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STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

March 30, 1998

The Honorable Madeleine K. Albright
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

The State of Alaska has strong concerns about the decision of the Province of British Columbia (B.C.) to approve certification for the Tulsequah Chief Mine and asks for your assistance in receiving a referral of the project to the International Joint Commission. It is the state's position the measures outlined by Redfern Resources, Ltd., the developers of the Tulsequah mine, in their Project Report, and by the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office, in the Project Committee Report, are insufficient to protect the valuable salmon resources of the Taku River.

As you may know, the project is a Redfern Resources, Ltd., proposal to reopen a historic underground mine located about 40 miles northeast of Juneau, Alaska. The ore deposit is located on the Tulsequah River, near its confluence with the Taku River. The proposal also includes construction of a 74-mile road from near Atlin, B.C., through a currently roadless watershed, to the mine site near the Taku.

The Taku River is an international boundary water, which reaches saltwater a few miles southeast of Juneau. The river, and its near pristine watershed, is a prolific producer of all five species of Pacific salmon. These fisheries are fundamental to Southeast Alaska's subsistence, sport, and commercial fishers, and the communities in which they live. The Taku River is also a transboundary river under the Pacific Salmon Treaty with Canada, and fishers from both sides of the border have benefited from joint salmon enhancement projects on the Taku. By putting salmon habitat at risk, the Tulsequah mine project also puts at risk this successful program to conserve and sustain salmon.

During the review of this project, the State of Alaska, U.S. federal agencies, commercial fishing groups, and a large number of Alaskans raised concerns about water quality,

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fisheries, and road construction. Specific concerns were raised about effluent mixing zones, inadequate tailings disposal design in this earthquake and flood prone area, and deleterious effects on fisheries habitat from road construction and mine development. The documentation necessary to address these concerns raised by the State of Alaska and other Alaska interests has not been made available. As a result, we have no alternative except to seek further opportunities to resolve these issues.

Alaskans and Canadians know the resources will bear the brunt of the potential negative effects of this project; there has been little consideration for the resource in the final decision. Alaska sat on the B.C. Project Committee for the Tulsequah mine project and has participated in the review process for over three years. Throughout this time, we raised concerns about potential impacts to fisheries and water quality. In our final comment opportunity, we were given less than 48 hours to review a draft 104-page Project Committee report, and we continued to raise the issue of a lack of commitment to the protection of salmon habitat.

In response, the B.C. Assessment Office, on behalf of the Project Committee—but certainly not with its full consent—issued the final Project Committee report with a recommendation that a project certificate be issued. Even though we have yet to receive the final report or an official response to our comments, the B.C. Ministers have issued a certificate for the project.

Given the world spotlight on conservation and habitat protection, the haste with which the Province issued a certificate, and the possibility of significant negative impact on the Taku River and its salmon resources, I respectfully request, pursuant to Article IX of the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, the Tulsequah Chief project be referred to the International Joint Commission for full examination of this proposed mine development, with regard to transboundary water quality and fishery habitat implications. Alaska needs assurance that all critical issues regarding the resource values of this river are fully considered and addressed before approval is given for any mine development in this region.

Alaska supports mineral development. We know mining can play a significant role in the economy of the region. In Alaska, where mining is enjoying record levels of exploration, construction, and production, we have learned issues such as those under consideration here must be subjected to critical public scrutiny and debate. I am proud to say our successful mines, including several that are owned and operated by Canadian firms, work

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very well within these expectations. As a result, our gold, metal, and coal mines are trusted employers and community members. We expect mining operations immediately adjacent to Alaska with tremendous potential impacts on Alaskans and Alaska resources to meet the same standards.

It is an extraordinary and, to my knowledge, unprecedented request to place a mine development in the flood plain of a major salmon producing river. It would stand to reason that any such request be given extraordinary scrutiny rather than the cursory final review that this project has received.

In conclusion, the State of Alaska believes resource development projects must be based on a "doing it right" philosophy. "Doing it right" means the project is based on sound science, good management, and public process. We do not believe these principles have yet been addressed for the Tulsequah Chief Mine.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions please contact me or my Washington, D.C., office. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Tony Knowles
Governor

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Al Gore, Vice President
The Honorable Ted Stevens, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Frank Murkowski, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Don Young, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior,
U.S. Department of the Interior
Carol Browner, Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
John Katz, Office of the Governor, Washington, D.C.

