**Futures explores regional industries**

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Editor’s Note: The annual **Winnemucca Futures** economic development forum took place on Jan. 30, and featured Humboldt County’s industry and government leaders. What follows is the third of a four-part series.  
  
**Mining**

**Winnemucca Futures** Mining panelists expressed optimism about future mining growth in Humboldt County and surrounding areas. Gold is currently over $1,550 per ounce.

Nevada Gold Mines Turquoise Ridge Underground Division Manager Andy Sholty said that the July 1, 2019 formation of Nevada Gold Mines has taken two of the best pieces of Barrick and Newmont and rolled them into one consolidated entity with 48.3 million ounces of gold in the ground.

Within the Nevada Gold Mines portfolio Sholty said there are three tier one mines, making it the highest concentration of tier one gold mines in the world.

“We have created a heck of an opportunity just in the last 365 days,” said Sholty.

Sholty said that the past six months has not been easy for the company in transitioning its now 7,000 employees and families but that the future is bright.

“First and foremost, I would like to thank spouses and partners in the community for the support while we’ve been pulling this together,” said Sholty. “The challenges have been tremendous but with the right people in the right positions in the right places focusing on the right things we have been doing very well at integrating our business.”

Prior to the Nevada Gold Mines transition, Turquoise Ridge Mine, owned by Barrick, utilized Newmont’s Twin Creeks Mine adjacent to Turquoise Ridge to process its ore. Now those assets have been consolidated into one organization and one team.

For the next five years, Sholty estimates Nevada Gold Mines to produce 3.5 to 3.8 million ounces of gold across its northern Nevada properties.

Sholty said the $300-plus million third shaft project at Turquoise Ridge is on schedule to give better ventilation and ability for more production and that the site is starting to utilize battery powered haul trucks underground, which means zero emissions and a cleaner, safer work environment for employees.

Sholty said the battery powered haul trucks will also increase production of the mine underground and that manpower is expected to be relatively unchanged for the next five years.

Hycroft Vice President of Environmental and Corporate Affairs Tracey Thom said that Hycroft has been

continuing to build their employee count and maintain its equipment fleet. Hycroft was also successful in proving the sulfide leach process which included building nine 50,000 ton test pads.

Hycroft started 2019 with just 47 employees, adding over 150 people to finish the year at just over 100 people after factoring employee turnover. They now have approximately 172 people with 80-85% in Winnemucca and some employees coming from Pershing County and Elko.   
The crushing system at Hycroft is now up and running despite challenges and the company officially recorded their first gold and silver in August 2019.

Hycroft also received approval for their environmental impact study for a phase two expansion project from the Bureau of Land Management on October 22, 2019.   
Thom said the mine hopes to increase the mining rate by double by mid-year and build 20 million square feet of leach pad to move forward with the sulfur leach process and not have to raise capital for a Mill.

Thom said the company is currently going through a merger with a fund to raise capital needed to secure a future with the company. That is anticipated to be completed sometime by June.   
Thom said the largest employee growth will be in the mobile operations department with more trucks and loaders with the goal to double the current mining rate.

“We will be going public again but where that leads in terms of how we interact with the community is we’re going to be adding another 100-120 jobs,” said Thom. “So we’re going to continue growing and giving back to this community.”

SSR Mining Marigold Mine General Manager Greg Gibson said that 2019 was the 30th year of continuous operation for Marigold and that 2019 was the safest year in their 30-year history, producing approximately 78,000 tons of ore per day.

Marigold Mine produced 226,000 ounces of gold produced in 2019, making it a record year.   
Gibson said Marigold Mine also received an approval on their Mackay Optimization Environmental Impact Study submitted last year which will extend the life of the mine by several years.

Gibson said part of the focus for 2020 will be exploration and engineering, with permitting to look at acquisition of properties adjacent to the mine.

Marigold currently has 430 employees and plans to have 450 by the end of 2020, with 63% living in Winnemucca and 26% in Battle Mountain.

Gibson said most of Marigold’s employee growth will be in maintenance and trades with people who have technical skills to work with and the ability to learn computer skills and technology.   
Marigold plans to continue focus on community involvement, pledging approximately $200,000 per year after releasing their first corporate sustainability report in 2019.   
  
**Clean technology and renewable energy**

**Winnemucca Futures** 2020 brought together a panel of speakers addressing the future of clean technology and renewable energy. Lisa Briggs, Government Affairs Manager for Con Edison Development Division; Jeff Neri, Program Manager for Loon, LLC; and Alexi Zawadzki, CEO Lithium Nevada Corporation

all brought to the discussion a perspective of growth, sustainability, and a sense of what the future holds for Humboldt County.

Lisa Briggs kicked off the discussion with an announcement that Con Edison Development, a division of Con Edison, plans to construct a solar generating operation near Valmy. “We're getting ready to build our very first in northern Nevada,” she said. The project is the Battle Mountain Solar facility that will generate 100 megawatts and store energy in a group of 25 megawatt batteries. Briggs said Con Edison expects to start construction in the second quarter of this year and will be in full operation in July 2021.

Briggs said the project will likely generate about 300 jobs at peak construction, and then three to five permanent jobs. “This is a $120 million capital investment and we're excited to be here,” she said.

Briggs said Con Edison will be looking for a skilled construction workforce during the construction phase. “We're going to be looking for carpenters, electricians, operations and maintenance.” Once the plant becomes operational, they will look for employees who may have had experience working at gas plants, coal plants, nuclear plants or with a background in electrical engineering.

Con Edison is required to hire at least 50% of its workforce from Nevada residents.   
Jeff Neri with Loon, LLC talked about its lofty goal of providing Internet access to rural and remote areas. The company uses high-altitude balloons in the stratosphere at an altitude of 18 km (11 mi) to 25 km (16 mi) to create an aerial wireless network with up to 4G-LTE speeds.  
“We've been doing this for seven or eight years,” Neri said. “We came up to Winnemucca because Winnemucca is a really friendly place to launch balloons.”

Loon is a subsidiary of Alphabet Inc, the parent company of Google. Loon recently finished construction of a 1.5-million-pound vertical launch facility in Winnemucca.

Neri discussed the company’s preference for hiring local talent. “We're way better off finding local people” because people are established in the community and don't need to learn the local culture and traditions.

Neri didn’t discuss what the company’s future workforce needs might be but the company announced in November 2019 that it had signed a deal with Internet Para Todos Perú to bring balloon-powered internet to the Amazon rainforest region in Peru sometime this year.  
Lithium Nevada CEO Alexi Zawadzki laid out the future of the lithium industry. “Our company is developing one of the largest deposits of lithium in the world, located in northern Humboldt County.”

Zawadzki said the lithium industry is growing at 15% per year, so there is a need for the chemical element. He added that there are other factors involved in developing the Thacker Pass site: currently, most lithium flows through China which presents vulnerabilities to the US economy as well as to security.

In response to reducing US dependence on foreign minerals, President Trump signed Executive Order 13817. The US Department of the Interior published a list of 35 mineral commodities considered critical to the economic and national security of the United States. Lithium is on that list.

“Developing this site will allow us to supply lithium for the US for decades to come,” Zawadzki said.  “It's a very strategic asset.”

Zawadzki said Nevada is in a unique position with respect to lithium. The forward-thinking automobile

company Tesla is located in Sparks. Tesla auto technology uses lithium batteries to power its vehicles. Zawadzki said his company hopes to establish the raw materials for this “cornerstone” company by producing lithium hydroxide.

While Lithium Nevada may be considered a mining company, Zawadzki said that is only part of what the company foresees as its future. “We're proposing to have a chemical factory producing this very specialized chemical.”

 The jobs associated with mining and manufacturing the lithium hydroxide are expected to be very high paying. Zawadzki said the project will bring approximately 350 jobs to Humboldt County during Phase 1. He said the company plans to begin training programs this year to ensure it has the workforce it needs ready and in place. “We have to make sure those employees are there at the time we need them with the skill sets that we need, to that extent we've been working with the communities to develop training programs, which we will be starting this year and make sure that workforce is there.”

Lithium Nevada is currently in the permitting phase. “We submitted our Plan of Operations and was accepted by the BLM in September [2019] we are in the NEPA process.” The BLM has a 365-day mandated process to issue permits to operate. “We're hoping around this time next year to be able to have construction begin,” Zawadzki said.

The capital for the project is $500 million for phase one, and Lithium Nevada owns 100% of the asset right now. The company is looking to partnerships for financing the project.

Zawadzki said sustainability is engraved in the company’s culture. “We've actually set the goal of making the world's first carbon neutral lithium products. We've developed a very unique process for this asset.” During the manufacturing process heat is release. That heat is captured in the form of steam which generates carbon neutral electricity to run the facility.

We've also reduced our water consumption through water recycling,” Zawadzki says. “We have environmental emissions that are well below mandated levels. We also have sound proofing and visual mitigation. We're really trying to be good neighbors and sustainability is a point of pride with our design team.”