December 28, 2017

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary
U. S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson:

I am writing to you as the Mayor of the City and Borough of Juneau, Alaska’s capital city. On behalf of the Juneau Assembly, I wish to express our strong support for the letter sent to you on November 13, 2017, by the Alaska congressional delegation, Alaska Governor Bill Walker and Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott. That letter outlined deep concerns about the potential negative effects of proposed and operating Canadian large-scale metal mining operations located upstream of Southeast Alaska in shared U.S.-Canada “transboundary” watersheds. These open pit and underground hard rock mining projects are situated near the headwaters of the Taku, Stikine and Unuk Rivers that flow from British Columbia (B.C.) into Southeast Alaska.

Of the transboundary waters in question, Juneau is situated closest to the Taku River. B.C. mining projects that are affecting and could affect the Taku watershed include Tulsequah Chief, New Polaris, and Big Bull. Protection of the Taku and other transboundary rivers is vital to ensure healthy wild salmon populations and abundant fisheries, upon which Juneau and other Southeast Alaska communities depend.

The Tulsequah Chief mine has been discharging acid-generating waste into the Taku River watershed since the mine was abandoned in 1957. Despite the fact this pollution is in violation of provincial and Canadian federal law, and potentially the U.S.-Canada Boundary Waters Treaty as well, the pollution continues unabated. The Juneau Assembly joins with Alaska leaders in asking the U.S. Department of State to do all you can to ensure this acid mine drainage in the shared Taku River watershed is stopped.
Mining, like fisheries, is central to Juneau's economy by providing well-paying jobs and serving as a foundation of America's manufacturing sector. We are home to the Greens Creek silver and Kensington gold mines. Both mines are permitted through the Alaska Departments of Natural Resources, Fish and Game, and Environmental Conservation, and the US Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Corps of Engineers, and Environmental Protection Agency. Both have operational, reclamation, and closure plans on file with the City and Borough of Juneau.

While we share natural resource development interests with our Canadian neighbors, we must also be assured that B.C.'s mining activities do not negatively impact our livelihoods downstream.

We are specifically concerned about weaknesses in current monitoring and enforcement efforts by the government of B.C. The aforementioned ongoing acid rock drainage at the Tulsequah Chief mine, as well as the tailings dam failure at the Mount Polley mine in B.C.'s Fraser River watershed in 2014, demonstrate the need for greater protections of Southeast Alaska's transboundary rivers.

We urge you to utilize the international tools at your disposal to protect Juneau and its neighboring communities from potentially detrimental effects from mines located at the B.C. headwaters of our Southeast Alaska rivers. Please continue to discuss this matter with U.S. Department of State counterparts at Global Affairs Canada and develop measures to evaluate and prevent potential negative impacts to Alaska interests.

Finally, I have enclosed Resolution 2710, which the City and Borough of Juneau Assembly passed nearly three years ago, demonstrating our long-term concerns in this area. Resolution language includes the following: "The City and Borough of Juneau strongly urges the United States government to continue to work with the government of Canada to...use any and all powers afforded it under the Boundary Waters Treaty to...develop measures to ensure that Alaska resources are not harmed by upstream development in British Columbia."

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kendell D. Koelsch
Mayor

Enclosures: Resolution 2710
November 13, 2017 Letter from Governor Walker, Lieutenant Governor Mallott, and the Alaska congressional delegation