

# Community Engagement Activities for the Warwick Mountain Gold Project

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The Warwick Mountain Gold Project, initiated in 2016, is a study that evolved from the broader Cobequid Highlands Project, which started in 2010. The Warwick Mountain project focuses on collection of geoscience data required to evaluate the potential for volcanic rocks of the Early Carboniferous Byers Brook and Diamond Brook formations to host an epithermal gold deposit. The geoscience studies include lidar, bedrock and surficial geology mapping, and stream, till and bedrock geochemical surveys. Regional surveys by government and high-resolution exploration company geophysical survey data were used to assist with bedrock mapping. The project is primarily a geoscience research exercise, but its intended use, for attraction of mineral investments to the province, requires a community engagement component. DNR placed a mineral staking closure over the project study area in 2016. Mineral rights for these licenses will be awarded to the winning proposal submitted in a Call for Proposals. This paper describes the community engagement activities carried out by DNR in support of the Warwick Mountain project.

Community engagement plays an increasingly important role in mineral exploration and mining activities in Nova Scotia and will soon become a requirement when the new *Mineral Resources Act* is proclaimed. Early, open and transparent communications with communities are required to earn a social licence to explore for and mine minerals in the province. DNR learned from recent community engagement work on the Warwick Mountain Gold Project that despite a community engagement team's best effort to follow a transparent communication pathway, it may still be fraught with unforeseen challenges.

Historically, community engagement on mineral development projects in Nova Scotia occurred in the environmental assessment process for mine

development. Currently, however, there is increasing public pressure to engage with communities about mineral resource projects in the exploration phases.

To help address these public pressures, in 2013, Geological Services Division Director Rob Naylor brought together representatives from Ecology Action Center, Sierra Club Atlantic and Mining Association of Nova Scotia to develop a Community Consultation Guide for Prospectors and Mineral Exploration Companies working in Nova Scotia. The guide book was released in November of 2013 as Information Circular ME 068 and is available for free download on the DNR website. The guide breaks out the engagement activity requirements into three categories that are linked to the level of exploration activities. In the case of the Warwick Mountain Gold Project there were no diamond-drilling or trenching activities, so the consultation requirements fall into the lowest impact level category. In this case the consultation chart indicates the community groups that should be engaged are landowners and the local DNR office. As representatives of the Minister, DNR geoscience staff have the right to cross private lands to collect scientific data. Wherever possible, however, staff consulted with land owners before crossing their land to conduct the geoscience surveys. DNR regional office staff were notified of the project survey activities. Although not every land owner was contacted in the study area, many were contacted and briefed on the project by field geologists. For the most part, the Warwick Mountain Gold Project team met the community engagement standard as outlined in the community engagement guide.

It was noted in the early stages of planning the project that a portion of the mineral staking closure overlaps with the French River Water Supply. A call was made to the Municipality of Colchester

County to arrange for staff to meet with the Water Supply Committee to discuss the project. A presentation on the project was given at the May 2016 committee meeting. The author has attended all committee meetings since May 2016 and provided briefing overviews of the project activities and outcomes. Some of the committee members also participated in a short field tour. One of the volunteer community members that sits on the committee suggested that DNR hold a community Open House to inform residents living in the water supply about the project and its outcomes. DNR followed that advice and held an Open House on November 24, 2017, in the Warwick Mountain Recreational Center.

The Open House was structured around four poster stations, staffed by geologists, where the public could learn about various aspects of the project. The posters and staff explained bedrock mapping, gold project geochemistry, mineral exploration and community engagement. The Open House was well attended and included a strong representation from the Municipality of Colchester County, including the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and local councilor.

Prior to the Open House an article describing the project was published in the local newspaper, the *Tatamagouche Light*, and a second story was published a short time later in the *Truro Daily News*. While the purpose of the Open House was to inform people living in the water supply about the

DNR project, the news articles attracted a broader audience of people opposed to mineral exploration and mine development to the Open House. Although the geologists interviewed for the *Tatamagouche News* article did their best to explain that it is a grass roots mineral exploration project, some water supply residents and the people opposed to the project reached the conclusion that mine development is imminent in the project study area. This has created some community engagement challenges that are still being addressed.

Community engagement is a challenging exercise because it has many moving parts and no clear instructions on what works, what does not work, or what constitutes a good engagement process. The only thing that is clear from the Warwick Mountain Gold Project community engagement is that there are varying degrees of community expectations and values within the geographic study area. Many members of the community group that formed to oppose the project live outside the project study area, the French River Water Supply and the Water Utility Service Area, but they are demanding their voices and values be part of the discussions and project planning. Defining a process on how to engage these groups and to evaluate the degree of influence they should have is a challenge that will require further thought and action.