

Canada 'needs to act and act very soon' on polluting mine, say Alaska politicians

Alaska politicians on trip to Ottawa ask for progress on Tulsequah Chief mine cleanup

By Dave Croft, [CBC News](#) Posted: Feb 06, 2018 12:23 PM CT Last Updated: Feb 06, 2018 12:40 PM CT

Senior Alaskan politicians say U.S. federal and state agencies are ramping up their efforts to force B.C. to clean up the abandoned Tulsequah Chief mine, about 80 kilometres south of Atlin.

Dan Sullivan, one of Alaska's two U.S. senators, and the state's Lt.-Gov. Byron Mallot were in Ottawa Monday for a series of meetings with Canadian officials, including federal Environment Minister Catherine McKenna.

Mallot said there will be more meetings on transboundary issues in April.

"Hopefully this will continue to create the kind of focus on the Tulsequah Chief mine that we raised in the last two years," said Mallot.

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"Recognizing that the mine had been spewing water — waste water — for almost half a century, and we've got this focused at a level now that has never been focused on before," he said

Acid drainage from the idle Tulsequah Chief mine flows into the Tulsequah River, and then the Taku River and down to Juneau, Alaska, less than 50 kilometres away.

Sen. Sullivan said the U.S. State Department and the Environmental Protection Agency are now much more engaged in transboundary water issues on the B.C.-Alaska border.

"There's either mines that have been in operation, mines that have unfortunately been abandoned and are polluting the area, or mines that are in development," he said.

'Very legitimate concerns'

Sullivan said the Alaskans are looking for several things from the B.C. government.

They want a say in B.C.'s environmental permitting for development on rivers that flow into Alaska, and they want financial security to compensate downstream users like the commercial fishery and tourism operators if there's an environmental disaster. They also want a joint water monitoring program and the immediate reclamation of the Tulsequah Chief mine.

Sullivan says Alaskans are not anti-mining.

"Look, Alaska is a resource development state. As a matter of fact, a lot of the mines in Alaska have Canadian investors, so this is not some kind of anti-resource development focus. We just think we have very legitimate concerns," said Sullivan.

Mallot said Canada "needs to act and act very soon," he said.

"If it goes too much longer without forward movement, I think we have legitimate reason to be fairly aggressive in our continuing conversations with the Canadians about this subject," said Mallot.

The Alaskans thought progress was imminent in 2015 when then-B.C. Mines Minister Bill Bennett toured the site by helicopter.

He then told the provincial legislature, however, that there was no significant environmental harm from the mine.

Reaching an accord

Sullivan said comments were made in Ottawa on Monday pointing out his anger with [Canadian officials for lobbying](#) U.S. Senators to block oil and gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, which he called "borderline outrageous."

He was asked how that was different than what he was doing in Ottawa.

Sullivan said it's completely different, partly because the Porcupine caribou herd is thriving.

Mallot said he also spoke to Yukon government and First Nations leaders in Ottawa about reaching an accord on issues such as climate change and development in the North.

He said an accord could also help maintain relations over issues that divide Yukoners and Alaskans, such as exploration in ANWR.

"We were very clear in saying that we supported the exploration that is now authorization in the 10-02 area, but that we also wanted to work closely with the, particularly Indigenous, people on both sides of the border," said Mallot.

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