
Feds to look into mining dispute involving Alaska, Canada

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JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — The federal government will look into a transboundary mining issue affecting Alaska and Canada, officials said.

The U.S. State Department stated in a letter to Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott that it acknowledges Alaska residents' concerns over pollution coming from British Columbia mines, CoastAlaska News reported .

The department will work with Canadian officials to protect the salmon-rich, cross-boundary watersheds, department officials said in the letter released Dec. 28.

The Walker-Mallott administration had brought the issue to the department's attention in November.

Before the letter, the department had said it would not get involved with the issue.

"We're very excited to see the federal government engaged in this issue and their response that they've made to us and to see the actions going forward," said Barbara Blake, senior transboundary mines adviser.

The department is looking into what gaps and limitations of cooperation exist between the two countries, Blake said.

The department is expected to present its findings at an International Joint Commission meeting in April.

Two mines are operating in transboundary watersheds that feed into Alaska: the Brucejack and the Red Chris.

Another, the Tulsequah Chief is closed and leaking polluted water.

Mine critics have repeatedly called for commission involvement, including Frederick Olsen Jr., who serves on the SouthEast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission and is tribal president of the Organized Village of Kasaan on Prince of Wales Island.

"It looks like it's a good first step," Olsen said. "Of course, as it said in the letter, to have the International Joint Commission, you still have to have the Canadians support that."