

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRANSLATION FROM FRENCH:

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## Saskatchewan Ready to Receive Rare Earths from Northwest Territories

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Thomas Ethier - L'Acquilon



PhotoCaption: The mineral enriched by the sensor-based sorter is crammed into large bags that will take the road to Saskatoon. (Photo credit: Marie-Soleil Desautels)

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A delegation from the Northwest Territories was in Saskatoon on September 20 to take part in a rare earth summit hosted by Vital Metals. The mine took the opportunity to officially unveil its new processing plant in Saskatchewan's capital, dedicated to rare earths mined in the NWT, at the Nechalacho mine.

A portion of the event focused on the so-called "critical" minerals industry was dedicated to the communities involved in the activities of the mine that began operations in March 2021. The two-and-a-half-hour event – dubbed "Light on the Northwest Territories" – replaced the official opening of the site east of Yellowknife, which ultimately never took place.

"We had hoped to be able to organize the official opening of the Nechalacho mine in 2021, but COVID-19 prevented us from doing so. We are combining the event with the opening of the plant in Saskatoon this week," David Conelly, Vice President of Strategy and Corporate Affairs for Cheetah Resources and Vital Metals, told NWT Media.

Representatives from Aurora College were also invited to participate in a panel of five post-secondary institutions on preparing the NWT and Saskatchewan workforces for future jobs arising from Nechalacho Mine operations. The educational institution is currently in the process of transitioning to the opening of the future NWT Polytechnic University, scheduled for 2024.

#### *High expectations for Nechalacho*

In 2021, the Nechalacho mine became the first Canadian mine to extract so-called critical minerals, essential, in particular, to the manufacture of batteries for electric cars, wind turbines and cell phones. The federal government is talking about "minerals and metals needed to meet the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050," according to a statement from the Department of Transport.

"The world is hungry for rare earths," says Connelly. Our partners want a rare earth supply that is independent of China and Russia. Vital Metals intends to double the production of the new plant over the next few years.

The mining company recently concluded a long-term supply agreement with the Schaeffler Group, a German manufacturer of automotive components, which supplies electric motors to Volkswagen. "We expect the Nechalacho mine to be a major supplier to the automotive industry, and to the wind energy industry," says Connelly.

Canada's emerging critical minerals sector is raising high expectations for the Northwest Territories economy, with the GNWT already seeing its place at the table of leaders in Canada's low-carbon new technologies industry. In Budget 2022, Ottawa plans to invest \$3.8 billion to implement Canada's first-ever critical minerals strategy.

On the environmental front, Vital Metals has announced certain measures to reduce the heavy carbon footprint associated with mining. In particular, the mining company wants to electrify mining vehicles, an operation that is not viable at present since the site is fuel-powered.

According to Connelly, the company is in discussions with the GNWT as part of the Taltson Hydroelectric Expansion Project, with the goal of moving the transmission line close to the mine.

Link to original French article:

<https://www.aquilon.nt.ca/Article/La-Saskatchewan-prete-a-recevoir-les-terres-rares-des-Territoires-du-Nord-Ouest-202209221412/default.aspx#article>