

# **GOLDCORP** **ÉLÉONORE MINE**

**PARTNERSHIP IN  
NORTHERN QUEBEC**



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*Goldcorp's Éléonore gold mine is paying far more than lip service to the principles of stakeholder consultation, community benefit and local content*

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James Bay, a tongue of water licking out between Ontario and Quebec, is by any standards remote. The Cree nation that lives on its shores have staked their claim, not always without difficulty, to such economic development as has taken place in the region, but today the greatest impact on their way of life is undoubtedly mining.

Nobody coming into this area should doubt the need to involve the Cree, as traditional owners of the land, in their plans. Perhaps the highest profile local business to have been developed is Air Creebec, founded in 1982 and today carrying more than 60,000 passengers a year – it's a wholly-owned Cree enterprise, and its largest customer is Goldcorp, one of the world's fastest growing senior gold producers, with operations and development projects located throughout the Americas. Goldcorp plans to fly more than a third of that number to its Éléonore project during 2013.

A Canadian company headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia, Goldcorp employs more than 16,000 people worldwide however one of its most significant current projects is its fast developing Éléonore project located some 200 kilometres inland from the Cree centre of Wemindji on the east coast of James Bay. When it comes into operation in 2014, according to figures from a pre-feasibility study published in 2011, it should be processing 3,500 tonnes of gold bearing ore a day, extracted from an underground resource that is known to have a lot more potential than so far confirmed. By 2017 this rate will double,





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making the Éléonore mine one of Canada's most significant gold producers, but as the deposit is 'open at depth and along strike' (there is more to be discovered below and beyond the areas already drilled) the ultimate limit is not yet known.

It is a brand new, greenfield site, says Guy Belleau, site manager at the Éléonore project and it has been moved forward in an exemplary way. "In February 2011 we announced that after a successful negotiation with our Cree partners we had reached a collaboration agreement with our First Nation partners, the Cree Nation of Wemindji, the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) and the Cree Regional Authority."

The agreement will ensure that the Crees receive a fair share in the project's financial

benefits. It protects the environment while supporting the Crees' social and cultural practices in a spirit of continued collaboration, and establishes shared responsibilities in critical issues of environmental stewardship, community development, local employment, and small business development. It reflects an approach to working with indigenous communities that Goldcorp hopes will provide a benchmark for its own and others to use in

future projects, he says.

Construction started in November 2011, and has progressed excellently. "We are on schedule," says Belleau. "We have dug an exploration decline, or ramp, that is now three kilometres long and down to 400 metres in depth, enabling us to initiate our diamond drilling definition so we can get better knowledge of the detail of the ore body and definition drilling also takes place from

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our 725 metre exploration shaft. We have also made a start on the production shaft. It is already 200 metres deep, but is projected to end up at 1,500 metres so still has a long way to go.”

A 63 kilometre road was built from the La Sarcelle Hydro-Quebec power plant which is located 60 kilometres from James Bay Highway, a 60 kilometre power line brought to the site, an airstrip constructed complete with

communications tower. All in all Goldcorp has invested \$130 million in infrastructure at Éléonore. “We are in a win situation here with these world class infrastructures: there is no excuse now – we are going to deliver!”

Above ground there’s a great deal of building work in progress. The steelwork for the processing plant is substantially completed, and cladding has started. From May the ball mill that crushes the ore will

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be installed, an important milestone towards getting the processing plant ready to receive its first batch of rock from the mine.

At the moment Éléonore is a fly-in-fly-out operation served by Air Creebec, however a 400 person permanent camp is under construction. “The accommodation is just about complete, and we are starting to build a new kitchen facility, the recreational areas and a gymnasium – all that will be completed by the end of this year.” There will also be a world class tailings management facility, an administration building and a water treatment facility with a daily capacity of 26,000 cubic metres. Contributing to this hive of activity, 850 workers are currently at the site, which means that the mine is providing direct employment to around 1,300 people.

The permitting go-ahead from the Québec department of environment could have come at a better time than November 2011. Many companies would have put off construction till the spring, but Goldcorp thought it could perhaps save time by working the foundations for the concentrator and the production shaft through Canada’s unforgiving winter. “You know that every time we have obstacles or challenges our people respond,” says Guy Belleau with irrepressible enthusiasm. “They always think outside the box and find solutions so we did pretty well to speed work up and build during the worst time of the year while keeping up the schedule.”

The solution was to build a shed over the foundations. It was, he claims, just like working in the summer! Additionally the



Aerial view of the operations

## “FIRMS LIKE THIS WILL BE TRAINING OTHERS IN THE COMMUNITY TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRY”

concrete elements for the foundation were cast in a factory off-site. “They arrived ready made so it was just like putting together Lego – that also helped us to speed up a lot.”

First and last, Guy Belleau believes in the mantra that people are the key to a successful project. “Our main challenge is to find the right people, and so far we have been very successful in attracting the best-in-class simply because of Goldcorp’s reputation in

promoting people, safety and partnership.” Staffing a project like this ought to be difficult, but it has not been hard. Good people really want to work for Goldcorp and gravitate to the company, as evidenced by the large number of résumés he gets on his desk.

Safety is an important pillar in attracting the best people, he continues. The results of the continuous improvement efforts were recognised by the Quebec Mining Association

when it awarded the FJ O’Connell trophy to Éléonore in 2011 to acknowledge an 85 percent improvement in safety at the site in the past three years. However training is also key where the First Nations are concerned.

A committee comprising 50 percent Cree and 50 percent Goldcorp employees meets regularly with the objective of maximising Cree employment, training and retention. “Today 30 percent of our workforce are from the Cree communities - that is a great achievement just a year into the construction phase and we are very proud of it.” These are not just any jobs, he emphasises. “When someone joins us as a janitor or washing up in the kitchen, and a year later I see them working as technologists with the geology or explorations teams, or doing skilled jobs

like roof bolting underground, operating sophisticated equipment or shaft sinking it makes my job really worthwhile!”

Some operators who joined without qualifications or experience are now operating 50 tonne trucks underground, thanks to the ore extraction training program, and that really warms his heart. Now Belleau’s team along with Cree partners are developing a similar programme in mineral processing. “We think this is the first time, in Quebec anyway, that the Cree have had the opportunity to learn mineral processing. They will end up with a high school diploma in the subject.” The first cohort of 16 students is already in session, he says.

That is important. The mine life is estimated at 15 years. It will probably be there decades



after that, but at some point it will stop but then there will be a core of experienced Cree able to take their skills anywhere in the world.

Outside of direct employment, he wants to leave a legacy of sustainable investment. A laundry is being established by the Cree in Wemindji and Goldcorp participated in the purchase of some of the equipments. The new business has a three-year contract to wash all the overalls, all bed liners, sheets and cleaning cloths generated by the mine. “Firms like this will be training others in the community to create a sustainable industry,” enthuses Guy Belleau. “We promote Cree contractors on site too. Today 80 percent of the material brought to the site is transported by a Cree company. And Air Creebec has added to its fleet thanks tour contract with them.”

But the First Nations are not only concerned with making money. One of Goldcorp’s proudest innovations has been the way it manages its tailings at Éléonore. “In consultation the Cree made it very clear they didn’t want traditional tailings management involving a large body of water under which we would do the tailings deposition. Water is very important to them. So we decided to filter 85 percent of the water and transport the thickened tailings truck by truck to the tailings facility.” The area is rehabilitated progressively, he adds, so that be the end of the project the tailings will have been already 95 percent revegetated. **BE**

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