editor's comments

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Nunavut welcomes mineral explorers

On April 15, the Honourable Minister Peter Taptuna, Minister of Mines for the Territory of Nunavut, Canada's newest territory, was the keynote speaker for Nunavut Day in Vancouver, British Columbia. The event coincided closely with the tenth anniversary of the creation of the territory, which was formerly a part of the Northwest Territories.

Although Nunavut, the capital of which is Iqaluit, is vast and encompasses some 2 million square kilometres, its population is only 32,000, 85% of whom have the First Nations language of Inuktitut as their first language.

Minister Taptuna pointed out that in 1999, exploration spending in Nunavut was a modest $37 million, but has now increased to about $300 million annually involving over 130 mineral projects. Metals and minerals of interest include gold, silver, base metals, diamonds and iron ore. Projects range from grass roots to advanced developments. In addition, while at a very early stage, there may be potential for oil and gas projects.

For example, Agnico Eagle's Meadowbank Mine will produce its first gold early next year and is expected to recover approximately 350,000 ounces annually.

Geologically, Nunavut is an attractive region to explore. "Much of the territory is underlain by Archean-aged rocks similar to the most productive geology in parts of Ontario, Québec, South Africa, Australia and Brazil," noted the Minister.

Obviously, mineral explorers are keen to obtain geological maps to identify attractive prospects. To that end, "Nunavut is partnering with the federal government in its Geomapping for Energy and Minerals initiative that over the next five years is going to put $75 million into new geoscience mapping north of the 60th parallel," said Minister Taptuna. The 60th parallel is the southern border of the territory.

He added that the GEMS initiative will have a number of major mapping projects across Nunavut, including the Thelon Basin where geologists are hoping to further their understanding of the region, which is a sister basin to the Athabasca Basin in northern Saskatchewan that produces much of the world's uranium.

The Minister wanted to make clear that there is security of mineral tenures in Nunavut under the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, and that with the exception of some minor aboriginal land claims still being settled along Nunavut's border with Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the struggle over aboriginal rights are settled. With the exception of warfare, nothing deters mineral explorers more than the uncertainty of tenure of their claims.

Minister Taptuna's predecessor, The Honourable Peter Kilabuk, Nunavut's first Minister Responsible for Mines, stated, "The government of Nunavut will support any resource development that is economically viable, that can demonstrate that it will not damage the environment, and that any impacts can be managed and mitigated, and can provide substantive and sustainable benefits to the people and communities of Nunavut."

Stating his territory's Mineral Exploration and Mining Strategy, intitled Panautit, released in 2007, Minister Taptuna said it is, "To create the conditions for a strong and sustainable minerals industry that contributes to a high and sustainable quality of life for all Nunavummiut [residents of Nunavut]."

He added, "From our smallest communities to the individuals that make up our government, most Nunavummiut agree that an economically strong and self-reliant territory will be built alongside a strong and sustainable minerals industry."

If that's not a welcome mat, I don't know what is. ■

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