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Taseko keen for Prosperity panel review

By Ken MacInnis Tribune Editor

A joint review panel's decision to recommend against the expansion of the Kemess North project last week makes **Taseko** Mines a little nervous about its Prosperity project in the Chilcotin.

But the company is also eager to go before another joint federal and provincial panel as part of the approval process, because it has a better case to present, says **Taseko** director of public affairs Brian Battison.

"These are two completely different projects," he says. "A mistake people could make is that because Kemess uses a lake (as a tailings pond), and Prosperity would use a lake, that the projects are the same.

"But we're optimistic that our project can meet the tests in front of it." Kemess North would be located approximately five to six kilometres north of the current Kemess South mine, 450 km northwest of Prince George, and would use much of the existing infrastructure. The project would boost production from 55,000 tonnes of ore per day to 120,000 tonnes and extend the life of the mine from 2009 to 2020. The plan calls for the acidic tailings and waste rock to be stored at the bottom of Duncan Lake – also known as Amazay Lake.

The Prosperity project, at Fish Lake 125 km southwest of Williams Lake, is a gold and copper mine that would use the lake as a tailings pond. **Taseko** has proposed to develop another lake and reclaim the land when the mine closes.

Battison says while Kemess North is an expansion, Prosperity is a brand-new undertaking, and he says there are a number of other differences.

"Kemess had a duration of 11 years, while we have a duration in excess of 20 years," he says. "Kemess would have a capital investment of \$190 million, we would have in excess of \$800 million. We would create brand new jobs — 900 to build the mine, and 500 to

operate it.”

The panel — the first of its kind in B.C. — recommended against the Kemess North project because “the economic and social benefits provided by the project, on balance, are outweighed by the risks of significant adverse environmental, social and cultural effects, some of which may not emerge until many years after mining operations cease.”

Battison says because Prosperity is a long-term project, it may be easier to show the environmental effects are balanced by the economic benefit, and that Prosperity will not close prematurely.

“Our mine is local, the benefits stay in the community,” he says. “And our economics are solid.”

Taseko has been pushing the provincial government to start the panel review process for Prosperity, so it can continue with the environmental assessment process required for eventual approval for the mine.

A study released Monday shows the mine is both economically and technically feasible.

“We’ve been expecting a referral since January,” Battison says. “We’d like to get into this process in late winter or early spring. People need this — (federal Natural Resources Minister) Gary Lunn is talking about how we need to deal with the pine beetle, so let’s get on with examining this project.”

The final decision after a joint panel recommendation lies with the provincial and federal ministers of the environment. The B.C. Environmental Assessment Board conducts further review and consultation on the proposal.

If the project receives provincial support, it would go to the federal government for additional review.