

BLIG, Brett & Cassandra to meet with Steep Rock Rehab team
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**Province wants detailed plans on Steep Rock water treatment;
BLIG frustrated with delay**

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Bending Lake Iron Group (BLIG) president Henry Wetelainen remains frustrated over the time it's taking to get approval to use the Steep Rock site, despite an upcoming meeting with MNR and an assertion from MPP Bill Mauro that Minister of Natural Resources Linda Jeffrey has yet to receive the project information she requested from Wetelainen in a meeting last month.

Proponents hoping to access the former Steep Rock mine site will take part in a day of meetings with the MNR's Steep Rock Rehabilitation Project technical team at the Thunder Bay MNR office, April 14.

Wetelainen, however, is not optimistic the process of gaining access to the Hogarth Pit will move quickly enough for his company and its investors to construct a first iron-processing plant. "I think it's really going to be a time-line problem. That's what bothers me... how long it takes [the MNR] to make up their mind."

He said while he is still committed to building two ITMK3 iron processing facilities here, he might build an initial plant elsewhere. "I'm looking at other locations, existing industrial sites around Lake Superior. We've short-listed a couple of sites."

However, "that doesn't preclude our commitment to Atikokan; what we've laid out is two ITMK3s there." Rather, a first one potentially built elsewhere would begin processing iron concentrate from the U.S. and eventually that plant and the two Atikokan facilities would be fed by the Bending Lake iron mine once it goes into production, likely in a few years. In the end, with three plants, "we would add to our production," he said.

Brett Resources and Cassandra Enterprises (a company hoping to develop pump-based water storage hydroelectric power generation) are willing to partner with BLIG to access Steep Rock and work together to help remediate the brownfield site.

Such a partnership has been viewed as a positive step toward speeding approval for site use by the Town, the AEDC, and Brett and Cassandra. While Brett reps and Cassandra owner Barry Peterson were unable to attend last month's meeting with Minister of Natural Resources Linda Jeffrey and Wetelainen at MPP Bill Mauro's office in Thunder Bay, both companies were represented by the AEDC and Mayor Dennis Brown. The companies expressed last week their commitment to working together, and they will attend this month's meeting.

Brett CEO Patrick Soares reiterated his company's desire to share use of the site, and to gain approval as soon as possible for feasibility planning. He said the pH balance of potential Hammond Reef mine tailings dump there would serve to neutralize the sulphide tailings in the Hogarth Pit. The existing brownfield site would be a more "environmentally friendly" option than other possibilities, he added. Even in light of a possible takeover of Brett, Soares said "certainly we'll continue pushing for that, as will Osisko."

Wetelainen acknowledged while it has been important to work together, the time involved was frustrating. "It just takes time, a lot more time. With my company, it's a majority-owned and we can make decisions a lot quicker."

Detailed plans sought

A formal commitment to the partnership and detailed water management plans are what the province now wants to see, said MPP Mauro.

At last month's meeting, Minister Jeffrey asked Wetelainen for an amended project description which outlines detailed water treatment plans for both the Hogarth and Caland pits. MPP Mauro said this request came as a result of some information related to the company's water treatment plans, information of which the Minister had been previously unaware.

"Her issue, of course, was the water, the contamination and how you deal with it," said Wetelainen. "What we've now done is the calculation on how much water consumption we would use for the first ITMK3 and we're going to use something like 32,000 gallons per hour. We're extrapolating that out."

MPP Mauro said Thursday that in more than one discussion with Minister Jeffrey last week she had told him she was still awaiting the requested information from BLIG. "I know from her end, that's important. I think that part of the Minister's response was that if you're suggesting you have an ability or capacity to do that, then obviously that ability and capacity needs to be demonstrated. I think part of what we're looking for in the letter was for the proponent to confirm to the minister that there is a partnership in place, and that if there is a suggested capacity from a proponent to rehabilitate the site."

He said receiving that information would determine the next steps required by the proponents. "That is potentially very good news; but clearly that needs to be demonstrated before some very toxic water would be allowed to be discharged into a river system. We simply obviously can't just go forward because someone has said they can do it - we need some demonstrated capability."

While Wetelainen said his company is still committed to eventually using the Steep Rock site, his company is also planning for the eventuality that the MNR may deny access. In that event, "We're looking at where else could we locate the project: Would we do it all at Bending Lake [80 kms north of Atikokan], or move it closer to Highway 17? All those things are on the table. We have a big ore body and we have to plan for that."

MPP Mauro said he hoped BLIG would also be looking at other industrial sites in Atikokan that could potentially serve their project's needs and support the municipality.

"If there are, potentially, problems with one particular site and for multiple reasons they have suggested to us that Atikokan is the best place for them to be, it would be my thought that they would be looking at other sites as well in the Atikokan area."