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Wider mining gains offset slide in opal

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WHILE Coober Pedy's opal industry has declined, the town and district are gaining from the wider mining boom.

At the forefront is Oxiana's Prominent Hill project, 100km away, where mining contractor Thiess is expected to begin extracting ore in 2008.

About 50km closer to the town is Goldstream Mining's Cairn Hill iron ore/copper/gold project, which Northern Regional Development Board Far North economic development officer Steve Staines said was also expected to boost the local area.

"Its proximity to Coober Pedy means Goldstream will better utilise the infrastructure and services the town has to offer," he said.

Goldstream expected to

hire about 200 staff during construction and about 50 once mining started.

Mr Staines said the newer mining projects would bring "a lot more benefits".

Housing prices were being boosted by the increase in activity, with a 20 per cent jump in the past year.

To lift the opal industry, the board has set up the Opal Industry Alliance, comprising SA's four opal mining communities: Coober Pedy, Mintabie, Andamooka and Lambina. Its first project is a drilling program at Andamooka, while Coober Pedy will host April's National Opal Symposium for miners from SA, Queensland and NSW.

Mr Staines said tourism was also increasing, with Oxiana planning tours of its site.