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Interest growing in Hutton garnet beaches, says Freeport

Freeport Resources president Brenda Clark Inc. says her company's call for proposals to mine garnet and titanium from the Hutton garnet beaches in northern Labrador is attracting a lot of interest from companies in North America, Europe and southeast Asia.

The Hutton Beaches property consists of several high-grade alluvial garnet deposits located on tidewater. Current work is focused on export market development, site logistics and environmental planning.

Clark noted her company issued an open-ended proposal call to evaluate the Hutton Garnet Beaches as a potential development opportunity last year. The RFP closed January 17.

Clark said Freeport was prepared to

evaluate "a range of options," including proposals with a limited role for the RFP proponent, such as marketing, sales or distribution; a significant role in project development and operation, including optioning the property or working it as a joint venture, or contractor; and even the outright sale of a portion or all of the project.

Proponents could also respond to any or all parts of the project, including permitting, garnet extraction, on-site processing, shipping and transportation of bulk or upgraded material to a processing site, and mineral processing, as well as marketing and distribution of the Hutton garnet product on the world market.

"Freeport wishes to see the Hutton project developed in a way that maxi-

mizes the value to its shareholders, respects the interests of the Labrador Inuit, and minimizes its environmental footprint," said Clark "It is important to understand the seasonal nature of this project."

Clark noted Freeport has been in discussions with many of the major players in the garnet industry, from suppliers to distributors, and from service providers to garnet consumers. Several groups visited the site last summer, testing bulk samples provided as part of the RFP process. Freeport is currently talking with a number of parties interested in advancing the project as a whole, while others are focused on specific aspects such as transportation, processing, marketing and distribution, she added.

Clarke said that waterjet grade garnet, such as that found on the Hutton beaches, is in high demand.

"Many suppliers have advised that they cannot keep enough material in stock to meet this demand, and have expressed interest in a new North American product, especially a high-quality product such as the Hutton garnet," Clark said.

As part of its export market development plan, Freeport arranged to have commercial-quality waterjet concentrates prepared from the Hutton garnet. The concentrates were tested by groups in the U.S., Europe and Canada.

One American waterjet manufacturer, which recently conducted an industry-wide study of commercially available

waterjet products, advised that Freeport should be confident in the Hutton product, which performed "really well," Clark said.

"Another major North American supplier and distributor testing its own products and Hutton garnet advised that it performed equal or better to a hard-rock product imported from China. As all waterjet tests to date have met with strongly positive responses, Freeport believes the Hutton garnet will command a respectable place in the market once it becomes commercially available," Clark said.

"Our next step is to test the Hutton garnet at a pilot plant level in order to prepare larger amounts of product for broader market testing." ■