
CANADIAN PARKS AND WILDERNESS SOCIETY - CLAYOQUOT ACTION - FOREST PROTECTION ALLIES - FRIENDS OF THE STIKINE SOCIETY - MINING WATCH CANADA - PACIFIC WILD - RIVERS WITHOUT BORDERS CANADA - SALMON SOCIETY - SIERRA CLUB BC - SKEENA WATERSHED CONSERVATION COALITION - SKEENA WILD CONSERVATION TRUST - TAKU SOCIETY - THE WATERWEALTH PROJECT - WATERSHED WATCH - WILDERNESS COMMITTEE - WILDERNESS SOCIETY - YUKON CONSERVATION SOCIETY

April 18, 2016

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

Langevin Block 80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A3
Canada

Subject: Request for International Joint Commission involvement in the Northwest British Columbia - Southeast Alaska transboundary region

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

We are pleased to see the federal Liberal government voice commitments to tackling environmental issues such as improving the federal Fisheries Act, addressing climate change, reforming the environmental assessment processes, and utilizing Indigenous science and traditional knowledge. We also appreciate the commitment of your administration to healthy, sustainable communities and economies in the Arctic as exhibited in the U.S./Canada Joint Statement on Climate, Energy and Arctic Leadership signed by you and President Obama on March 10.

We would like to call your attention to an issue not normally thought of as an Arctic concern and urge you to seize an important upcoming opportunity to apply the aforementioned principles and standards your administration has developed with President Obama. Our specific request is that Canada and the U.S. mutually support the establishment of an International Joint Commission to address issues raised by existing and proposed mining activities in the transboundary Taku, Stikine and Unuk watersheds and that this be discussed at bilateral Canada/U.S. meetings in Washington, D.C. the week of April 18.

The transboundary region of Southeast Alaska and Northwest British Columbia (B.C.) lies north of 53 degrees North Latitude and is officially part of the Arctic region. Mining activities in the B.C. portion of the transboundary region, particularly in the watersheds of the Taku, Stikine and Unuk Rivers, that originate in B.C. and flow into Southeast Alaska, are becoming increasingly controversial due to potential downstream effects on the water quality, fisheries, wildlife and livelihoods that depend on these resources. These three rivers are among North America's top salmon-producing rivers, they are still largely intact, and their significance as reservoirs of biodiversity in a time of climate change is growing. These watersheds are the lifeblood of the region and are profoundly important to Indigenous people and cultures on both sides of the border.

As you formulate plans to address challenges in the Arctic, we urge you to include the globally significant B.C. - Alaska transboundary region in these efforts and to develop a specific process to address the issues in the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk watersheds shared by Canada and the U.S. Such a process would include, but not be limited to:

- an assessment of the **potential cumulative** impacts from existing and proposed projects;
- creation and funding of a **monitoring and maintenance** network to operate in perpetuity;

- determination of a **financial surety** mechanism to guarantee any pollution is fully cleaned up and affected parties are compensated;
- use of **best available practices and technologies**;
- participation by **Indigenous people** on both sides of the border as governments;
- increased **public participation** opportunities for citizens in both countries, including a meaningful “seat at the table” for decisions about land use in the transboundary region.

Many of the principles and standards you and President Obama have spoken of should be applied specifically in this region, including:

- Confronting “the challenges in the changing Arctic, with Indigenous and Northern partnerships, and responsible, science-based leadership.”
- Recognizing that this region “is home to natural marine, land and air migrations that know no borders.”
- Setting “a world-class standard by basing development decisions and operations on scientific evidence.”
- Ensuring that “commercial activities will occur only when the highest safety and environmental standards are met, including national and global climate and environmental goals, and Indigenous rights and agreements.”
- Working with the U.S. “to develop this year a shared and science-based standard for considering the life-cycle impacts of commercial activities” in the transboundary region.
- As stated in your November 2015 mandate letter to DFO Minister Tootoo, “use scientific evidence and the precautionary principle, and take into account climate change, when making decisions affecting fish stocks and ecosystem management.”

This task may seem challenging, but a mechanism exists through which the above-listed standards and commitments can be applied to the transboundary region. The Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 provides an International Joint Commission (IJC) to resolve transboundary watershed disputes. There is widespread support in Alaska for utilizing the IJC, and Canadians are now advocating for the use of the IJC for this region. Now is the time to seize the opportunity for collaboration between the United States and Canada to develop proactive and progressive solutions to manage our shared resources.

Bilateral Canada/U.S. meetings commence the week of April 18, and we submit that this is an excellent opportunity to begin the process for a cooperative, Canada/U.S. national approach to using the IJC to address the important issues in the B.C. - Alaska transboundary region.

We look forward to your response to this letter and we would be pleased to meet with you and your staff at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

SIGNATORIES:

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Sierra Club BC
Victoria, BC

Bruce Passmore, Executive Director

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
Vancouver, BC

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Whitehorse, YT

Cc.

Canada

Honourable Minister Stéphane Dion, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Honourable Minister Catherine McKenna, Ministry of the Environment and Climate
Change Honourable Minister Hunter Tootoo, Ministry of Fisheries, Oceans and the
Canadian Coast Guard Honourable Minister Carolyn Bennett, Ministry of Indigenous and
Northern Affairs Canada Honourable Minister James Carr, Ministry of Natural Resources
Canadian Section of International Joint Commission

U.S.

Secretary of State John Kerry
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Department of Interior
U.S. Section of International Joint Commission
U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan
U.S. Congressman Don Young
Alaska Governor Bill Walker
Alaska Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott