



JOINT VENTURES SIGNED FOR GEOPHYSICAL SURVEYS

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The Canadian subsidiary of an international metals and minerals company has made joint venture agreements with four Newfoundland-based junior exploration companies.

Billiton Exploration Canada Ltd., a subsidiary of Billiton PLC, which has worldwide production, trading and processing interests, has signed agreements with the four companies to carry out a high-tech airborne geophysical survey of their mineral property holdings in central Newfoundland.

The four joint venture partners are Altius Minerals Corp. Buchans River Ltd., Celtic Minerals Ltd. and Jilbey Exploration Ltd.

Mines and Energy Minister Chuck Furey said Wednesday, "This is good news for the junior exploration companies, for exploration in general and for central Newfoundland."

Furey said the general area being surveyed is the northeast-trending linear zone from Buchans to Badger.

He said Billiton's international expertise and the detailed geological knowledge of the local companies are an "exciting and promising combination."

Meanwhile, Altius Minerals said Wednesday its joint venture agreement with Billiton involves its Victoria River properties in central Newfoundland.

"Billiton may earn up to 70 per cent interest by the expenditure of \$1.3 million on exploration and by making cash payments to Altius of \$200,000," said Brian Dalton, president and chief executive officer.

The properties involved consist of 127 claims (3,175 hectares) which cover portions of the Tulk's Hill volcanic belt.

Dalton said that under the agreement, Billiton must spend an aggregate of \$500,000 over a maximum four-year period, with a minimum of \$100,000 in the first year, to earn a 51 per cent interest in the project.

Billiton has also been given an option to earn a further 19 per cent in exchange for annual \$25,000 payments until the initial 51 per cent is earned. In order to exercise the option, Billiton must pay Altius \$200,000 minus the total of annual payments made, and commit to an additional singularly-funded exploration expenditure of \$800,000.

Billiton's exploration programs are expected to begin shortly, Dalton said.

Buchans River said Wednesday its joint venture agreement involves approximately 116 square kilometres, including the Buchans East property, the Clementine property and the Oriental property.

John Tuach said two non-arms-length companies with directors in common, GT Exploration Ltd. and Newfoundland Mining and Exploration Ltd. have also signed the agreement, joint venturing their properties in the Buchans area with Billiton.

Billiton can earn a 51 per cent interest in the properties by spending \$3.5 million on exploration over a four-year period, with a minimum \$600,000 expenditure in the first year. It has an option to earn an additional 19 per cent with a payment of \$1 million and an additional \$4 million exploration expenditure.