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## B.C. mines minister proposes more cross-border co-operation with Alaska

Concerned state groups want review under Canada-U. S. water treaty

BY GORDON HOEKSTRA, VANCOUVER SUN AUGUST 26, 2015



B.C. Minister of Energy and Mines Bennett, left, and Alaska Lt. Governor Byron Mallott visit a commercial fish landing station on the Taku River in Southeast Alaska, a top salmon-producing river. The river runs from Northwest B.C. to the northwestern coast at Juneau.

**Photograph by:** Government of B.C.

Mines Minister Bill Bennett said Wednesday he's willing to provide more access to the province's environmental assessment system to address Alaskans concerns over mines that could effect transboundary waters.

Bennett finishes up a five-day trip to Alaska on Thursday, where he has met with state officials and numerous groups that have concerns about the potential effects of effluent released from mines in British Columbia into waters that flow into Alaska.

Imperial Metal's Red Chris gold-copper mine is already in production in the northwest corner of the province and there are other planned mines in the region. Those included Seabridge's \$5.4-billion KSM gold-copper-silver mine and Pretium's \$811-million Brucejack gold-copper mine.

In a phone interview, Bennett said measures that have been discussed include having public meetings in Alaska as part of the province's assessment of mines, involving the state in B.C.'s permitting process and creating a water-testing program.

The idea is also to have a system in place to immediately communicate non-compliance orders at B.C. mines in the transboundary area to Alaska and concerned groups.

"I think within 30 days we'll know exactly what is left to be done so we can get the premier of the province and the governor of Alaska to consider signing an agreement that would to some extent codify the things we talked about," said Bennett.

As part of his trip, Bennett also toured the old Tulsequah Chief mine site and went boating with Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott.

Bennett said he has committed to doing a better job of cleaning up the Tulsequah Chief mine site, saying he can't ask Alaskans to accept that B.C. has integrity in its processes without doing so.

The mines minister said he encountered some protesters and some anger and fear, noting Alaskans are very passionate about protecting rivers such as the Stikine.

An Alaskan coalition — which includes Salmon Beyond Borders, the Alaska Trollers Association and the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Working Group — have said they believe an international review is the best way to develop specific binding commitments to ensure clean water, salmon, jobs and traditional and customary practices are not harmed by B.C. mines and that adequate financial assurances are in place to cover long-term monitoring and compensation for damages.

The Alaskan coalition's concerns were heightened by the catastrophic tailings dam spill at Imperial Metals' Mount Polley mine in the B.C. Interior in the summer of 2014.

On Wednesday, after meeting Bennett, the coalition said it was pleased there was general agreement that business as usual cannot continue and there is a need for more dialogue between Alaskan and B.C. officials.

However, the group noted that B.C. officials could not provide a clear plan or timeline as to how Alaskan's concerns are managed and addressed.

The group reiterated it believes an international review under the Boundary Waters Treaty is the best solution.

"While cross-border co-operation is essential for protecting fisheries, it involves more than provincial and state agreements regarding the sharing of data and perspectives," said Dale Kelley, executive director of the Alaska Trollers Association.

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