

Madagascar to pilot biodiversity indicators

Right: trial restoration of littoral forest in the area of the proposed ilmenite mine in Madagascar. This is pioneering work as littoral forests normally take hundreds of years to reach maturity due to the poor soil close to the sea.

A set of biodiversity management performance indicators will be piloted at the Madagascar minerals sands project as part of Rio Tinto's commitment to achieving a net positive impact on biodiversity at operating sites.

The programme will inform the development of Rio Tinto's broader Biodiversity Performance Measures project – a key element of the biodiversity framework that will provide guidance and tools to help operations deliver on the long term net positive impact goal.

"The notion of achieving net positive impact has been refined in theory," said Elaine Dorward-King, global practice leader, Health Safety and Environment. "Now it is time to test the theory on the ground.

"With less than three years until mining begins, the Madagascar project was identified as the logical and obvious project to pilot an indicator project."

Said Stuart Anstee, principal adviser Land Stewardship/Closure: "The indicators will look at the social and environmental programmes and conservation action. The project will examine the commitment in place with the



Madagascar Government and see how this can be measured in terms of net positive impact and in terms of biodiversity loss and gain."

Rio Tinto can measure delivery against the net positive impact promise in a number of different ways, said Tom Burke, environmental and political adviser. It will not always be possible to replace exactly what was there before, but biodiversity offsets may be employed.

Potential offsets include the Tsitongambarika conservation zone, outside the mine concession, where Rio Tinto has funded research on fauna and flora for the past two years. The zone was

established earlier in 2006 as direct consequence of this research.

The indicator project is set to begin in early 2007, undertaken by a Rio Tinto team in consultation with the biodiversity committee. The committee comprises experts from Rio Tinto and its corporate biodiversity partners such as BirdLife International, Fauna & Flora International and US based research institution Missouri Botanical Garden.

Work on the ground in Madagascar is undertaken by a team headed by Manon Vincelette and comprising Jean-Baptiste Ramanamanjato, Faly Randriatafika and Johny Rabenantoandro. 

Four sites named for FutureGen shortlist

TWO SITES in Texas and two in Illinois were named in a short list of candidates to host the US\$1 billion FutureGen power plant, a coal fired electric and hydrogen production prototype aimed at reduced carbon emissions. Rio Tinto Energy America is one of the private sector sponsors of this clean coal technology test bed.

The FutureGen Alliance, of which RTEA is a member, and the US Department of Energy said it will be another year before the final site is chosen for the 275Mw plant. The four

sites were selected from 12 possible locations in seven states. They were rated on various criteria, including suitability for underground storage of carbon dioxide.

The alliance is looking for a site with a saline rock formation several thousand feet deep covered with permeable caprock that also has water for cooling and a transmission grid to carry electricity. Markets for electricity and hydrogen close by are also important. Hydrogen fuel will be produced as a byproduct of the clean coal gasification process.