

Annual Activities Report to the 2020-21 General Membership Meeting of Alternatives North

Introduction

Fiscal 2020-21 was another busy year for Alternatives North. In fact, even active members of the organization find themselves surprised when they take the time to review everything that was done. All the activities were undertaken in the context of the COVID pandemic, in other words they were done largely by distance with activists agreeing to handle things and then making them happen.

Despite the pandemic, Alternatives North continued to address issues of poverty and inequality, environmental matters including the territorial legislative framework, Giant Mine Remediation, climate change, and the like. While these issues are huge (existential in some cases) and despite the fact that few of the problems we address in pursuing social justice ends are achieved, we do believe that we have moved the needle in the right direction through our efforts.

Now to the highlights of some of Alternatives North's achievements.

NWT Poverty

NWT Poverty Report Card 2020: This groundbreaking report was released in December 2020. The *Report Card* describes the reality of poverty in the NWT, outlines factors that contribute to poverty and makes recommendations to better understand and reduce poverty in the Territory. Lois Little, the author of the report, offered a briefing to Minister Julie Green, GNWT Minister of Health and Social Services, a public lunch hour session on the report and a briefing for the NWT Association of Communities. Copies of the report and a plain language version were produced and mailed to community agencies, non-governmental organizations and band councils. Copies were also provided to the elected officials of the GNWT. This project was funded by the PSAC Social Justice Fund and the plain language version was funded by the Diocese of Mackenzie Fort Smith.

Anti-Poverty Roundtable: Representatives of Alternatives North attended the annual two day Anti-Poverty Roundtable on January 27th and 28th, 2021. The roundtable focused on food security this year. Members discussed various ways of increasing food security with locally produced, harvested and affordable food.

Market Basket Measure for NWT/Yukon: Members participated in the consultation organized by Statistics Canada towards developing a market basket poverty measure for the NWT/Yukon. This mechanism is now being used as the national measure of poverty but there is not a current version that is suitable for any of the territories. Points that were made highlighted the particular needs in a northern environment.

Giant Mine

Alternatives North is one of six signatories to the Environmental Agreement of 2015 and is the only participant that is not a public or Indigenous government. The other parties are the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, City of Yellowknife, North Slave Métis Alliance, Government of the Northwest Territories, and Government of Canada.

AN continues to contract Michael Nabert and Katharine Thomas to work on this project, with oversight from Gordon Hamre. AN's participation in the Giant Mine Remediation Project is funded through a contribution agreement with the federal government, which allows the organization to engage in processes and activities related to the Remediation Project. AN is grateful for the financial support, without which it would not be able to contribute.

The 2020-21 fiscal year saw continued work to review management and monitoring plans associated with the water licence approval. AN continues to participate fully in engagement meetings for various groups, bodies, and task forces. More specifics related to the work undertaken in fiscal year 2020-21 follow.

Working Group: AN continues to participate in meetings of the Working Group, an effective forum which includes all signatories to the Environmental Agreement, plus representatives from various organizations involved in the remediation of Giant Mine. Working Group meetings feature updates on the Giant Mine Site, remediation, and engagement activities. These meetings offer the opportunity to raise questions and make recommendations on project activities.

Giant Mine Oversight Board: AN's appointee is David Livingstone. David assumed the role of chair of GMOB over the past year.

5-Year Review of the Environmental Agreement: AN took a leading role in developing the request for proposals, reviewing proposals, and selecting the contractor to lead this 5-Year Review. AN then participated in the review process along with all other parties to the Environmental Agreement. The Review concluded that GMOB is successfully fulfilling its mandate and offered some suggestions for improvement, particularly with regard to promoting public awareness.

Management and Monitoring Plans (MMPs): The bulk of our regulatory work during the year involved reviewing and providing comments on the MMPs associated with approval of the water licence. These MMPs include: Arsenic Trioxide Frozen Shell, Borrow and Explosives, Water, Dust, and others.

Socio-Economic Advisory Body: Meetings this past year addressed the target ranges for northern and Indigenous companies and individuals, the development of an Indigenous hiring strategy, and the review of economic snapshots of the Project in 2019-20.

Hoèla weteèts'eèdeè: Understanding Community Well-being Around Giant Mine: AN contracted Pam Naylor to conduct a thorough review of documents associated with this study in October of 2020. Many improvements have been made to the study since it was initially brought forward to the Working Group. Data and sample collection is intended to start in late-Summer of 2021.

Perpetual Care Plan Task Force: Work this past year has involved developing a framework with which to approach the creation of a Perpetual Care Plan. Current work involves developing a Request for Proposals for the development of a first draft Perpetual Care Plan.

Aquatics Advisory Committee: This committee began meeting in September of 2020. Its purpose is to review and discuss specific remediation activities related to Baker Creek and Yellowknife Bay, including topics such as water treatment at Site, fish habitat, and the cover of foreshore and nearshore tailings.

Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability

As part of our promotion of a just transition through recovery programs that build back greener and better following the pandemic, we wrote columns and made them available on our website. Two columns, including one on Doughnut Economics (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/after-covid-doughnut-economic.pdf>) and a second on The Climate Emergency (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/after-covid-the-climate-emergency.pdf>) were posted in April and May.

Climate Emergency – Getting the NWT Off Diesel!: On Earth Day, Alternatives North released the report,,” (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/climate-emergency-getting-the-nwt-off-diesel-report-april-22.pdf>). This substantial work identified the most feasible, quick and cost-effective ways of reducing NWT Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions by 50%. A plain language summary of the report was released on the same date (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/climate-emergency-getting-the-nwt-off-diesel-plain-language-summary-april-22.pdf>.) These reports were distributed widely, including to all MLAs, municipalities and Indigenous governments.

In June, we contracted Alison McCreesh to develop an infographic of the report, and this document was distributed across the NWT (at https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/off-diesel_may22_complete.pdf).

In May/June, report authors presented, “Climate Emergency – Getting the NWT Off Diesel!” to the NWT Legislative Assembly’s Standing Committee on Economic Development and Environment (SCEDE). In July, a letter was sent to SCEDE emphasizing points and providing more detailed responses to questions and comments raised during the meeting by MLAs (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/2020-07-02-scede-follow-up-letter-to-climate-report-presentation.pdf>).

Subsequently, the report authors met with GNWT ministers of Infrastructure, and Environment and Natural Resources as well as the Energy and Climate Coordination committee of Deputy Ministers to present findings and discuss possible actions. Though some degree of interest was expressed, there seemed to be little intent to increase the ambition of the current government climate strategy and timelines, or to adjust to new perspectives. A meeting with the head of DeBeer’s Snap Lake diamond mine was more encouraging as DeBeers is aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030 and was very interested in the report’s recommendations.

Thus, in October we developed an internal memo (Greenhouse Gas Reduction Local Barriers) that considered the likelihood of adoption of major report recommendations (carbon offsets, co-generation, district heating and renewable diesel) under the current government, and ways to influence same. The memo delineated possible strategies for AN to pursue, seeking broad adoption of those recommendations having the most apparent chance of success.

GNWT 2030 Energy Strategy: Also in October, we submitted a letter to GNWT’s Infrastructure Minister providing feedback to the “Minister’s Update to the 2030 Energy Strategy,” noting the lack of any quantitative assessment of GHG reductions achieved in the report, and referencing our report “Climate Emergency – Getting the NWT Off Diesel!”. Specifically, we recommended GNWT use the Low Carbon Economy Leadership Funds (LCELF) directly, and begin developing the opportunities advanced in our report (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/2020-10-29-energy-strategy-2030-update-minister-archie-letter-an-final-2020-1.pdf>). A Minister’s response was received in November thanking us and noting our interest.

AN also wrote the Prime Minister and federal ministers of finance, climate change, Indigenous relations, infrastructure, public services and defense about the NWT 2030 Energy Strategy Update (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/2020-11-09-letter-to-canada-re-nwt-energy-strategy-1.pdf>). The letter focused on the problem of federal subsidies focused solely on major infrastructure and equipment when the critical need was for renewable fuel subsidies. Questions were posed to each minister according to their various mandates and potential for shifting policy and subsidy supports towards renewable fuels and other major NWT greenhouse gas reduction opportunities.

Green New Deal: In February, AN wrote to MP Michael McLeod to acknowledge and express appreciation for his publicly stated intention to support MP Peter Julian's motion calling for Canada to create a Green New Deal.

Presentation by Health & Social Services Climate Change Co-ordinator: Zoe Guile gave a 'lunch and learn' presentation on February 3, 2021 about her work as H&SS Climate Change Co-ordinator. Priorities for H&SS mitigation and adaptation actions are Food Security, Education, Mental Health, Fire and Essential Services.

Evaluating Renewable Energy Alternatives: To help elevate the conversation that happens around renewable solutions beyond "here's an idea", and dig into the heart of what any particular technology can actually accomplish in the NWT, AN developed a guide called "Evaluating NWT's Renewable Energy Technologies" (at <https://anotheralt.files.wordpress.com/2021/04/evaluating-nwt-renewable-energy-technologies.pdf>). The guide offers three simple but critical questions that must be answered to inform conversations regarding GHG emissions and renewable energy technologies in the NWT. The guide was co-published with Ecology North. In March, it was widely distributed, including to all MLAs, the NWT Legislative Committee's Standing Committee on Economic Development and the Infrastructure Committee, the Dene Nation and all regional Indigenous governments, the three centres of the Aurora Research Institute, NWT media, the NWT Association of Communities, the NWT Association of Architects, the NWT and Nunavut Construction Association and others.

AN arranged an Earth Week presentation of the guide during April 2021.

GNWT Post-Devolution Resource Management Legislation

During the last Assembly, AN participated in the development and review of several resource management bills put forward by GNWT as part of its efforts to finally review the federal regime inherited through devolution. They were:

- *Protected Areas Act* (passed August 2019, now in force)
- *Forest Act* (introduced into the Assembly, but withdrawn by the Minister following Indigenous government and public concerns)
- *Environmental Rights Act* (passed August 2019, now in force)
- *Waters Act* (not introduced)
- *Environmental Protection Act* (not introduced)
- *Petroleum Resources Act* (passed August 2019, in force July 2020)
- *Oil and Gas Operation Act* (passed August 2019, in force July 2020)

- *Public Land Act* (passed August 2019, not in force pending regulations)

The *Mineral Resources Act* and *Public Land Act* are not in force until regulations have been updated. Public engagement for the regulations on the *Public Land Act* began in December 2020. Alternatives North wrote a detailed letter to the Department of Lands requesting more information on several aspects of the regulations. An informal meeting with two Lands officials was held in March. A formal response to our letter is still expected.

A major area of concern in the regulations will be how securities are set for various activities, including mining, quarrying and forestry. Lands has stated they will establish a technical advisory panel for developing the regulations. AN, through and with Ecology North, have obtained funding from MakeWay to have an expert on this panel (or otherwise assist with commenting on the regulations). No criteria for the panel have been published.

We are tracking the development of the *Mineral Resources Act* regulations, but there is no public engagement to date.

We understand that the next Act to be brought into public engagement will be the revised *Forest Act*, but no timeline is given.

Indigenous Government Organizations are co-drafting all legislation and regulations before they are introduced to the Assembly in accordance with a recently released Legislative Development Protocol (at https://www.igcnwt.ca/sites/daair-igc/files/2020-12-02_igc_mtg_-_igc_legislative_development_protocol-final.pdf).

Mining Royalties

As part of our mining series last year, we had planned a royalties session, but it was postponed due to the pandemic. We finally held a ‘lunch and learn’ session with two employees of Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment in November 2020. Henrik Falck gave a presentation on a royalties report done by Price Waterhouse Cooper for the GNWT. The presentation showed that costs for royalties and taxes do not constitute a significant barrier to setting up mines in the NWT. Between our high costs due to factors such as remote location and weather, plus comparatively lower royalties and taxes, mining profits are ‘middle of the pack’ in terms of competitiveness. The presentation stated “*continuing to attract mining investment is critical to the NWT because of the economic importance of mining within the territory.*” This was evaluated and shown graphically by GDP. AN has grave concerns about evaluating mining benefits in terms of GDP, since that does not actually guarantee benefits to the NWT, it also incorporates “negatives”. Despite being told that PWC was not asked for recommendations, the presentation listed this as one of PWC’s recommendations: “*Effectively improving competitiveness would require reducing the high costs of operating in the territory. Infrastructure, including power, is important given that it is a major driver of higher costs.*” It is hard to conclude other than that the report was prepared to justify providing additional public subsidies to the mining industry, rather than truly evaluating a suitable royalty regime. We wrote to ITI expressing our concerns, and merely received an acknowledgement of receipt.

Alternatives North is prepared to continue involvement in the GNWT review of the mining fiscal regime but no work plan or schedule has been publicly released.

MOU between City and Chamber of Mines

AN reviewed and commented on a proposed MOU between the City of Yellowknife and the NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines in January 2021. We were very concerned it required the City to commit substantial time and resources without any discernible benefits. The MOU offers no substantive benefit to the City and fetters Council's discretion to always act in the best interests of the City. AN recommended simply not signing the MOU, but, if signed, that some improvements be made to it. City Council approved the MOU as originally drafted.

Memberships and Affiliations

Alternatives North maintains membership in, or affiliation to, the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce, MiningWatch Canada, the Canadian Health Coalition and Tamarack Institute.

Other Outreach and Public Education

- Arlene Hache presented on basic income at a CDNETO event.
- Suzette Montreuil was interviewed on French CBC Radio re: the GNWT's \$18 per hour COVID wage subsidy and France Benoit was also interviewed re: CanNor funding plans to support food production in the NWT.
- A letter was written to the GNWT criticizing the wage garnishee for Income Assistance recipients who had claimed the federal CERB grant.
- Letter was written to the GNWT Minister questioning aerial wolf culls.
- AN contributed \$500 towards Ecology North's anti-plastics Water Campaign.
- Although there was a poor take-up by media members of AN wrote a series of columns/letters suggesting how the NWT should 'build back better' when coming out of COVID. Topics included a Basic Income Guarantee, doughnut economics, climate change, food production, homelessness and housing, health care, lockdown and mental health. These documents were posted to Facebook and AN's website.
- When Julie Green was appointed GNWT Minister of Health and Social Services she was invited to present a talk on her Department's priorities during a weekly meeting to which other interested groups and individuals were invited.

General Administration

- Due to COVID restrictions, AN moved its weekly business meetings online. Operations were able to be continued.
- For about 20 years, PovNet out of BC provided mail list services to AN free of charge. The system they maintained became outdated. Craig Yeo oversaw the conversion of our distribution lists to 'Groups i/o' to improve our outreach functions.

Conclusion

Approaching 30 years of participation in the life of the local, territorial and national community, Alternatives North continues to make its mark.