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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Alaskans thank the Alaska Congressional Delegation for bolstering State Department involvement on transboundary B.C.-Alaska rivers and ensuring funding to continue baseline monitoring

JUNEAU, AK—Led by the Alaska Congressional Delegation, the U.S. Congress has approved more than \$3.62 million dollars for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to continue baseline water quality monitoring at the international border for Southeast Alaska’s transboundary rivers, and to shore up U.S. Department of State involvement on the issue of British Columbia (B.C.) mining, and mining contamination, near rivers that flow into the United States. The funding was included as part of the [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021](#), and approved by Congress on December 21, 2020.

“To defend Alaskan interests and interests of the United States, there must be focused data collected for baseline water quality, fisheries, and reference conditions in the U.S. portions of transboundary rivers shared with B.C.,” said Salmon Beyond Borders Director Jill Weitz.

“Historically, 80 percent of Southeast Alaska king salmon have come from the transboundary Taku, Stikine and Unuk Rivers — and yet, by this spring, all three rivers’ king salmon populations will likely be listed as stocks of concern, and B.C. is rushing through more than a dozen Pebble Mine-sized projects just over the Alaska border in those same river systems. We do not have any time to waste, and we are grateful for the Alaska Congressional Delegation’s continued involvement in and support of Southeast Alaska’s transboundary rivers, jobs, and ways of life.”

In the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 is [\\$3.12 million for the USGS](#) to continue to expand its streamgage monitoring of transboundary watersheds and to work with the Environmental Protection Agency to evaluate and reduce pollution from B.C. mines in rivers that flow into the United States. The USGS has also been directed to continue evolving a formal partnership with Tribes and other federal agencies to develop a water quality strategy for the transboundary rivers.

“We look forward to developing a true partnership between Tribes and the USGS,” said Rob Sanderson, Jr., Chair of the Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission (SEITC). “Besides putting up money, we need to ensure that long-term water quality monitoring includes Tribal involvement.”

“This funding for data collection continues to validate the concerns of our tribes in Southeast Alaska, as well as our ongoing request for increased engagement between Canada, the United States and Indigenous governments,” shared Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska’s (Tlingit & Haida) Environmental Coordinator Raymond Paddock III. “We must work together to better understand and manage the proposed, existing and abandoned mines in our shared rivers.”

Tlingit & Haida has called on the federal government for action under the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 and to meaningfully engage Southeast Alaska's Tribes. In 2015, Tlingit & Haida began working to collect baseline water quality data, sediment sampling and water quality surveys on the Taku and Stikine Rivers. Tlingit & Haida has since expanded their scope to sampling on the Alsek River near Yakutat and the Chilkat and Klehini Rivers outside of Klukwan and Haines.

"We are very excited about the future of this partnership," said Chris Zimmerman, center director of the U.S. Geological Survey Alaska Science Center. "By working collaboratively, we will be able to better understand water quality in transboundary rivers to help resource managers and users make sound, science-based decisions."

The U.S. Department of State [was also allocated \\$500,000](#) for the first time to specifically expand its participation in the matter of transboundary mines, which is vital to the federal involvement necessary for long-term, binding solutions to B.C. mining contamination in transboundary rivers. Specifically, in a request led by Congressman Don Young, the funding directs the U.S. Department of State to engage with relevant federal agencies to identify remaining gaps in the nonbinding Memoranda of Understanding between British Columbia and Alaska, Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

"We are the gap," said SEITC's Executive Director Frederick Olsen, Jr. "We like that our federal government will allocate some funding towards the transboundary mining issue but looking for gaps in the MOUs may not be the best use of said funds. Sovereign Tribal governments must have meaningful inclusion in transboundary decisions, something that is not the case with the current nonbinding agreements."

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Image:

Click [here](#) for a free-to-use photograph of USGS water quality monitoring on the transboundary Unuk River.

[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. We are united across the Alaska/British Columbia border to defend and sustain our transboundary rivers, jobs and way of life.