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'Passion for environment'

[Danette Dooley](#)

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Ernie Ford, Nunatsiavut Government Environmental Protection Officer, and Lela Evans inspect drums at an abandoned mineral exploration site at Okak Bay, Northern Labrador.

Submitted photos

Labrador restoration project receives provincial recognition

The province recognized a Labrador project that works to clean up abandoned mineral exploration sites.

On June 5, the Restoration of Labrador Exploration Sites (ROLES) Inc. was awarded the 2015 Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Award in the community group or organization category.

Kaylen Janes, manager of environmental affairs and community relations with Altius Minerals, and Ernie Ford, Nunatsiavut Government Environmental Officer, accepted the award during a ceremony in St. John's.

Janes chairs the ROLES board. The project stems from a partnership between the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board (MMSB), the Newfoundland and Labrador Women's Institute, the provincial and Aboriginal governments as well as numerous businesses. The award recognizes outstanding achievements and contributions in sustaining, protecting and enhancing the environment.

The project was inspired by a restoration project completed in Nunavik (Northern Quebec), Fonds Restor-Action-Nunavik.

When Janes' employer heard about the Quebec project, she was asked if she thought a similar initiative would work in Labrador.

"I just took it and ran with it," Janes said.

The project got off the ground in 2012 when Altius Minerals contributed \$100,000 to start the initiative.

Other mineral exploration, mining and service companies active in the Labrador region also came on board, Janes said.

"Companies have provided personnel support and technical support. The Nunatsiavut government has contributed \$10,000 worth of helicopter time each year and Universal Helicopters gave us a reduced rate for helicopters hours."

Janes said community members have been an important part of the project with interviews taking place to determine the location of the abandoned mineral exploration sites.

Those involved with the project update communities through the distribution of brochures in English, French, Inuktitut, two innu-aimun dialects and Naskapi.

"The communities did such a good job providing the information to us," said Janes. "We want to keep them in the loop as it continues."

Site inspections

Site inspections were completed at over 100 sites in 2013.

In Northern Labrador, 34 former exploration sites were found to have abandoned material with 11 of these sites deemed to be high priority due to the presence of diesel.

In 2014, a contract was issued to a Nain-based company to remove the fuel and fuel drums (barrels) from the 11 priority sites. A total of 260 oil drums, and more than 14,000 litres of diesel and gasoline, 260 fuel drums and 24 large propane cylinders were removed from the sites.

Many of the aging drums were leaking contaminants into the environment, Janes said.

The wastage was transferred to secure drums before the material was "slung out" using helicopters.

Many of the sites cleaned up thus far were based around the Voisey's Bay discovery.

"The companies disappeared or ran out of funds which lead to materials being left at these sites," Janes said.

Much of this material was received by Vale at their Voisey's Bay Mine, she said, where the company incorporated the waste into its own waste management system.

The value of the in-kind contribution was significant, Janes said.

The project is a great example of people working together to address environmental issues.

"All the companies that were part of the partnership volunteered their resources in terms of staff time and some of them made a financial contribution," Janes said.

Dan Crummell, Minister of Environment and Conservation, said in a press release that the individuals, groups and businesses recognized with awards are environmental ambassadors for the province.

Crummell congratulated all of the award recipients for their outstanding contributions for strengthening the environment and natural heritage.

"They have demonstrated tremendous ingenuity and determination, along with an impressive passion for our environment," Crummell said.

Multi-Materials Stewardship Board CEO Mike Samson said his organization is honoured to recognize award recipients.

We are pleased to provide each winner with a \$1,000 honorarium to further their environmental initiatives or donate in their name to an environmental organization or cause," Samson said.

Newfoundland and Labrador Women's Institute President Jane Laite said the environmental awards program is a positive force in the community.

"Congratulations to all the nominees and this year's winners for their outstanding contribution to the environment," she said.

In 2015, the project aims to restore a large site on the shore of Okak Bay, Northern Labrador that contains 123 fuel drums.

Other sites have also been targeted for clean up – including some in Labrador West. However, Janes said, whether the work gets done depends on the group's success in securing additional funding.

For more information on the project visit www.altiusminerals.com/environmental or e-mail kaylen@altiusminerals.com.

danette@nl.rogers.com

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