

June 29, 2007

# Quebec miners ante up to clean old messes

## Industry-backed foundation to raise money for remediation of worst abandoned sites

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Quebec mining companies are chipping in money to clean up the worst messes left behind in Nunavik by mining exploration companies during the 1950s to the mid-1970s.

More than 20 companies have set up a foundation called Fonds Restor-Nunavik to raise money for the restoration of the 18 worst abandoned mining sites in the region.

Littering those abandoned sites are everything from buildings, motors, drilling and heavy equipment, tanks, barrels, batteries, and transformers to a junked airplane, radio station, drums and bedding.

To date, Fonds Restor-Nunavik has raised \$750,000.

Quebec has pitched in \$4.1 million towards the clean-up effort, while the Kativik Regional Government and Makivik Corp. will provide assistance to make sure all "priority number one" sites get cleaned up.

"Cleaning up the mistakes of the past, a partnership between government, industry and Inuit, is sending a message to the new users of the territory - that we should do the thing right," said André Gaumond, president of Virginia Mines, a company with mining projects mainly in the James Bay region.

Gaumond, who spearheaded the creation of Fonds Restor-Nunavik, said Quebec's mining companies, such as Canadian Royalties and Azimut, want to show the public that they're thinking differently now than in the past.

"The new generation of exploration companies are taking on their social and environmental responsibilities," Gaumond said.

Before the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec agreement, there were few, if any, rules regulating mining activities in northern Quebec. Sometimes mining companies pulled out thinking they would return. Sometimes they just abandoned everything. And occasionally they left behind barrels of gas on purpose as fuel caches for Inuit.

Canada's association of prospectors and developers has also come out in support of the Fonds Restor-Nunavik and the establishment of similar funds in other provinces and territories, said Gaumont, who is also a director of this national association.

Gaumont said the Fonds Restor-Nunavik plans to continue to raise as much money possible to cover rising costs, because the government money for the clean-up was based on lower cost estimates in 2003.

A 2003 inventory noted 595 abandoned mine sites in Nunavik. The inventory looked in detail at 193 of these sites, of which 18 were found to need extensive clean-ups.

Most of the sites are south of Kuujjuaq and around Kangiqsualujjuaq, with some near the Hudson and Ungava bays.

"The scope of the problem is so vast... that a government intervention is clearly needed in the near future," said the 2003 "Inventory of Abandoned Mining Exploration Sites in Nunavik" by Gérard Duhaime, Nick Bernard and Robert Comtois, for The Canadian Geographer.

In 1997, more than 100 litres of highly toxic acid was found near Kattiniq, while, in 2000, a stock of abandoned dynamite was found near Tasiujaq.

But at the very least, leftover debris on the sites could pollute groundwater, said the inventory's authors, who suggested crews remove materials, burn debris and recover scrap metal.

This year, the clean-up activities will be concentrated on three sites near Blue Lake and Aupaluk.

In September, Cruise North, the Makivik-owned Arctic Cruise company, will work with the Fonds Restor-Nunavik and Quebec to clean-up on Merganser Point on the southwest shore of Ungava Bay near Aupaluk. The Ungava Iron Ores Company abandoned this site in the late 1950s.

Over the past two years, volunteers with Cruise North removed more than 250 rusting oil drums, 13 propane tanks, 14 drums full of scrap, and numerous broken truck batteries. They dismantled two 90-foot antennae and took down a large old transformer on top of a power pole.

They swept the area to gather scrap into piles for removal, and salvaged a variety of building materials for Aupaluk.

"We have made a very good start, but there is more to be done," said Dugald Wells, president of Cruise North.

This year, the clean-up money from industry and government will help pay for equipment to transport heavier loads, a helicopter for shuttling personnel and logistical support, and technical expertise for specific activities such as bio-remediation of polluted soil.

Cruise North is recruiting 40 volunteers from business, government and other organizations, who will pay only a portion of a cruise's cost to participate in the project.