Elevated levels of some contaminants (nitrate from blasting, chloride from deep groundwater, and some metals naturally found in rock) have been found downstream of the mine. While these levels appear to be safe, the Agency wants to make sure that these contaminants of concern are properly managed. There should also be a plan in place to take action when there are early warning signs or limits of acceptable change have been reached.

It will be important to think about how long the next licence should be good for, as the mine is expected to close in about 2019. It is not clear whether a separate water licence would be required for closure and reclamation.

BHPB is scheduling meetings with the communities to discuss the water licence renewal.

The EKATI Diamond Mine’s current water licence will expire in August 2013. The Agency met with BHP Billiton (BHPB), Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) and Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to discuss the upcoming renewal of Ekati’s water licence. BHPB plans to apply to renew its water licence in April 2012.

Grizzly Bear Monitoring Program

Last year, we recommended BHPB move forward with a grizzly bear monitoring program based on the successes of the wolverine hair snagging work done by the Ekati, Diavik and Snap Lake diamond mines and GNWT. BHPB agreed and late last year proposed a regional program that would be funded by all three diamond mines with the GNWT providing some support.

The Agency is pleased with the leadership BHPB has shown. We hope the program can go forward in 2012. The study should provide a better understanding of how many grizzly bears there are in the region and how they are distributed.
Agency Communications

As part of our mandate, the Agency stores, distributes and makes information about the Ekati Mine available to Aboriginal peoples and the general public. We also serve as a way for people to communicate any environmental concerns about Ekati to BHPB, the GNWT and Government of Canada (AANDC).

In an effort to improve our communications, we developed a Communications Plan. The Plan, completed in late 2011, summarizes the Agency’s current communications initiatives and key messages (what we want to say), defines our communications objectives and outcomes (what we want to happen), and looks at options for improving our communication tools (how we communicate and get our message out). Each year, we will review the Plan and its results. To review our Communications Plan, please visit our website.

We also recently hired Allison Anderson as our new Communications and Environmental Specialist. Her previous experience includes working on fisheries issues and with several environmental organizations. Allison has lived in the north since 2005.

Traditional Knowledge Workshop

In December, the Agency hosted a workshop in Yellowknife on Traditional Knowledge (TK). The Agency, BHPB, Government of Canada (AANDC) and several community representatives gave presentations.

BHPB is funding TK community projects and has recently hired a TK advisor to help better focus its efforts. Lutsel K’e Dene talked about their TK project with BHPB to bring together previous interviews and mapping studies about hunting, fishing, trapping, place names, burials and industrial uses. The Goyatiko Language Society presented on its efforts to preserve recordings of interviews with Yellowknife Dene elders. Workshop participants also heard about a Kugluktuk project investigating the impacts of development on caribou and involving the training of community researchers. The North Slave Metis Alliance said it would like to begin a community heritage project to document indigenous North Slave Metis. AANDC talked about its collaboration with Aboriginal peoples in contaminated sites work.

We continue to encourage BHPB to better document its use of TK at Ekati in its environmental monitoring and management, and reclamation planning.

Visit our website at www.monitoringagency.net to view correspondence, meeting minutes, photos, background documents and other information about Ekati. Our website also features our Ekati Timeline, which shows important events in the history of the Ekati Mine.
Every three years, BHPB is required to put together an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), a special report that documents the environmental changes at the Ekati mine from the very beginning. Longer term effects and how BHPB manages these impacts are also to be covered in the report. BHPB is required to consult with the Agency and others as it is putting the report together.

Environmental Impact Report 2012

To avoid problems that happened with the last EIR in 2009, it was agreed that BHPB would consult with interested parties on the methodology, contents and findings of the EIR a lot earlier in the process. We are pleased to report that BHPB has started this work, and we look forward to an improved report in July or August of this year.
Tim Byers was appointed to the Agency by Akaitcho Treaty 8 First Nations (YKDFN and LKDFN) in May 2001. Tim has been the Agency’s Vice-Chairperson since 2004.

Tim is an independent consultant living in Manitoba. He has been working on projects in the Canadian Arctic since 1980 specializing in studies of fish, Arctic seabirds and marine invertebrates. Tim has assisted Aboriginal communities in documenting their indigenous environmental knowledge.

Tim is keenly interested in seeing more Aboriginal youth become engaged in the environmental sciences, as well as Traditional Knowledge being used more effectively in environmental monitoring, research and impact assessments.