

CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

RESOLUTION NO. 2017-18

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA URGING THE US GOVERNMENT TO UTILIZE ANY AND ALL POWERS UNDER THE BOUNDARY WATERS TREATY TO ENSURE THAT ALASKA RESOURCES ARE NOT HARMED BY UPSTREAM DEVELOPMENT IN THE ALASKA/BRITISH COLUMBIA (BC) TRANSBOUNDARY REGION

WHEREAS, The transboundary rivers of the Northwest British Columbia/Southeast Alaska region, including the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk rivers, are of tremendous and unique economic, ecological, cultural, and recreational value. The clean water and intact habitat of these rivers systems make them some of the most productive wild salmon rivers on the entire west coast of North America; and

WHEREAS, this large-scale mining district with several open-pit mine projects in known acid-generating ore bodies, along with associated waste rock storage facilities and tailings dams, roads and other infrastructure, will threaten the productivity and health of watersheds and fish and wildlife habitat through cumulative impacts and contamination or possible catastrophic failures; and

WHEREAS, The proposed mines include Tulsequah Chief in the Taku watershed; Galore Creek, Red Chris, and Schaft Creek in the Stikine watershed; and the Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell (KSM) project and Brucejack Mine in the Unuk watershed; and

WHEREAS, Some of these mines would require an unprecedented level of water treatment that could pose the threat of acid mine drainage for centuries, if not in perpetuity; and

WHEREAS, the Statement of Cooperation on Protection of Transboundary Waters, signed by Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott, Bill Bennett, British Columbia Minister of Energy and Mines, and Mary Polak, British Columbia Minister of the Environment, on October 6, 2016, is important, but cannot provide binding, enforceable protections for the residents, rivers, and watersheds of the state; and

WHEREAS, environmental laws and permitting processes in BC and Canada have been weakened over the past decade. The ongoing acid mine drainage from the Tulsequah Chief mine and the tailings dam failure at the Mt. Polley mine demonstrate weaknesses in monitoring and enforcement; and

WHEREAS, Commercial fishermen, subsistence and recreational users, local communities, elected leaders, and Tribes and First Nations on both sides of the Canadian/U.S. border have raised concerns about the pace and scope of the proposed industrial development in British Columbia and the potential for harm to water quality, fish and wildlife, and local economies; and

WHEREAS, A major part of Sitka's economic base is commercial and sport charter ocean fishing with 566 resident commercial permits and 569 crew license holders, that deliver salmon, halibut, and black cod to three major processing plants employing 1,102 processing jobs in 2016; and

WHEREAS, Maintaining and protecting healthy wild salmon populations throughout these river systems must be a priority. The concerns of local communities, individuals, and user groups downstream from these projects must be integral to any transboundary watershed development and decision making; and

WHEREAS, The Canadian and BC permitting processes have not been adequate to address our concerns; and

WHEREAS, the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 between the United States and Canada states in Article IV, "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 provides a mechanism to address transboundary water concerns through the International Joint Commission.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka strongly urge the government of the United States to utilize any and all powers under the Boundary Waters Treaty and develop binding and enforceable protections to ensure Alaska and British Columbia interests and ways of life are not negatively impacted by Canadian development in the shared transboundary watersheds of Southeast Alaska and Northwest British Columbia.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that affected communities and governments be consulted with and represented in any policy discussion related to impacts to these watersheds.

PASSED, APPROVED, AND ADOPTED by the Assembly of the City and Borough of Sitka, Alaska on this 12th day of September 2017.


Matthew Hunter, Mayor

ATTEST:


Sara Peterson, CMC
Municipal Clerk

1st and final reading 9/12/17