

Young Generation Shares Concern for Gros Morne National Park

By Kelly Young



A fjord in Gros Morne National Park, Newfoundland (Photo by Gilad.rom).

Generation Y and Millennials as well as Baby Boomers are concerned about the proposal by the oil industry to conduct hydraulic fracking near the boundary of Gros Morne National Park. I am an undergraduate student attending Memorial University and I am writing this article to bring to light the conservation activism of my generation using social media. This “underground” movement may not be readily apparent, as these activities are not usually reported in the mainstream media such as newspapers and television news programs.

Gros Morne National Park was established as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in 1987. It was designated as a World Heritage Site based on its unique geology, which is one of the world’s best examples of plate tectonics. In the late Precambrian time period, deep fractures from moving plates began to split and the huge cliffs of Western Brook Pond and Ten Mile Pond were created, resulting in the majestic scenery it has today (Parks Canada, 2015a). The park is characterized by “coastal lowland, alpine plateau, fjords, glacial valleys, sheer cliffs, waterfalls and many pristine lakes” (UNESCO, 2015). The park includes, Gros Morne Mountain, the Tablelands and the Western

Brook Pond (there are many other smaller hiking sections). Many activities that occur in and around the park are camping, hiking, kayaking and guided boat tours (Gros Morne.com, 2015). There are museums and various entertainment venues in communities in and around the park. Adjacent communities include Norris Point, Rocky Harbour, Woody Point, Cow Head, Trout River, Wiltondale and Sally’s Cove (Parks Canada, 2015b). Gros Morne is a tourism highlight in Newfoundland for locals and visitors alike. Many young people actively use the park, as well.

In 2011, Shoal Point Energy Ltd. was assessing the possible oil reserves off the West Coast of Newfoundland (Gale 2011; CTV News 2012). A large quantity of oil was estimated to be located in the fragmented shale rock. The formation was estimated to extend from the south of the Port au Port peninsula, all along the coast, and up past Gros Morne. Furthermore, “as in other shale formations throughout North America, tapping the Green Point [would] require hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to unlock the resource” (CTV News, 2012). However, no **formal proposals** made to the provincial government regarding the use of fracking. Testing of conventional wells had only occurred near the Port au Port peninsula, away from Gros Morne

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(Left) Map of the boundaries of Gros Morne National Park (Reprinted with permission from MUN Geography Department). (Above): Young adults with the Duke of Edinburgh Program hiking the Green Gardens Trail near Trout River. (Photo by Randy Young)

National Park.

The possible threat of oil development near the park lead UNESCO, and other environmental groups, such as the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), calling on the government to implement a buffer zone around the park where development would not take place. All recently declared World Heritage Sites have a buffer zone included in the creation of the park (Leask & Fyall, 2006). Gros Morne did not create a buffer zone as the UNESCO site was established prior to it being a requirement. Alison Woodley, CPAWS National Director said, "oil and gas development doesn't belong in that setting... so we'll be recommending that a buffer zone be implemented around the park" (CBC News, 2013a). If the buffer zone is not implemented, there is a possibility of UNESCO de-listing Gros Morne as a World Heritage Site, which would impact the tourism sector (CBC News, 2013a).

Several meetings have since been organized by the Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness group, who spread information and concerns about fracking across Newfoundland and Labrador. Residents in the vicinity of the park have also voiced their concerns about possible oil development in the

area.

Many young people from the West Coast are engaged in the conversation, aware of both positive and negative impacts of fracking. They are active in the fight against the possibility of fracking in close proximity to the park. As seen on the Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group Facebook page, there are over 2,300 members, with many of them being young, concerned residents of the area. Articles about fracking are posted in this group and often there are comments by young people who want their voices heard.

A moratorium on hydraulic fracking was put in place by the Provincial Government in November of 2013, until such time an independent assessment can be done. Natural Resources Minister Derrick Dalley stated that, "the government said it hasn't permanently closed the door on fracking, but will take more time to study the process before allowing it in the province" (CBC News, 2013b). This has temporarily paused the conversation of fracking near Gros Morne. However, environmental groups are still actively informing the public about their concerns. If fracking is approved to take place within the province, a buffer zone around Gros Morne will

How to get involved?

There are many ways to get involved in the conversation online about fracking and protecting our natural areas. Check out these pages:

CPAWS Save Gros Morne Campaign Website

<http://cpaws.org/campaigns/gros-morne>

CPAWS-NL Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/cpawsnl>

Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/471261759605852/>

Save West Coast NL Website

<https://savewestcoastnl.wordpress.com>

Save Gros Morne & Our West Coast Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/SaveGrosMorne>

NL Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel Website

www.nlhfrp.ca

are posted frequently for its members to view. There are also many young people who have “liked” this page, showing their support for the implementation of a buffer zone around the park. Some comments are as simple as “#frackoff” (Save Gros Morne & Our West Coast, 2015) – a tag used to collectively view many articles and comments on the topic. When the independent fracking review panel was announced, Katie Broadhurst, a Corner Brook resident showed her support online, “Glad to hear this! Thank u[sic] too[sic] everyone who has put in time and energy to make this happen!! Keep up the great work!” (Save Gros Morne & Our West Coast, 2015).

Young people are aware and engaged in the fight against oil development near the national park. Often their online contributions go unnoticed, yet social media posts are one of the most powerful means of communication. Young people from all across Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada and the world can join in on the conversation and spread the word. The spirit of preserving nature is instilled in the

youth of today, but in a different form. This form is virtual, but it is making a real impact. The government has heard the concerns raised by these environmental groups, with the support of young people, and has taken precautions by imposing a temporary moratorium. It is imperative that more young people become involved in this conversation. It is our future that is being threatened by temporary resource development. Once the resource is depleted, the question will be raised: was it worth it? Did the economic benefits outweigh the priceless environment we are desperately trying to save?

I believe the more opportunities that are given to young people to voice their concerns will result in more voices being heard. The message can be spread much further than the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Gros Morne is meaningful to many people and we can work towards a safer, greener and better future.

be the only solution to preserve its pristine landscape, as well as its World Heritage Site status. Every other world heritage site has a buffer zone - except Gros Morne.

In March 2015, CPAWS held an event at Erin’s Pub in St. John’s where people met to discuss what should be done in regards to saving Gros Morne and its status. There were many young adults in attendance at the event, representing the interest and support from younger generations.

As opposed to protests and physical displays of concern for the environment, much of the conversation is occurring online, in the new technological age. Many environmental groups such as CPAWS and Port au Port/Bay St. George Fracking Awareness Group have created Facebook pages to attract a more diverse audience, including young people. Comment sections are the perfect place for conversations to thrive and for people to connect.

The Save Gros Morne & Our West Coast Facebook page has over 1,700 “likes”, and articles

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The Osprey, Nature Newfoundland and Labrador Volunteer Positions



Nature Newfoundland and Labrador is looking for dynamic and committed individuals, awed by the rugged natural beauty of our province, to help with various aspects of The Osprey, the Nature journal of Newfoundland and Labrador. These volunteer positions allow both literary expression and interaction with leading naturalists from our province.

The Osprey is a published four times per year. It is distributed both electronically and in hard copy to a readership that spans Canada, the US, and Europe, and is digitally archived at Memorial University. The journal publishes articles ranging from seasonal bird reports and discussions of important undertakings in the province with the potential to impact the environment, to nature photography and poetry.

Editorial Team: Editorial team members are responsible for compiling and reviewing articles for publication and laying them out. Editing, word processing, and excellent communication skills are required. Experience in basic graphic design and desktop publishing would be an asset!

Contributors: Contributors are sought to submit articles on a range of environmental and nature topics.

Photographers: Photographers contribute stock and feature photos to accompany articles in the Osprey. All photos will be attributed to the photographer.

Artists / Graphic artists: Artists will assist with producing graphics and infographics to support Osprey articles. Graphic artists will also help design and develop Nature NL advertisements for various programming (indoor and outdoor programs, Nature Nook, etc).

Social Media Coordinator(s): The social media coordinators will moderate the social media outlets for Nature NL and be responsible in developing a social media strategy that coincides with the organization's communications plan.

If you'd like to see the latest volume of The Osprey, or if you have further questions, please contact Justin So or Sarah Penney-Belbin at osprey@naturenl.ca.