



Mining activity on rise in ACT region

By John Thistleton
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The commodities boom and new technology are driving a multi-million-dollar resurgence in mining in the Canberra region.

The Woodlawn zinc, lead and copper mine between Goulburn and Queanbeyan could be operational again by late next year with a workforce of 250, a wages bill of \$18 million and flow-on revenue of \$30 million. Woodlawn closed in 1998, leaving 160 miners out of work and owed \$6.5 million.

In a separate venture, Monaro Mining is investigating vast gold and mineral resources near Braidwood, Captains Flat, Michelago and near Jingellic, south-west of the ACT.

The most promising area is Lake George mine at Captains Flat, where Ironbark Gold has signed an agreement with Monaro Mining to explore the disused workings which originated in 1882 and reopened in 1937, producing zinc, lead, copper, silver and gold.

Perth-based exploration company Cortona Resources has spent more than \$6 million at Majors Creek near Braidwood on what could be a

significant new gold mine. Cortona's chairman Clive Jones said early indications were excellent.

"The area hosts the largest alluvial goldfield in NSW, so clearly there has been a lot of gold that has been eroded into the system out of those creeks there," he said.

A scoping study would be done for a site known as Dargue's Reef where 300,000 ounces of gold had already been found.

Tri Origin Minerals, which listed on the Australian Stock Exchange in 2004, expects 80,000 tonnes of zinc and copper concentrates from underground at Woodlawn and 140,000 tonnes in overall production.

Managing director Bruce Robertson said when Woodlawn closed in 1998, zinc was making \$1100 a tonne. Zinc was now worth about \$2700 a tonne. Critical to the project was an environmental impact statement which he hoped would be completed mid-year.

After the mine closed abruptly, the open-cut section was sold to Collex which developed a 25 million cubic metre megatip which is being filled with household rubbish railed from Sydney.

Mr Robertson said Tri Origin had a clear and separate area of operation and was working closely with Veolia Environmental Services, which bought the waste site from Collex and continued to maintain the infrastructure. This would be a big plus for the mining operations.

As well as working underground, miners would extract concentrates from the tailings dams and would take over responsibility for rehabilitation.

"What's changed is technology in terms of mineral processing, material impact would be different, mining methods have changed and it's a more efficient operation."

The overall strength of exports to Brazil, India and China would ensure good returns well into the future.

"Metal prices have held up well despite the subprime market influence and I see no reason why they should weaken. Analysts are now saying zinc is in short supply and copper will maintain elevated price levels, the same with lead."

Tri Origin had been exploring in the region since the mid-1990s, and would draw its workforce from the local area.