

Northern Ireland
NEWSLETTER
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TO MINE OR TO MIND?



**Friends of
the Earth**
Northern Ireland

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Beyond Extractivism

The extractive industries have framed their activities as essential for the progress of societies around the world, especially in the global South. Mining = development, because mining = economic growth, is the basic equation. But this kind of 'development', founded on extractivism, is unsustainable, unjust and inevitably bound for failure. Ours is a finite planet, and to go on extracting to fuel the overconsumption of the few at the expense of the many is neither desirable nor possible.

We need alternatives to this kind of development, and these alternatives need to take us beyond extractivism. That means asking not 'how can mining be done better?' but 'how can we minimise all extractive activities, understanding that they are predicated on harm?'

Post-extractivism, rooted in the Latin American experience of mining destruction, is a set of ideas, proposals, and living practices that explore how we

can bring this change about and liberate communities and ecosystems from mining destruction.

The change must start deep, in our values. Extractivism is enabled by a worldview in which all non-human nature, and even humans 'other' from 'us', are seen as 'raw materials' or 'labour' to be exploited. So, a post-extractive world, and our efforts to get there, must recognise the interconnectedness and inherent value of all life.

The change must involve radical political and economic changes that shift our societal priorities, measures of development and decision-making about our common natural wealth away from economic growth. This demand for endless growth is pursued by extracting increasingly large volumes of minerals, metals, and other natural wealth to meet growing demand. It is the root cause of extractivist policies and economic reforms that make this extraction possible at our expense.



Photo courtesy of Six Mile Images, Johnny McKee

The change must provide a platform to communities whose livelihoods, worldviews and connection to place show us how to live well on Earth, in non-extractive ways. Far from being the impoverished communities mining companies present them as, these communities are on the pathway to post-extractivism, if indeed they ever left it. Their commitment to care of the land, community, direct democracy and truly sustainable livelihoods shows the way.

Looking to the future, Uruguayan activist-academic Eduardo Gudynas describes how and why such post-extractive alternatives to development would serve us and the Earth for the better:

"[It] seeks to ensure people's quality of life, in a broad sense that goes beyond material well-being (to include spiritual wellbeing) and the individual (to include a sense of community), as well as beyond anthropocentrism (to include Nature)."

Read more at: <http://www.gaiafoundation.org/what-we-do/beyond-extractivism/learning-exploring-post-extractivism/>

Hal Rhoades is the Communications and Advocacy Coordinator with the Gaia Foundation.

Making Relatives

'Our existence is our resistance' says the banner hanging outside the Greencastle People's Office. 'Fáilte' says the totem pole standing in front of the two caravans at the centre of the GPO. Two moments can explain the roots of these expressions. The banner dates back to April 2018, when our international conference, 'Our Earth, Our Future: to mine or to mind?', took place in Tyrone, the centre of resistance against toxic mining on this island. The two-day event welcomed fellow activists from Honduras, Romania, Galicia, England, and closer to home. All arrived ready to share their story of how the extractive industry had wreaked environmental, social, cultural and economic havoc to their home and how they were resisting, persisting in their existence. Local stories were shared in return – for example how two young people from Greencastle travelled to Toronto to belie the proclamations of government to international investors that Ireland was 'open for business'. We concluded our conference with an appreciation

for the solidarity shared and the friendships forged.

The totem pole, a wooden structure intricately carved with native symbolism, arose in July 2018 to welcome Chas Jewett, Red Morning Star Woman of the Lakota nation of the Cheyenne River, Dakota. As part of Chas' visit the guardians of the GPO laid out a feast fit for a friend, before hearing from representatives from some of the many communities gathered about how they are protecting people and place. The local groups were there: Save our Sperrins, Love Tyrone, Greencastle Community Voices and others, along with newer groups – such as Communities Against Mining in Omagh and Protect Slieve Gallion. More experiences of fighting extractivism were shared, from Shell to Sea, Love Leitrim and Stop the Drill - who successfully protected Woodburn forest from fracking. The learnings from each campaign enables us to continuously become more effective in our efforts to protect our earth, our home.

Chas was deeply moved to see such dignity and courage in our communities, as were we to hear the story of the Native American nations coming together in prayer and resistance at Standing Rock. Making these emotional connections is what Chas and her people call 'making relatives', or simply remembering that we are, already, family.

Another moment of beauty, flaring from a supportive base of sustained and organised action, was when the environmental justice movement publicly celebrated our presence, on 20th October 2018 in Derry. The Environmental Gathering, of

which Friends of the Earth forms a part, organised a march, rally and gathering, once again for 'Our Earth, Our Future'. With art, poetry and song we affirmed our belief in the possibility of a world where we live in harmony with nature, to which we belong, and our commitment to contribute to the creation of this world, to live it now. By re-writing our narrative we can ask again what defines us: the speed by which we allow our home to be exploited, or the beauty in which and by which we live?

Lynda Sullivan is the Office Co-ordinator with Friends of the Earth Northern Ireland.



Photo courtesy of Lynda Sullivan, Friends of the Earth

Editor: Declan Allison **Contributors:** Hal Rhoades, Lynda Sullivan, Vince Beiser, James Orr, Celeste Hicks, Andy Clapperton, and Fidelma O'Kane. The views expressed are not necessarily those of Friends of the Earth. **Designed by:** Dogtag Creative Printed on paper made from 100 per cent post-consumer waste

The world in a grain

Environmentalists have been waging a years-long battle over Northern Ireland's Lough Neagh, the biggest lake in the British Isles. It's hardly surprising to hear there's opposition to industrial activity in a treasured lake, but who would have thought the controversy would be over sand?

Dredging companies suck some 1.5 million tonnes of sand up from the lake bottom each year to sell to the construction industry. Activists say the dredging is decimating the birds and fish that live in the lough, and have taken to the courts to try to rein it in.

Lough Neagh is a unique place, but the damage being done there is not. Around the world, riverbeds and beaches are being stripped bare, and farmlands and forests torn up, to get at one of the 21st century's most valuable resources: sand.

Sand is the thing modern cities are made of. Every apartment block, office tower and shopping mall from Belfast to Beijing is made at least partly with concrete, which is basically just sand and gravel stuck together with cement. Every yard of asphalt road that connects all those buildings is also made



Photo courtesy of Declan Allison, Friends of the Earth

with sand. So is every window in every one of those buildings.

Sand is the essential ingredient that makes modern life possible. And we are starting to run out.

Though the supply seems endless, usable sand is a finite resource like any other. (Desert sand, shaped by wind rather than water, generally doesn't work for construction.) Humans are estimated to consume nearly 50 billion tons of sand and gravel every year. That's enough to blanket the entire state of California. It's also twice as much as we were using just a decade ago. We use more of this natural resource than of any other except air and water.

In India, the Supreme Court recently warned that river sand mining was disrupting ecosystems, killing countless fish and birds. In Indonesia, some two dozen small islands are believed to have

completely disappeared since 2005 thanks to sand mining. In Vietnam, miners have torn up hundreds of acres of forest to get at the sandy soil underneath. The demand is so extreme that in some places organized crime has gotten involved. In several countries in Africa and Asia, black-market sand mining gangs have murdered hundreds of activists, government officials, and police officers who got in their way.

Hardly anyone thinks about sand, or where it comes from, or what we do to get it. But we can't afford that luxury anymore. We've learned the hard way that we have to conserve, reuse, find alternatives for, and generally get smarter about how we use natural resources like oil, water, and trees. It's time to start thinking that way about sand.

Vince Beiser is the author of *The World in a Grain: The Story of Sand and How It Shaped Civilization*.

The story of Soya

Friends of the Earth's recent focus on the Going for Growth agricultural strategy has helped to shed light on the issue of where feed for increased pig and poultry production would come from.

While much recent attention has been on the negative impacts on communities and the environment from the extraction of natural resources such as minerals and oil, the issue of land being used for the production of animal feed

has not been highlighted. But this can also be considered as a form of extractivism.

Northern Ireland's Agri Food strategy board wants to increase the country's breeding sow population to 53,000 by 2020. A number of planning applications for industrial-scale pig farms have been submitted, including in the town of Limavady.

But if Northern Ireland is to achieve these targets for increased pig production, the hungry animals

will need foods high in protein such as soya. They are reared in intensive conditions where they are unable to eat a varied diet, and market conditions require them to grow quickly.

Around 97% of the soymeal produced world-wide is used for animal feed, and with demand set to double by 2050, more and more land is being turned over to feeding livestock. Great swathes of Latin America have been given over to growing soy, which is shipped around the world. This means pristine forests, wildlife habitats, and indigenous community lands are being destroyed to make way for crops for animal feed. Across Latin America, rural communities are being forced off their land and small-scale farmers have nowhere to grow the food they need for their families. Stripping land of natural forests to make way for soya production also releases carbon dioxide, pollutes the soil through the use of pesticides, and causes erosion and water loss.

Brazil is the second largest exporter of soya after the USA, followed by Argentina and Paraguay. According to figures from the Stop Limavady Pig Farm campaign, already 19,307 hectares of land in Brazil is used to grow soya for Northern Ireland's pigs. That's about the size of 19,000 rugby pitches, and it's set to grow.

Does it make sense to grow animals in conditions which require them to eat foods which are not a natural part of their diets? Especially if those foodstuffs are having negative impacts on communities, food security and habitats in other parts of the world.

Celeste Hicks is Friends of the Earth's Editorial and Content Officer.

Peace in our heart

Lough Neagh is a wetland of global importance (our first Ramsar site), a Special Protection Area (designated under the EU Birds Directive) and has numerous other accolades meant to give it strict protection. If the rivers of a land are its arteries, then Lough Neagh is our heart.

But the system isn't working. Until recently this vast ecosystem teemed with fish and birdlife. The Lough lost around 100,000 birds in ten years. Water quality is so poor with sewage and farm effluent it is described as hypereutrophic. Dredging companies scour millions of tons of sand from the bottom of the Lough. It seems that nothing will stop the Lough's fragile bed being turned to cement and concrete.

Shifting baseline syndrome is the idea that severe ongoing losses of nature gets normalised in the minds of each new generation, redefining what we perceive as 'natural' according to an impoverished standard. What if we shifted our baseline on Lough Neagh to embrace what we could achieve instead of framing our perception of this heartland by what we are losing? It depends where we want to pitch our imaginative level.

Lough Neagh needs a bigger story: a rewilding programme so ambitious that it has the potential to heal not only nature but the wounds of our ancient divisions.

Nelson Mandela was a founding patron of the Peace Parks Foundation. After conflict, he believed in the Peace Park as a new way to reconnect people, nature and culture. Healing divisions through restoring nature is the first step in allowing communities to flourish and feel at one.

In Germany the physical division between east and west has become a nature reserve; a place known as the Green Belt, a place of togetherness. Across the world we have seen how depleted ecosystems can be restored through a unity of traditional knowledge and science.

Peace agreements that fail to make peace with the earth will fail to make peace between people. Models of development based on extraction of resources sow the seeds of further conflict. Models based on sharing space with our neighbours build lasting peace.

Lough Neagh is the heartland that connects all of us, our biggest commons. Rewild the heart of this place and you rewild the human imagination. For me, Lough Neagh has become a place for hope. We have turned our back on Lough Neagh but we should embrace it with an open heart.

James Orr is the Director of Friends of the Earth Northern Ireland.



Photo courtesy of iStock



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Fishy Business at Fish Quarter

Imagine living in a quiet and secluded part of rural County Down – and somebody opens a quarry 20 metres from your front door.

This is what happened to John and Sharon Drennan at their home near Kirkcubbin.

A fifty-year-old planning permission was used to re-open an abandoned greywacke quarry. The site was stripped of all cover, dislodging nesting birds and destroying badger setts. For 18 months John and Sharon had to endure the noise, dust and disturbance being generated by the site by rock hammers and crushing equipment. In addition to this, up to 40 lorries per day would pass within yards of their front door and it seemed there was nothing anybody could do about the situation.

The local council planning department appeared to support the development despite the environmental damage being caused.

Things came to a head in November of 2017 when a blast was initiated at the quarry to dislodge rock. This operation caused nearly £25k of damage to the Drennan's home and damaged other surrounding properties.

Eventually an enforcement notice was issued to bring a halt to the disturbance and damage. At the time of writing, this notice is being appealed through the Planning Appeals Commission so the development is allowed to continue until all the legalities are considered.

This is not an isolated case. There are many examples of quarries

and gravel extraction sites being re-opened across Northern Ireland on the basis of historic consent. Many of the consents being used have no environmental conditions attached or have been reviewed to comply with current environmental regulation. Worse still is that many of these consents were withdrawn or invalidated but still the planning services are unable to fulfil the obligations of their office and bring them to task.

The beauty of Northern Ireland is being degraded by these operations. The scars left on the landscape by these extraction sites can last for years. Unregulated hard rock, gravel, and peat extractions are destroying critical habitats and scientifically important areas. Many of these sites go on to become illegal landfills and a whole new problem begins.

It's only when those interested in the environment begin to ask questions that these operations can be identified.

So where have John and Sharon been left? Their home is now



Photo courtesy of Andy Clapperton

basically worthless. The location next to the Fishquarter Quarry leaves it unsellable and cannot be mortgaged. What was to be their dream home has become a nightmare of dust, noise and disturbance. Fortunately they have many who are fighting on their side.

You can watch their story at vimeo.com/266673522

Andy Clapperton is an activist campaigning against unlawful quarrying.

Rights of communities, rights of nature

What do you do when the system is rigged against you? Planning consultations limit your ability to have a say; litigation is expensive and intimidating; even when you win, developers just learn from their mistakes and come back with a better planning application. When the law enables social and environmental destruction there is only one option – write your own laws.

That's what communities around the world are beginning to do, with the help of the Community Environment Legal Defence Fund. Communities around the world are asserting their right to decide what happens in the places where they live. This is active, participative democracy in action, radical and empowering.

Fed-up with big corporations imposing polluting industrial farms on them, communities in Todd Township, Pennsylvania, came together to write a new Bill of Rights that protected them and the environment. In July 2018, they successfully passed a law that banned industrial farming, protected small family farms, and safeguarded the rural character of the area.

New Hampshire residents introduced new laws covering unsustainable water abstraction, oil and gas pipelines, and other damaging energy infrastructure. They have been so successful that they persuaded a State Senator to table a rights based amendment to the State Constitution.

Hand-in-hand with the rights of communities is the rights of nature. If communities are to assert their right to clean water, clean air, access to a healthy

environment, and a stable climate then nature must also have rights – the right to exist, thrive, evolve, regenerate, and be restored.

In Ecuador, the rights of nature, Pachamama, were written in to the Constitution. The living world is no longer property to be exploited, but a rights bearing entity to be protected. Ten years on, and that constitutional right has survived attempts by big business to have it struck down.

This quiet revolution has inspired action elsewhere. Bolivia passed the Law of the Rights of Mother Nature. The Te Urewera area and the Whanganui River in New Zealand, the Atrato and Amazon rivers in Columbia, and the Ganga and Yamuna in India are now legal entities with their own rights. Campaigns to give the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, and the Himalayas in Nepal legal rights are underway.

Here, too, communities are looking at ways to have the rights of communities and rights of nature established by their Councils. Fed-up with destructive extractivism such as gold mining, quarrying, and industrial farming, communities across Northern Ireland are looking at this rights based approach to protect their special places.

This will be a long struggle. Powerful corporate lobbies who have shaped the game to suit them will push back hard. Local people are determined though, and experience from around world tells us they can win.

Declan Allison is a Campaigner with Friends of the Earth.

No toxic goldmining here!

On 27th November 2017 a Canadian goldmining company, Dalradian Gold, submitted a 10,000 page planning application for: an underground mine; a cyanide processing plant; a mercury smelting furnace; a toxic waste storage facility; contaminated water storage ponds; waste water treatment plant; cyanide tailings and mercury slag; and an explosives store (2 blasts per day x 365 days per annum x 20 years).

The proposed site is situated on the side of Crochanboy Hill overlooking the village of Greencastle, Co Tyrone, a kilometer from the local Primary School, Playgroup, Church, football club, playing fields, and Community Centre. This area of the Sperrins is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The proposed mine is located between the Owenkillew and Owenreagh rivers both of which are Special Areas of Conservation because of the presence of fresh water pearl mussels, salmon spawning, and otters. Nearby there

are the Drumlea and Mullan Woods Areas of Special Scientific Interest. The site is close to a Ramsar site, the Black Bog, the largest area of raised bog in Europe. The historic Green Road runs through the site, a road along which Hugh O'Neill travelled in 1607 during the Flight of the Earls from Tullyhogue, in Tyrone, to Rathmullan in Donegal, on his way to Europe. The Green Road has been asserted as a public right of way. The site is also close to numerous archaeological sites such as a standing stone, ogham stone, court cairns, forts, and graves.

Goldmining involves blasting with explosives, drilling, and machine work to remove vast amounts of rock. Mining 1 ounce of gold creates 79 tonnes of waste rock. The rock is then crushed to a fine constituency and soaked in a solution of sodium cyanide. A stronger concentration of cyanide ensures that more of the gold will be extracted from the ore. The waste rock when exposed to air and water produces acid water which strips out heavy metals such as mercury, arsenic, lead, cadmium,



Photo courtesy of Declan Allison, Friends of the Earth

chromium, zinc, and copper. Mining is also water intensive – one wedding ring requires 8000 litres of water.

Goldmining is a toxic business as it causes pollution to air, water and land. Its by-products, especially the heavy metals and cyanide, are dangerous to people's health.

Several anti-mining groups are campaigning to oppose the planning application. Already over 9,000 objections have been submitted. No decision has been made yet on the planning application. Further details can be obtained from Save Our Sperrins Facebook page.

Fidelma O'Kane is an activist with the Save Our Sperrins campaigning group.