

Fair Mining Collaborative (FMC)

INTERVIEW WITH GLENN GRANDE,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BC Studies: How did your research collective form?

FMC began in the early 2000s as the Environmental Mining Council of British Columbia's charitable division: the Environmental Mining Education Foundation. We changed our name to Fair Mining Collaborative in 2013 but have retained the same founding principles and dedication to providing sound science and education, informed through traditional knowledge and wisdom, on mining issues to affected communities and individuals.

Who are your members? What skills, knowledge base(s) do they bring to the work?

Our outgoing Executive Director, Amy Crook, brought over twenty-five years of experience conducting environmental reviews of all types and assisting communities with the full spectrum of analysis, information, meetings, strategy, advocacy, training, and networking needed in dealing with mining concerns large and small.

Glenn Grande has a law degree from the Peter A. Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia, with a focus on Aboriginal law, inherent rights, and self-determination. Glenn is of Aboriginal (Cree) ancestry. He volunteered on the Board of Directors at the Vancouver Aboriginal Community Policing Centre where he supported the Aboriginal population of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and collaborated to resolve the friction between Aboriginal people and the police, not only in Vancouver but throughout British Columbia and Canada. Glenn also served as a soldier in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Tara Ammerlaan (see this issue) is our project manager and website administrator. Since 2012, Tara has brought FMC her unique energy and skills from her background as a seaman for the Canadian Coast Guard; co-owner of a successful scuba dive charter business; and experience managing the deck operations of Canada's largest tall ship. Tara is of

Métis descent and was born and raised in northern Alberta. Tara earned her Honours BSc in biogeography from the University of Toronto.

What are the goals and accountabilities of FMC?

FMC's goals are to use facts, and the right of Indigenous self-determination, to dispel the two-hundred-year-old myth of mining as the highest value and best use of land. Through the centuries, our lawmakers and many members of the public have come to believe mining must be conducted in massive, open-pit projects that depend on the economics of scale (mining huge volumes of ore to retrieve ever-diminishing grades of metal). This belief includes the notion that certain "sacrifice zones" are inevitable and that the best we can hope for is to have a lake of toxic tailings left behind in perpetuity, with no one asking what happens once the verbal assurances prove false or simply run out of time. Miners and governments come and go, but the toxins remain forever.

Within our "myth-busting" initiative is the latest goal to expose the legacy of the earliest form of mining – placer mining – that began the colony/province of British Columbia, and of all forms of extractive industry, by far has the lowest return of benefit versus environmental cost.

The "Placer Trilogy" is the latest in a series of FMC/FNARM projects to expose information about mining in British Columbia that shatters the iconic, romantic vision of the "intrepid miner forging the new colony."

Procedurally, legally, FMC is accountable to its Board of Directors. More broadly, we seek truth about mining by using sound scientific and research analyses to deliver facts to our clients, the public, our partners, industry and government.

How do you differ from other consulting groups?

We are the only environmental mining NGO with a purely educational, purely mining, focus and one of the few to straddle Indigenous and non-Indigenous world views. While we advocate for communities and individuals facing the challenges of mining, we also speak with government and industry. Dialogue, if nothing else, can bring people together. We do not want to end mining. Mining is a fact. We simply strive to educate people out of the current state of recklessness that creates the "Mount Polleys" of today, and to repair the centuries of unmitigated

environmental damage, and harm to Indigenous peoples. Many of today's mining practices must evolve, and our educational commitment positions us to take on this challenge and make a difference.

How are you using the term “collaborative” internally and externally?

We collaborate internally in some interesting ways. First, we are a “virtual” organization. Weekly Skype meetings replace the overhead and cost of running an office. But we are a close-knit group, kept strong by our Aboriginal heritage and practices, and our personal world views, which align with those of many of our partners and colleagues.

We also collaborate with many great individuals and organizations. We work(ed) with Northern Secwepemc Tribal Council, First Nations Women Advocating Responsible Mining, Mining Watch, the Environmental Law Centre (University of Victoria), Amnesty International, Tsilhqot'in National Government, Argentinian filmmaker Hernan Vilchez, West Coast Environmental Law, Ecojustice, Salmon Beyond Borders, Friends of the Stikine, and more.

In what ways does FMC work towards social justice?

Human rights, and especially the rights of Indigenous peoples, underscores all we do. The key focus of most of our four hundred-plus recommendations for improving BC mining laws in the Fair Mining Practices Code are examples drawn from other jurisdictions that have better laws and policies towards Indigenous people. From this we helped draft the Northern Secwepemc te Qelmuw Mining Policy – the first Indigenous mining policy of its kind in the world. The First Rock training program, created from the Mine Medicine Manual, is written for those who work “in the trenches” with Aboriginal communities in British Columbia who are trying to protect their land and people in the face of mining's challenges.

Our Placer Reports expose the toxic legacy and cumulative effects of centuries of placer mining – something many First Nations communities have known all along. And our upcoming, comprehensive report titled “Equal Rights and a Fair Field” does a forensic analysis of the racial divisions in British Columbia's mining laws and practices and introduces an Impact Area Value formula for a true cost accounting of the value of mining, especially on the traditional territories of Indigenous peoples. For every dollar the ministry uses to reflect mining's “Annual Production

Value,” we offset this with the actual costs on the ground – to the land, the water, and the people. Much of this is irrecoverable, but we seek to get an accurate picture of the true costs of mining.

FMC’s entire body of work is our response to listening to those most affected by mining projects: our colleagues and friends in FNWARM and other Aboriginal communities in British Columbia who have experienced an almost exclusive, systemic injustice from mining since it began in this province in the 1850s. Even those projects that boast “fairness,” “consultation,” and “inclusion” of First Nations peoples often end up as grave disappointments and leave perpetual toxic blights on the land and water.

The stories we hear in Canada about the injustices and human rights violations in places like Honduras, El Salvador, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other nations of the “developing” world, where a Canadian mining company is either at the centre or nearby, are happening in their own way in British Columbia and across Canada.