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To press province to speed access to the site

Bending Lake, Brett and Cassandra willing to work together at Steep Rock

by Jessica Smith

Two other proponents interested in the Steep Rock site have stepped up to support Bending Lake Iron Group's push to speed up land access approval.

At a video conference meeting of reps from Bending Lake Iron Group, Brett Resources, a company proposing water pump storage-based electricity generation, and the Atikokan Economic Development Corporation last Wednesday, it was evident that all parties wanted to work together to seek provincial approval, said executive-director Garry McKinnon.

"It was clearly agreed by those three companies that their individual operations would not conflict with the operations of any of the others and there may in fact be some synergies to be achieved by collaboration," said McKinnon. The three companies plan to work together to clean up the toxic sediments left in the former Steep Rock Mine's Hogarth Pit, he said.

"None of them represent an obstacle for the others, so what that means is the only clear obstacle, at this point, appears to be the province of Ontario."

He said the three projects could lead to a collective investment of \$5 billion, thousands of construction jobs, hundreds of permanent jobs, and close to \$100 million in annual provincial tax revenue. "That's the magnitude of this opportunity these three industries represent."

"We've been told the province needs time to do this (rehabilitation) plan properly, which begs the question: What the hell have they been doing for the past 30 years?" said McKinnon. "These mines didn't just close yesterday. And based on (Wednesday's) discussion, I really believe these companies can help the province address their environmental nightmare that they have at those sites."

With the support of the AEDC, the three proponents are developing a proposal to demonstrate to the province plans to jointly address the Hogarth Pit's rehabilitation, in hopes of speeding up an approval. A planned meeting between Minister of Natural Resources Linda Jeffrey and BLIG president Henry Wetelainen will now also include reps from the other two companies.

One of those companies, Cassandra Enterprises, is looking to

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Steep Rock users would rehabilitate site as they develop new industries

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acquire land tenure at the Steep Rock site to use two water reservoirs there to pump and store water to generate 1,000 megawatts of 'peaking' power. (This would involve pumping water between pits – uphill in times of low electricity demand (and low prices), and then letting it run back down through a generator when electricity demand (and prices) are up.)

Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry Michael Gravelle told the Progress two weeks ago that in addition to BLIG there were at least two parties interested in the brown field site and that he was "not in any way going to suggest which one of the proponents should be successful." McKinnon said that to his knowledge however, BLIG, Brett, and Cassandra Enterprises were the only parties interested in the site and their projects complement each other.

He said the province's apparent perception of competing interests in the site "was all the more reason for us to help facilitate these three companies going forward collectively so that they can clearly identify that this is not a competition – that they can locate contiguously and be mutually beneficial."

Brett's VP of operations Joseph Ringwald, who is overseeing the Hammond Reef gold development, said that project would benefit from BLIG locating its iron processing facilities at the site. "We will do what we can to support their efforts because their efforts will support ours. We can see the possibility of multiple proponents using the site – it doesn't have to be exclusive to anyone. We see great synergy and the more the merrier as far as we are concerned."

He said both companies plan to not only share the Hogarth pit as a tailings site but also in remediation of the harmful sediments currently contained in the water. Brett Resources plans to build a corridor for a tailings pipeline to Hogarth and is planning to conduct extensive lab work to assess the effects of Hammond Reef's tails on the existing water in the pit and vice versa, said Ringwald.

"In either respect, a water treatment facility would be required and that facility could support us and Bending Lake. The potential of sharing activities, services, and costs, from Brett's perspective means we see the possibility of multiple proponents using that site – it doesn't need to be exclusive to anyone."

Ringwald said that, like Wetelainen, he received word from the MNR Monday that any possible approval would take at least a year and that it is disappointing news to Brett Resources as well.

"It's a surprise. The time line will eventually affect us. In a year from now if we don't have some clarity it's going to put pressure on us. That's why sometime this year we would like some very clear commitment."

He said government support for this project would have far-reaching investment benefits for the region and province. "Any demonstration of that support in this local region will demonstrate to the greater market – not only in Ontario, but nationwide – that we are in an environment that is supporting development, not only development for economic purposes but also development that is actually going to help remediate an environmental legacy site." she said, adding "We're potentially reducing a burden on the Ontario taxpayers."

Ringwald added that while it was important that the government ministries ensured that projects were economically viable and environmentally sustainable, that process could be accomplished in a more expeditious manner.

"Atikokan is long overdue for these sorts of things. I think what we need to do is all of us get together in whatever shape, form, or manner, to move this forward as quickly and effectively as possible."

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