

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



May 7, 2021

Honorable John Horgan
P.O. Box 9041 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1
Delivered electronically

Dear Premier Horgan,

As Alaska lawmakers, we write to convey the deep concerns of our constituents regarding the potential impacts to our transboundary rivers from abandoned, operating, and future large-scale mining projects in British Columbia. We write with a sense of urgency as the Alaska Department of Fish & Game is poised to list the once-mighty Chinook salmon runs of the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers as “Stocks of Concern” this year. Similarly, Stikine River sockeye salmon runs are forecasted to not meet subsistence needs and B.C. salmon stocks are historically low. Meanwhile, B.C. mine developers continue building massive tailings dams at the headwaters of these shared rivers. We must work together to develop a binding international framework that will protect the health of these rivers for generations to come.

The non-binding, unfunded B.C.-Alaska Memorandum of Understanding and Statement of Cooperation on Protection of Transboundary Waters are important communication tools. But without binding international agreements and the funding for long-term water quality testing, downstream Alaskans and British Columbians remain unprotected from the real threat of significant water pollution and associated impacts from upstream mining activity.

We know your government recently delayed the process of amending its mine reclamation policy. In 2018, former Alaska Governor Bill Walker asked your Province to require companies with mining projects in B.C.-Alaska transboundary rivers to post a full reclamation bond at the time they are permitted, as the State of Alaska requires. Washington state lawmakers also made a similar request in a letter on March 23, 2021. We echo Governor Walker’s request as a minimum step toward shared stewardship of our salmon rivers.

The United States Congress has appropriated increasing amounts each year since 2016 to fund water quality monitoring gauges on the U.S. side of our transboundary rivers. Congress has also appropriated funds for the U.S. Department of State’s engagement with Global Affairs Canada on the issue of governance related to the potential impacts of B.C. mining in shared watersheds. There is a clear need and opportunity for Canada to join with the U.S. in supporting First Nations and Canadian agencies in conducting ecological monitoring on the Canadian side of the border.

We take very seriously the struggles facing Pacific salmon populations and the communities dependent upon them. The Alaska House Fisheries Committee held a hearing on April 27, 2021 focused on B.C. mining near the Taku, Stikine, and Unuk Rivers. Testifiers called on us to develop an Indigenous- and community-led framework. This builds on the calls of former Alaska governors, dozens of municipalities throughout Southeast Alaska, fifteen Tribes in Southeast Alaska, hundreds of business owners, tour operators, and commercial and sport fishing groups, the Alaska congressional delegation, and thousands of individual Alaskans who have called for enforceable protections and robust financial assurances.

The transboundary mining issue is an opportunity to work together and set the stage for both conserving productive salmon habitat and continuing responsible mineral development. Binding international agreements, water and wildlife monitoring, and reclamation bonds are important steps forward.

Sincerely,



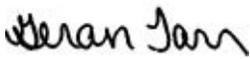
Senator Jesse Kiehl



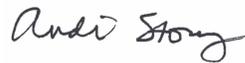
Speaker Louise Stutes



Representative Dan Ortiz



Representative Geran Tarr



Representative Andi Story



Representative Sara Hannan



Representative Kevin McCabe



Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins

CC:

Office of Governor Michael Dunleavy

Office of Senator Lisa Murkowski

Office of Senator Dan Sullivan

Office of Congressman Don Young

U.S. Department of State, Daniel Kachur

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of International and Tribal Affairs, Jane Nishida