



June 2, 2025

Dear Alaska Delegation,

Thank you for your past efforts to engage with Alaskan and Canadian lawmakers in support of cleaning up the Tulsequah Chief mine, which has been discharging toxic wastewater into the headwaters of the Taku River since 1957. Although British Columbia committed to addressing the issue a decade ago, Alaskans are still waiting for a cleanup, even as a new mine proposal is now being considered just downstream in the Taku watershed. The New Polaris gold mine proposal is advancing rapidly through its application process while pollution from the Tulsequah Chief mine continues unabated. The Taku River is a salmon-producing system of continental significance, and there is broad consensus to clean up the Tulsequah Chief mine. We, the undersigned, firmly believe that Tulsequah Chief's remediation should be prioritized before any further consideration is given to the New Polaris project.

The Taku watershed covers approximately 4.5 million acres, with its headwaters originating in the boreal forests of northwest British Columbia. The system includes a network of lakes, streams, and wetlands that feed into the Taku River, which flows across Alaska's panhandle to the Taku estuary near Juneau. The Taku River system is largely undeveloped, with no roads or dams, making it the largest intact river system on the Pacific coast of North America. The Tulsequah Chief mine produced copper, lead, and zinc until its abandonment. Although British Columbia pledged in 2015 to end ongoing contamination and clean up the abandoned mine, progress has been frustratingly slow.

Over the past decade, only preliminary planning has been completed, with no clear timeline for actual cleanup efforts. As a result, mine pollutants that are known to cause negative impacts on fish and other aquatic species, continue to enter the Taku watershed. Even small amounts of copper—within water quality standards—can have sub-lethal effects on salmon, including olfactory impairment, which makes them more vulnerable to predators and hinders their ability to return to their spawning grounds.

While still awaiting the remediation of the Tulsequah, Canagold, a Canadian mining company, has proposed the New Polaris gold mine just downstream of the Tulsequah Chief site, near the confluence of the Tulsequah and Taku rivers at Flannigan Slough. This area is one of the most productive salmon spawning and rearing habitats in the region, and the development of this mine poses risks to this vital ecosystem.

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The Taku has long been Southeast Alaska's top salmon-producing river system and a vital resource for southeast's fishing industry and other user groups on both sides of the border. This vast system produces the largest runs of Chinook and coho salmon in Southeast Alaska. All five species of Pacific salmon are present and harvested in marine waters by troll, gillnet, seine, and sport fisheries. The seafood industry is the largest private sector employer in Southeast Alaska and provides 12% of the workforce; three communities regularly rank among the top 25 fishing ports in the nation with several others in the top 100. McKinley Research Group reports that 9,050 seafood workers produced \$1.18 billion in economic output for Southeast Alaska in 2021-2022; salmon made up 75% of the value. In 2022, Southeast fishermen produced 11% of the value and 4% of the volume of Alaska's \$6 billion dollar harvest. Millions of dollars in landing fees and taxes are paid each year into state and local coffers by fishermen and processors. Salmon from the Taku River contribute to all salmon fisheries and are caught from Yakutat to Ketchikan.

In 2016, an analysis by the McDowell Group estimated average earnings by Taku River commercial fishermen at \$1.9 million, with Chinook and coho from the river providing millions more in sport expenditures. When hunting and tourism impacts are added, the watershed is thought to generate the equivalent of 260 full-time, year-round jobs, underscoring its vital role in sustaining local livelihoods and the broader fishing economy. This issue transcends the political spectrum. The Taku is a crucial ecological and economic resource for Southeast Alaska, not to mention its importance to local Tribes. We are requesting your ongoing support in urging British Columbia to prioritize the long-awaited cleanup of Tulsequah Chief mine.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mayor Mark Jensen
on behalf of the
Petersburg Borough Assembly

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