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Mill starts producing paper in East Millinocket

By [Nick Sambides Jr.](#), BDN Staff

EAST MILLINOCKET, Maine — With [215 papermakers on its payroll](#), the new Great Northern Paper began producing virgin newsprint to fill its first order at 6 a.m. Monday, a company spokesman said.

Though smoke had begun to pour from the paper mill's stack on Friday — company workers were testing the mill's boiler system — and workers filled the woodyard steadily throughout last week, Monday was the revitalized mill's first real day of full operations, spokesman Scott Tranchemontagne said.

“It feels wonderful and gratifying,” Tranchemontagne said. “Like I said throughout the whole process, there is a real spirit of teamwork. There were a lot of people involved in making it happen. To have 215 people who really want to work be able to come to work is a great thing.”

Gov. Paul LePage announced on Sept. 16 that GNP parent company Cate Street Capital of Portsmouth, N.H., had consummated negotiations with former mill parent company Brookfield Asset Management of Toronto [and purchased in escrow the East Millinocket and Millinocket paper mills](#) for an undisclosed amount. The final sale [occurred later that month](#).

The sale ended months of speculation that began when Brookfield closed the mill on April 1 as to whether the Katahdin region would ever again be a home to papermaking. East Millinocket and Millinocket were without active mills — Millinocket's mill closed in September 2008 — for the first time in a century.

Now the hardest part of the deal begins — making paper and profit. Tranchemontagne said company officials are confident they will make their first shipment deadline in early November and the mill has orders enough to be fully occupied for a year.

“We are confident that we are going to make it,” Tranchemontagne said of the first order deadline. “We got a little leeway from our clients and everything is on target.”

Less certain is exactly when the Millinocket mill could restart. Company officials have said market conditions would dictate when that mill would again start producing supercalendered paper — probably not for several months.

One related form of production, that of signs saying “Welcome Back, Great Northern Paper” and other, similar messages, had been underway for weeks. About a dozen signs were visible along Route 11 and on other main roads in the region late last week.

Tranchemontagne, who is based in New Hampshire, said he looks forward to seeing those the next time he is in the area.