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## Xstrata removes seals on closed Donkin tunnels

DONKIN — Sunlight bathes the entrances to the Donkin coal mine for the first time in more than a decade.

Xstrata Coal Donkin Mine Development Alliance, a consortium developing the mothballed colliery, has cleared the earth from around the tunnels and removed the cement plugs used to seal them.

But the mine is filled to the brim with 350 million litres of groundwater, roughly the amount that would fill 80 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

On Sept. 20, the company will begin pumping the water out of the 3.5-kilometre tunnels, which were developed in the 1980s by Devco but were never opened.

Xstrata will then assess their condition and drill for samples in the three-metre-high seams.

"A seam of that thickness is a very good, comfortable mining height," project manager Darren Nicholls said Thursday.

Devco abandoned the mine project when coal prices slumped. The federal Crown corporation got out of the coal business in 2000 and returned the leases to the coal resource to the province.

The developer will prepare a feasibility plan for the Xstrata board in early 2008.

"From there we will move into the hundreds of millions of dollars to get the operation up and running," Gerard said.

The \$300-million mine is expected to be in production by 2009.