



November 13, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

We write to convey our continued concerns about the development of large-scale hard rock mine proposals and operations in British Columbia (B.C.) and their potential catastrophic effects on Alaska's communities and habitats surrounding the transboundary rivers, which flow from Canada into Southeast Alaska. We, like this administration, prioritize the promotion and protection of American economic interests, which in this instance could be threatened by B.C. transboundary mining and inadequate financial mechanisms to assure long term management of toxic wastes and redress for damages from potential releases. In light of our common interests, we have renewed optimism that the federal government will support the peoples and governments of Alaska, and utilize their international tools to protect overall U.S. interests in this situation.

Alaska's economy and culture are directly connected to our natural resources, many of which are nurtured by our vast river systems throughout the state. The Alsek, Chilkat, Taku, Whiting, Stikine, Unuk, Salmon, and Chickamin Watersheds drain from B.C. into Southeast Alaska. Increasing mineral development and legacy mining impacts in the Taku, Stikine and Unuk Watersheds threaten Alaska's world-renowned salmon runs, which support the commercial fishing and visitor industries and contribute to the way of life for Alaskans throughout the region.

Alaska fisheries are some of the most productive and unique in the world. According to a 2016 economic analysis prepared by the McDowell Group, the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk River Watersheds account for \$48 million in economic activity annually, including \$34 million in direct spending, 400 jobs for the Southeast Alaska region, and almost \$20 million in labor income. These aren't just numbers, they represent livelihoods and communities that are based around the natural resources of the region. The continued health of the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers sustains the region's unique way of life.

Additionally, the McDowell Group also found that Alaska's visitor industry accounted for over two million visitors in 2015, supporting over 11,000 jobs in Southeast and contributing roughly \$1.2 billion to the regional economy.

Alaska Native communities throughout Southeast also depend heavily on high-functioning ecosystems for healthy fishery resources and migratory waterfowl to meet their nutritional needs and to promote resilience in their communities. Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian traditions and culture are inextricably tied to the bounty from the waters. Their food security and very survival depend on keeping these waters healthy.

Alaska is a resource state and we believe in thoughtful utilization of not only our fisheries but our other natural resources. Mining, like fisheries, is central to our regional economy by providing well-paying jobs and serving as the foundation of America's manufacturing sector. While we share common resource development interests with our Canadian neighbors, we must be assured that mineral development in B.C. does not disproportionately impact the ecosystem services we depend on in Southeast.

The Tulsequah Chief Mine in B.C., now closed, is currently discharging acid mine drainage into a tributary of the Taku River, in violation of provincial permit conditions. While this mine was abandoned decades before environmental laws were established in either country, discharge has persisted for decades after such laws were enacted, and it serves as an example of an inadequate response by the B.C. government. Moreover, in 2014, the approved tailings dam at the Mount Polley Mine in central B.C. failed, causing over six billion gallons of water, tailings, and materials to be released into Polley Lake, Hazeltine Creek, and Quesnel Lake in the upper reaches of the non-transboundary Fraser River watershed causing significant impact. Although the B.C. government has responded quickly and broadly to this tragedy, this event is a reminder of the real risks Alaska faces as mineral development in the transboundary region increases.

On October 6, 2016, a Statement of Cooperation (SOC) on the Protection of Transboundary Waters was signed by B.C.'s Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett, B.C.'s Minister of Environment Mary Polak, and the State of Alaska's Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott. We are encouraged by the level of engagement that the Provincial Government in B.C. has had with Alaska on this issue and fully support the SOC and continued efforts between Alaska and B.C. We also believe there is an appropriate complementary role for our respective federal governments to play in response to transboundary mining concerns. We feel it is important that the Canadian permitting process include the involvement of our state and federal agencies as well as the solicitation of input from tribes and other interested Alaskans: formally implementing such a transboundary process necessitates formal engagement by the U.S. and Canadian federal governments.

As a result, we kindly request that B.C. mining projects, and potential impacts to Alaska, be included on the agenda for the upcoming bilateral meetings between the U.S. Department of State and Global Affairs Canada. This is an important first step towards federal level communication between the U.S. and Canada on this issue. Specifically, we ask that you please consider our below stated requests ahead of your upcoming meetings with the Canadian Delegation:

- 1) Encourage B.C. officials to develop public outreach tools to better explain their processes for considering the cumulative impacts of proposed mining projects on transboundary waters during the environmental assessment process.
- 2) Determine whether an International Joint Commission reference is a suitable venue to evaluate whether mines operating in the transboundary region between B.C. and Alaska are implementing best management practices in the treatment of wastewaters and management of potential-acid-generating mine tailings and waste rock.

- 3) Establish a formal consultation process with U.S. state agencies, other federal agencies, tribes, and Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act corporations during the environmental assessment process, similar to the consultation process afforded to a cooperating agency under the National Environmental Policy Act in the U.S.
- 4) Support and work towards robust funding and other needed resources for developing a reliable database of water quality and related data for transboundary waters that can be used to track cumulative impacts, trends and significant episodic changes associated with operating and historic mines in the transboundary region.
- 5) Establish an interagency task force led by the Department of State and including the Department of Interior, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other agencies as necessary, to work in collaboration with the State of Alaska, and develop recommendations and direct funding to ensure protection of transboundary rivers.

We, along with the State of Alaska, are hopeful this administration, and specifically the Department of State appreciates the magnitude of the consequence that these issues may have on Alaskans' livelihoods and Alaska's economic stability. Given the State of Alaska's history and expertise on these issues, we look forward to working alongside you and the federal agencies to come to a practical solution to Alaska-B.C. transboundary mining issues – one that is not only beneficial to Alaska's regional economic and social development, but also to industrial development and job security across the whole country.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Please contact our offices if you would like additional information.

Sincerely,



Bill Walker
Governor, State of Alaska



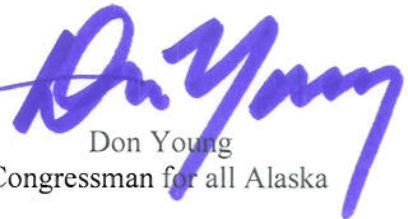
Byron Mallott
Lt. Governor, State of Alaska



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Don Young
Congressman for all Alaska

cc: The Honorable Secretary Ryan Zinke, Department of Interior
The Honorable Administrator Scott Pruitt, Environmental Protection Agency