Moving Forward

The former mine sites in the Sahtú region are in various stages of remediation. A successful clean-up at Port Radium took place over the summer of 2007, after many years of environmental assessment and community consultation.

The environmental assessment work at Silver Bear, Contact Lake and El Bonanza was completed in 2007, and is ongoing at Sawmill Bay. A number of community consultation meetings took place during the fall of 2007 with Táchó and Déeline community remediation representatives. During the meetings, environmental assessment results and clean-up options were presented, and the representatives were then able to choose a preferred clean-up option for each area of concern.

In addition to the work being done in the Great Bear area, preliminary assessments are also under way for sites in other parts of the Sahtú region. A ground inspection of the Canol Trail was conducted this summer, and existing reports on the Canol Trail are being compiled and examined in 2007 and 2008. The Government of the Northwest Territories has indicated interest in developing a Canol Heritage Trail as part of plans for the proposed Dîî Toh Tírriq Territorial Park. The trail’s heritage value will be taken into account when developing assessment and remediation plans, if remediation is required.

Contaminated Sites in the Sahtú

The Contaminants and Remediation Directorate (CARD) of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is currently managing over twenty contaminated sites in the NWT, at various stages of remediation. A number of contaminated sites have been identified for further investigation and potential remediation in the Sahtú region, and identification and assessment is ongoing. These sites are located on both Sahtú and Crown Land. The majority of the high priority sites are located within the Déeline district.

Déeline residents today maintain strong links to their traditional Dene way of life. In 1993 the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement was signed to, among other things, “recognize and encourage the way of life of the Sahtú Dene and Métis which is based on the cultural and economic relationship between them and the land”. The following sites were identified by INAC and the Sahtú as priority sites for remediation, to reduce federal liability and allow, to the extent possible, renewed traditional use of the areas:

Port Radium

Port Radium was a former radium, uranium and silver mine, located along the eastern shore of Great Bear Lake. 440 kilometres north of Yellowknife and 265 kilometres east of the community of Déeline. The site was decommissioned in 1982 to the standards of the day. Beginning in 2000, the site was reassessed and further studied, due to concerns raised by the community of Déeline. All studies and recommendations on how to address the site were developed jointly by Canada and Déeline. Remediation of the site was completed in 2007.

Silver Bear Properties

Silver Bear Properties is a collection of former silver, copper and bismuth mines, located in the Camsell River area, approximately 300 kilometres northwest of Yellowknife, and 250 kilometres east of the community of Déeline. The sites include Terra Mine and four satellite mines known as Northrim, Norex, Graham Vein and Smallwood. The Silver Bear Properties area is used by the Sahtú people as a traditional harvest ground for country food, fur, fish, berries and plants, as are other sites in the area. These sites also fall inside the Môwhi Gogha De Nîîtåèè boundary, within the Wêknîeb management area of the Tâchó settlement area.

Contact Information

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Published under the authority of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians

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Winter 2008

What are the concerns at the sites?

1. Port Radium
   - Remediation of the site complete in 2007/08
   - Past concerns included:
     - Silver, copper and uranium were present in soils and surface water, around the immediate site
     - Elevated gamma associated with the waste rock, which has been covered
     - Small amounts of hydrocarbons and asbestos residue, which have been remediated
     - Various exposed waste materials, which have been covered or removed
     - Mine openings, which have been closed

2. Contact Lake
   - Waste rock and processed tailings deposited downslope of the mine site, located in and around a tailings pond
   - Elevated levels of metals in tailings and surface mine water
   - Old buildings, mine structures and openings on the site that pose safety hazards

3. El Bonanza/Bonanza
   - A limited amount of soil containing hydrocarbons
   - Drums of diesel
   - Waste rock extending into Silver Lake
   - Old buildings, mine structures and openings on the site that pose safety hazards
   - Scrap metal and general debris

4. Silver Bear Properties
   - Affected areas localized in two tailings ponds, including HeHum Lake at Terra Mine and Hermady Lake at Northrim
   - Elevated levels of cadmium, lead, mercury, uranium, zinc and arsenic in the tailings areas and nearby soils
   - Hazardous waste, including laboratory chemicals and waste fuels
   - Unsealed mine openings

5. Sawmill Bay
   - Elevated gamma levels at various locations
   - Associated arsenic, barium, cobalt and antimony in the soil
   - Small amounts of hydrocarbons and asbestos residue
   - Old buildings, scrap metal and general debris