

Debra Thompson

From: Breanna Walker <breanna@salmonstate.org>
Sent: Monday, August 2, 2021 5:29 PM
To: Mark Jensen; Debra Thompson; Chelsea Tremblay; Assembly
Subject: AK-BC Transboundary Salmon Rivers Update
Attachments: 2021 AKBC Resolution of Support.pdf

Hello Distinguished Municipal Leaders,

The [Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission](#) (SEITC) and [Salmon Beyond Borders](#) reach out to you today with a sense of urgency. Canada continues to permit massive mines with toxic tailings dams along shared rivers without the meaningful engagement of those of us downstream. Meanwhile, transboundary salmon runs plummet. [We again](#) call on regional municipalities to join us in the ongoing effort to defend the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers -- **THE RIVERS THAT FEED US.**

We humbly request that the Petersburg Borough Assembly consider adopting a municipal resolution based on the **attached Resolution of Support** language that has been carefully drafted, considered, and signed by many of our closest transboundary partners who represent multiple sectors and interests of Southeast Alaska.

We also request the opportunity to provide a virtual update to your assembly at its earliest convenience before our potential community visits later this fall, pending Covid-19. *Would you please respond to Breanna@salmonstate.org to confirm that you've received this request, including your preferences for a virtual update to the assembly, by Friday, August 13th?*

Many thanks for your ongoing support and for your consideration of the next phase of our collective work as Southeast Alaskans to defend and sustain our transboundary salmon rivers. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us with questions, ideas, or concerns at any time.

Sincerely,
Breanna Walker, Campaign Coordinator
Salmon Beyond Borders

On behalf of
Frederick Otilius Olsen, Jr., Executive Director
Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission
and
Jill Weitz, Campaign Director
Salmon Beyond Borders

[Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission](#) is a consortium of 15 Tribal governments founded in 2014 working to protect our Tribal lands and waterways for future generations in the Southeast Alaska/Bristol Bay/British Columbia/Yukon Territories region.

[Salmon Beyond Borders](#) is a campaign driven by sport and commercial fishermen, community leaders, tourism and recreation business owners, and concerned citizens, in collaboration with Tribes and First Nations. It is united across the Alaska/British Columbia border to defend and sustain our transboundary rivers, jobs, and way of life.

--
Breanna Walker, Campaign Coordinator
[Salmon Beyond Borders](#)
Juneau, Alaska

Auk Kwáan and Taku Kwáan lands

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**A RESOLUTION OF SUPPORT
FOR A PERMANENT BAN ON TAILINGS DAMS AND FOR A TEMPORARY HALT TO THE
PERMITTING, EXPLORATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND EXPANSION OF CANADIAN MINES
ALONG ALASKA-BRITISH COLUMBIA TRANSBOUNDARY SALMON RIVERS
UNTIL THE UNITED STATES-CANADA BOUNDARY WATERS TREATY OF 1909 AND
THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ARE UPHELD AND AN
INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT ON WATERSHED PROTECTIONS IS IMPLEMENTED**

WHEREAS, the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 was signed to prevent and resolve disputes over the use of shared waters between the United States (U.S.) and Canada, declaring in Article IV that, "it is further agreed that the waters herein defined as boundary waters and waters flowing across the boundary shall not be polluted on either side to the injury of health or property on the other;" and

WHEREAS, the Alaska-British Columbia (B.C.) Memorandum of Understanding and associated Statement of Cooperation on Protection of Transboundary Waters signed by the State of Alaska and the Province of B.C. in 2015 are important, but cannot provide binding, enforceable protections for the residents, rivers, and watersheds of the Alaska-B.C. transboundary region; and

WHEREAS, inadequately regulated Canadian hard rock mines in Northwest B.C., most of which are large-scale and open-pit, are occurring in known acid-generating ore bodies near the transboundary Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers shared with Southeast Alaska, producing massive tailings dams that have to store toxic waste forever, expansive waste rock storage facilities, the need for perpetual water treatment, roads, and other infrastructure, as well as threatening (both in the short term and on geological timescales) the productivity and ecological health of these watersheds through cumulative impacts, contamination, habitat destruction, and/or possible catastrophic failures; and

WHEREAS, the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers are of tremendous and unique cultural, ecological, subsistence, economic, and recreational value as Indigenous people from several Nations have stewarded the Alaska-B.C. transboundary region since time immemorial and this region is now home to nearly 80,000 people in dozens of communities; and

WHEREAS, the Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission - a consortium of fifteen federally recognized Tribes in Southeast Alaska - in 2018 submitted a petition to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, asserting that Canada has violated their human rights by failing to prevent foreseeable harms from hard rock mines in B.C., and on March 31, 2021 sent a request to B.C. Premier Horgan for a pause in the permitting of B.C. mining projects in Alaska-B.C. transboundary watersheds until an agreement is made regarding Alaska Tribal participation in ongoing permit decisions pursuant to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP); and

WHEREAS, the clean water and intact habitat of Alaska-B.C. transboundary watersheds are historically some of the most productive wild salmon rivers on the entire west coast of North America, with the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers alone contributing nearly \$50 million in economic activity, \$34 million in direct spending, over 400 jobs and almost \$20 million in labor income towards Southeast Alaska's annual multi-billion dollar fishing and visitor industries; and

WHEREAS, the leaching of heavy metals to groundwater and sediment from mining can contaminate freshwater systems for decades, preventing recovery of fish populations many



years after the cessation of mining activity and posing a risk to human health, and B.C.'s Tulsequah Chief mine in the Taku River watershed has been abandoned and leaching acid mine drainage since 1957; and

WHEREAS, B.C.'s environmental assessment process does not set legal requirements or standards for assessing cumulative effects of existing and proposed development, and B.C.'s open-pit Red Chris mine has been operating at the headwaters of the Stikine River since 2015, the entire riparian corridor of the Iskut River, the largest tributary of the Stikine River, is staked with B.C. mineral claims, B.C.'s Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell project (KSM), if built as proposed in the Unuk-Nass River watersheds, would be the largest open-pit mine in Canada and one of the largest in the world, and more than half of the B.C. portion of the Unuk watershed is staked with mineral claims; and

WHEREAS, the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers are experiencing a decline in wild salmon populations, resulting in the Alaska Department of Fish and Game listing Chinook salmon in the Unuk River as a Stock of Concern in 2017 and will soon list Chinook salmon in the Taku and Stikine Rivers as Stocks of Concern; and

WHEREAS, on June 30, 2021, Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans eliminated 60% of its commercial salmon fleet in B.C. due to poor returns and declining populations - some near 90% declines - resulting in the largest set of commercial salmon fishery closures in B.C. history, while simultaneously B.C. continues to permit industrialization of the headwaters (spawning and rearing grounds) of some of its largest salmon producing systems; and

WHEREAS, the risk of natural forces such as extreme precipitation events and landslides, which are becoming more common due to climate change, add further instability to the mining infrastructure and could trigger catastrophic failure of the tailings waste dams and thereby release contaminants into the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk waterbodies and are inadequately addressed in B.C. mine operations designs; and

WHEREAS, following B.C.'s Mount Polley mine disaster in 2014 an expert panel appointed by the B.C. government found that if mining companies continue their business-as-usual operations the province could face an average of two dam failures every ten years and the same expert panel reported there are 123 active tailings dams in B.C.; and

WHEREAS, the Auditor General of B.C., in her report issued on May 3, 2016, found that the B.C. Ministry of Energy and Mines and Ministry of the Environment's "compliance and enforcement activities of the mining sector are inadequate to protect the province from significant environmental risks", and according to a 2017 report by the United Nations Environment Programme, Canada has the world's second-worst record for mine tailings spills after China, with seven incidents reported in the previous decade; and

WHEREAS, the June 2021 *Audit of Code Requirements for Tailings Storage Facilities* by B.C.'s Mine Audits and Effectiveness Unit, has found provincial mining code changes developed after the Mount Polley disaster lack the definition needed to ensure compliance, verification and enforcement—which means communities and the environment across the province lack full protection against the potentially catastrophic consequences of tailings dam failures that B.C.'s new mining code was meant to provide; and

WHEREAS, B.C. touts itself to U.S. officials and potential investors as a world-class marketplace for responsibly-sourced metals and a mining jurisdiction with highly positive ESG (Environment, Social, Governance) outcomes and yet, B.C. is supporting widespread exploration and the



permitting of open pits and tailings dams at mine sites across B.C. just upriver from four U.S. border states (AK, WA, ID, MT) and at the headwaters of some of North America's last remaining productive wild salmon rivers, without the consultation and consent of local Tribes and communities downstream; and

WHEREAS, Native Tribes in Alaska, First Nations in B.C., commercial fishermen, local communities, conservation groups, thousands of concerned citizens, and local, state, provincial, and federal lawmakers (including all eight Senators from the four border states) on both sides of the U.S.-Canada border have raised concerns since 1998 about B.C. mining development potentially causing significant harm to water quality, fish and wildlife, cultural practices, and local economies in Alaska-B.C. transboundary watersheds and still do not have a meaningful say in the shared management of our shared rivers; and

WHEREAS, the below signed agree to share information and seek all opportunities for collaboration to address these issues, promote methods to protect these vital rivers from harm, and seek to facilitate and promote meaningful dialogue and engagement at the local, state, federal, provincial, and Tribal levels to assure protection of resources on both sides of the border.

We, the undersigned business owners, organizations, and community members, seek a thriving Salmon Coast (AK-B.C. transboundary region) fed by intact ecosystems, healthy salmon populations and landscapes, robust traditional lifestyles, and sustainable economies.

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED that we call upon President Joe Biden and the United States government and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Canadian government to *immediately*:

1. **Utilize** their authority under the United States-Canada Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 to prevent and resolve disputes over the use of shared waters; and
2. **Support** an immediate temporary halt to permitting, exploration, development, and expansion of Canadian mines along shared Alaska-B.C. salmon rivers until a binding international agreement on watershed protections, developed by *all* jurisdictions in these shared transboundary watersheds and consistent with the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, is implemented; and
3. **Convene** with local communities, stakeholders, and Indigenous leaders of the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk watersheds to develop the aforementioned binding international agreement on watershed protections. This agreement will identify and honor no-go zones and decisions by local residents and Indigenous people on both sides of the international border, ensure mining companies and shareholders are liable for cleaning up their waste and compensating impacted communities for all damages, and enforce requirements for mining best practices, including a permanent ban on the perpetual storage of contaminated water and wet tailings behind earthen dams along these irreplaceable Alaska-B.C. transboundary salmon rivers.