

British Columbia Announces Provincial Critical Minerals Strategy

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February 29, 2024

On January 22, 2024, the Government of British Columbia launched the first phase of its critical minerals strategy (the Strategy), joining a growing number of jurisdictions placing new emphasis on critical minerals – such as copper, lithium, cobalt, potash and others – identified as essential for transitioning to a low-carbon economy and protecting supply chains amidst growing global instability. The Strategy has three overarching goals:

Goal 1: Expand First Nations partnerships, shared decision-making and reconciliation.

Goal 2: Increase business certainty to attract investment.

Goal 3: Establish funding partnerships to advance critical mineral projects in British Columbia.

To support these goals, the initial phase of the Strategy identifies 11 action items, including:

- establishing a new project advancement office to expedite critical mineral projects and maximize federal funding opportunities;
- creating and maintaining a provincial critical minerals atlas of geoscience data to support mineral exploration and land-use planning;
- providing dedicated permitting resources to ensure efficient permit processing, bolster business certainty and attract long-term investment;
- engaging with First Nations and industry to identify and advance infrastructure projects essential to critical minerals development; and
- establishing a new Energy & Mines Digital Trust project to promote British Columbia's environmental, social and governance (ESG) advantage and provide greater transparency for investors through provincial government-supported digital certificates.

The provincial Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation (EMLI) has been tasked with filling out the details of the Strategy over the next three years. Consultation and engagement with First Nations and other stakeholders will factor heavily in this process – among other things, a 12-person Critical Minerals Advisory Committee (CMAC), co-chaired by a First Nations Leadership Council appointee and an EMLI representative, has been established to help guide and develop the Strategy. The remaining members of the CMAC includes two members from the First Nations Energy and Mining Council and representatives

from the mining, value chain, labour, non-governmental, post-secondary and financial sectors.

Notably absent from these action items are specific regulatory or financial incentives. Instead, for now the focus is on leveraging federal funding and promoting the ESG advantages of mining in British Columbia. Trade groups, including the Mining Association of British Columbia and the Association for Mineral Exploration, have suggested that the Strategy may not go far enough to make British Columbia competitive with other prominent Canadian mining jurisdictions like Ontario or Québec, but this may be addressed as the Strategy is further developed. The provincial government has indicated that it will work to identify barriers to attracting capital and will assess the need for targeted incentive programs that can drive further investment and encourage production, including potential financial measures.

We will continue to monitor the development of the Strategy and provide updates as further information becomes available. Please contact a member of our Mining Group if you have any questions.

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