from a representative of a coalition of organizations, including, among others, CCAMU, The Suzuki Foundation, Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, Mining Watch Canada, and the Voice of Women.

I was asked if I would begin to eat if the coalition called a Citizens Inquiry into the issue.

Considering the options:

- that McGuinty would not likely act with the legislature recessing the next day;
- that raising public awareness through the Christmas period was unlikely;
- that my health was steadily deteriorating -- by this time my body was breaking down - I'd not likely be holding up very well by the time legislature resumed in February,
- and that there was a lot of pressure for me to eat.

So, following the press conference announcement, on December 13th, I had my first meal in 68 days.

It was a bittersweet moment.

I'd failed in achieving what was most needed, a moratorium, though public awareness was at an all time high and an Inquiry had been initiated

And the struggle didn't let up on my return home. By this time, the original negotiations had

broken down and on Feb. 15th, civil 'contempt of court' sentences were handed out. Queen's University lecturer, and Ardoch Elder, Bob Lovelace, received a 6-month sentence and was removed from the courthouse in handcuffs. He and others from the Ardoch First Nations were saddled with fines totaling \$50,000. In tears, Native leaders 'purged their contempt;' 76 year old, Harold Perry, because of age and a heart condition; Co-chief Paula Sherman, because Children's Aid threatened to take her kids if she went to prison for that long.

By agreeing to the terms of the order, however, the Shabots remained in the court system and immediately filed an amended statement of defense, counterclaim, and cross claim - to lay a suit against the Ontario and the Federal government. That suit is still before the courts.

Identical civil contempt charges had also been filed by Frontenac Ventures against a retired United Church Minister, a Christian Peacemaker, and the private property owner who'd blown the whistle. All charges against these settlers were dropped or withdrawn as were new charges against six other settlers.

For his peaceful protest to stop the drill, Bob spent 3 1/2 months in a maximum-security penitentiary, before he was released on appeal, with 'time served.' The reasonings stated that the sentence was 'too harsh,' with a lack of precedent. How's that for an understatement? The fines, too, were set aside by the appellant court.

Legitimate questions as to why it was only native community members who were fined and sentenced have remained unanswered.

Joining the many thousands, David Suzuki, Robert F Kennedy Jr., and Margaret Atwood stepped into the fray to encourage the premier to take the appropriate action.

23 Municipal, City and County Councils, including Ottawa, Kingston and Peterborough, have passed resolutions for a moratorium and/or a review of the mining act.

In April this year, attention turned to the Citizens' Inquiry into the Uranium Cycle. Public hearings were held in Sharbot Lake, Kingston, Peterborough, and Ottawa. 157 individuals and organizations made presentations. As well, 230 submissions were received, and are available on the website at [www.uraniumcitizensinquiry.com](http://www.uraniumcitizensinquiry.com). A 50-page report on the outcome of the Inquiry, "Staking our Claim for a Healthy Future," is also available there. I have hardcopies of the recommendations with me for those interested.

The First Nations are in new negotiations with the government, the initial negotiations having broken down late last year. It is believed that some shallow drilling took place in early June.

In August, The Ministry of Northern Development and Mines began a review of the Mining Act, which sounds good on the surface. However, both the mining industry and those against mining activities are unhappy with the rushed process, which didn't allow time for preparation or travel arrangements. Nor did the review specifically address uranium mining.

Word this week is that the exploration company may have been sold. There is no activity at the site currently. Meanwhile, Frontenac Ventures is seeking leave to appeal the appellant court decision to the Supreme Court of Canada. On Thursday in Kingston, Bob Lovelace underwent triple by-pass surgery.

Prayer vigils and other activities continue at the site.

CCAMU members have undertaken to co-ordinate a network made up of individuals and organizations in order to move us toward speaking 'as one.' I was pleased to hear Phillip

comment in that regard at the beginning of this workshop.

I'll end by noting that resisting the ongoing planetary destruction and continuing our efforts to raise public awareness, thereby changing the direction we are heading, are key factors in the struggle. It is the work that we are here to do.

We will overcome.

Zephyr can't afford for us not to. Thank You.