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882549 Eagle Rock

TGS → Port Alberni

Port Alberni scheme cashes in on crushed rock shortage

RD YOUNG
Colonist staff
In a project
project worth \$115 million, a hill
Alberni is to be moved to Calif.
near
the shipload at a time.
The necessary approvals fall into
a unique partnership formed
Two First Nations and a Van-
company will begin mining much-
gravel from the site in 18 months.

Boosters of the project see it as a great way to perk up the Port Alberni area's depressed economy.
Polaris Minerals has teamed with the Hupacasath and Ucluelet First Nations to form Eagle Rock Materials Ltd. to open a quarry at a 333-metre-high hill by Alberni Inlet.

Setting up the quarry is expected to cost \$115 million.
The partners plan to ship to California, where construction industry demand for crushed rock is high.
Work on the project has been going on for two years, and the company is now a few weeks away from making appli-

cations for permits from the federal provincial and regional governments.
The company will entertain representatives from government agencies and the public today between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. at the Italian Cultural Centre in Alberni.

Front Page
gravel
Times Colonist (Victoria)
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Construction is expected to create as many as 150 jobs.
"It's a small hill that has been repeatedly logged," Romero said. "The site is a whole bunch of clearcuts."

Eagle Rock, based in Port Alberni, has already shelled out about \$2.5 million for analysis, studies and other investigation of the venture and the site.
Polaris has nine principals, all of whom are professionals in areas such as geology, mining and the environment, Romero said.

"We're not speculators," he said. "We're hands-on developers."

The project has been extremely careful in addressing environmental concerns, especially those brought forward by the First Nations, he said.

The plant will be developed so a green buffer of trees makes it "invisible" from Alberni Inlet, he said. The plant and equipment will be state of the art and environmentally sound and all used water will go through filtration before being put back into nature, he said.

The company hopes to start out mining about three million tons annually, eventually increasing its production to six million tons. Plans also call for a ship-loading facility.

"From what I have seen, it's going to be a great, a good partnership," said Ucluelet First Nations executive director Norman Taylor.

"I don't think we could have been able to do it without the partnership with the other First Nations and Polaris."

His First Nation has about 600 members with half its workforce unemployed.

"It's a part in the road to our economic development," said Hupacasath Chief Judith Sayers, who is chairwoman of the Eagle Rock board. "I really think it will be a precedent-setting venture for others to come and look at."

Unemployment in her community is 23.1 per cent, higher in the winter. But apart from job creation, the project will give her First Nation access and management over its resources, Sayers said.

The land will be leased from the Crown. Currently, the two First Nations along with a third not involved in the quarry project lay claim to the land, said. However, native land claims and project are two separate issues, she said.

She credits Polaris "with doing this right," coming to the First Nations at the start instead of proceeding into their territory and starting up business without consultation.

Polaris's initial contact led to trust and eventually a partnership with a lot of sensitivity toward First Nations concerns over the environment, Sayers said.

And the company has been open up-front with the whole Port Alberni community. That included environmentalists, politicians and residents, she said.

Port Alberni Mayor Ken McRae is excited about the potential impact on his community where the unemployment rate is 25 per cent. A third of the population is First Nations, he added.

"It's about diversification," he said. "We have to get out of being just a mill town. (The plant) is going to be there for a long time."

Weyerhaeuser, which previously logged the hill behind Hocking Point, has been the major game in town.

He expects eventually value-added businesses could spring up to provide other concrete-based products, McRae said.

While the hill is near Port Alberni there is no other development in the immediate area, which is serviced by logging roads, he said.

Workers will likely be brought to the job by boat, which will provide further work for water taxis, he said.