



Opposition grows in Alaska and BC to new development of Tulsequah Chief mine; BC government urged to clean it up or close it down

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(SitNews) Juneau, Alaska - Almost two years ago British Columbia's (B.C.) then Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett came to Juneau, flew over the abandoned Tulsequah Chief mine, and promised to clean up the ongoing acid mine drainage.

The mine, closed since 1959, has been continuously leaking contaminated water into the Tulsequah River, which drains directly into the Taku River and enters Alaska just a few miles south of the capital city of Juneau.

However, B.C.'s commitments, and the future of the Taku, are now more in doubt than ever due to the possibility of a new buyer for the mine. Current mine owner Chieftain Metals declared bankruptcy in September 2016 and the company was placed into receivership. On June 2, 2017 the receiver, Grant Thornton, posted documents to [its website](#) showing that a new company was interested in purchasing the mine. The company's name was redacted from the documents.



A tailings pond and a disused water treatment plant can be seen at the Tulsequah Chief mine site. The mine is about 62 miles south-west of Atlin B.C, and about 40 miles northeast of Juneau.

Photo courtesy Rivers Without Borders

"The Tulsequah Chief is not a viable mine, and it's time to clean it up and close it down once and for all," said John Morris, Sr., an elder and Tribal Council member of the Douglas Indian Association, a federally-recognized Alaska Native tribe with

traditional territory in the Taku watershed. "Two mining companies have gone bankrupt trying to re-open this mine and have left a legacy of toxic acid mine drainage into salmon habitat. B.C.'s assurances of mine cleanup seem hollow, with B.C. more interested in re-opening this failed mine rather than cleaning up its 60 year legacy of pollution."

"It is shocking that B.C. has not discussed the implications of a new mine buyer with the State of Alaska through the Statement of Cooperation signed last year," said Frederick Olsen, Jr, President of the Organized Village of Kasaan and Chairman of the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group. "Alaska needs to seek the help of the U.S. federal government to hold B.C. accountable for its environmental responsibilities at Tulsequah Chief."

Quoting a news release from Rivers Without Borders, Bennett visited the mine site in August 2015, seemed shocked at the acid mine drainage pouring into the river and promised to remedy the problem. However, he quickly started backtracking, claiming no contamination was entering the river and there was no environmental threat, despite evidence to the contrary. People on both sides of the border now worry B.C. is hoping to pass cleanup responsibility to a new mine buyer, a tactic that has resulted in two bankruptcies and little effort to halt the pollution.

"Trying to re-open the Tulsequah Chief a third time is not a cleanup plan. It is a recipe for another bankruptcy, more pollution, and opening up the heart of the Taku to mining and road building," said Chris Zimmer, Alaska Campaign Director for Rivers Without Borders. "Why would B.C., and this new buyer, want to re-invigorate a 20 year old international controversy that was the impetus for the growing concerns about B.C. mining across the transboundary region? This is a Clark/Bennett leftover that the new incoming B.C. government should end."

There is significant opposition to the mine, a proposed access road and river barging access, while feasibility studies have shown substantial economic risks. In 2012 the Taku River Tlingit First Nation passed a Joint Clan Mandate opposing the mine. The Douglas Indian Association and the Organized Village of Kasaan recently passed resolutions calling for cleanup and closure of Tulsequah Chief. A recent letter from six Alaska legislators to the governor called for more actions to ensure cleanup of Tulsequah Chief, noting "It is strikingly apparent that B.C. is and has been awaiting a new mine buyer to avoid financial obligations for cleanup."

"Children of the Taku Society supports the 2012 Taku River Tlingit First Nation consensus mandate opposing the Tulsequah Chief Mine. The secretive negotiations about a new mine buyer without First Nation input further fuel our desire to stop this mine that threatens our sovereignty and our territory. Any buyer should note the Taku River Tlingit mandate and consult with the First Nation before any decision is made," said Chantelle Hart of the Children of the Taku Society, a volunteer Yukon-based society dedicated to maintaining the culture, traditions and heritage of the Taku River Tlingit First Nation. "The Tulsequah Chief Mine is a legacy from the Christi Clark administration that the new B.C. government should promptly clean up and close down."

"It is shocking that B.C. has not discussed the implications of a new mine buyer with the State of Alaska through the Statement of Cooperation signed last year. Alaska needs to seek the help of the U.S. federal government to hold B.C. accountable for its environmental responsibilities at Tulsequah Chief," said Frederick Olsen, Jr., Chairman of the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group, which represents 16 tribes in Southeast Alaska. "If B.C. can't solve the pollution problem at the relatively small Tulsequah Chief, what can we expect at much larger mines such as Red Chris and KSM, especially without federal involvement under the Boundary Waters Treaty?"

Today's broad concerns about B.C. mining across the transboundary Taku, Stikine and Unuk watersheds began with the Tulsequah Chief in the late 1990's. Alaskans and British Columbians were then concerned about one, relatively small, B.C. mine that posed serious threats to salmon habitat and fisheries in one watershed. These concerns have now spread across the entire transboundary region due to B.C.'s aggressive mining programs.

"Given Tulsequah Chief, Mount Polley, critical B.C. Auditor General reviews of mining oversight, and weaknesses in the Alaska/B.C. Statement of Cooperation, we have real reason to worry about B.C.'s mining upstream of us. If B.C. wants us to take its words about environmental responsibility seriously, the province should start by taking action to clean up and close down Tulsequah Chief, said Cynthia Wallesz, Executive Director of the United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters. "This ongoing pollution is a clear sign B.C. is far more interested in supporting the mining industry than in enforcing laws, honoring treaties and being a responsible neighbor. Alaska needs to step up and ask for help from our congressional delegation and federal government."

"If B.C. officials want to be good neighbors, prove their commitment to environmental stewardship, and protect existing uses they could start by cleaning up the mess at Tulsequah Chief and working with the State of Alaska to secure meaningful protections for water quality, fish and wildlife, and folks on both sides of the border that rely on an abundance of healthy natural resources," said Dale Kelley, Executive Director of Alaska Trollers Association.

The Organized Village of Kasaan and the Douglas Indian Association, federally recognized Indian Tribes in southeast Alaska, also have passed separate resolutions calling for the cleanup of an abandoned Canadian mine that has been leaking contamination for over 50 years into a salmon-rich river that flows into Alaska.

"If B.C. can't solve the pollution problem at the relatively small Tulsequah Chief, what can we expect at much larger mines such as Red Chris and KSM, especially without federal involvement under the Boundary Waters Treaty?" asked Clinton Cook, Sr., President of the Craig Tribal Association, "We've all seen what happened at Mount Polley."

Rob Sanderson, Jr., 1st Vice President of Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska sees the problems at Tulsequah Chief as a real world example of BC mining practices and BC's failure to enforce water quality laws. "Alaska clearly needs help from our federal government to hold BC accountable and protect Alaska's downstream interests."

This lack of action by BC underscores the concern of the citizens of southeast Alaska as many much larger mining projects are either operating or obtaining permits to operate in the three-transboundary Rivers originating in BC but flowing into the Pacific through Alaska.

"It seems that this latest promise by the government is following the path of 100's of years of promises," stated John Morris Sr.

Carrie James of the Ketchikan Indian Community wonders how Alaskans can depend on British Columbia. "They assured us that the Tulsequah Chief would be cleaned up. We simply cannot trust BC to do the right thing. We need enforceable protections."

"Our state of Alaska and the province of British Columbia have a good 'Neighborhood Watch Program' outlined, if you will, with their MOU/SOC process," said Frederick Olsen, Jr, "But we still need 'the Police' as in federal involvement under the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, the International Joint Commission, et cetera. We need the United States to honor its fiduciary Trust responsibility to its Alaskan Tribes."

In 1997, Redfern Resources Ltd. applied to the BC Province for an Environmental Assessment (EA) Certificate to develop a 2,250-tonne-per-day underground copper, lead, zinc, gold and silver mine at the old mine site. It conducted various development activities until winding down in 2008 and being placed in receivership in 2009.

The mine is currently owned by Chieftain Metals (Chieftain), who acquired the property in 2010 and received an EA certificate in 2012. Chieftain agreed to address acid rock drainage issues as part of re-development of the mine. The Tulsequah Chief mine, 62 miles south-west of Atlin B.C., was operated by Cominco as a copper/lead/zinc, silver and gold mine from 1950 to 1957. The mine site is on the Tulsequah River about 7 miles upstream from its confluence with the Taku River which drains into Taku Inlet near Juneau, Alaska.

Acid Rock Drainage (ARD) has been leaching from the old mine workings and waste rock at the Tulsequah Chief mine into the Tulsequah River since historic mining ceased

7/18/2017 SitNews: Opposition grows in Alaska and BC to new development of Tulsequah Chief mine; BC government urged to clean it up or close it down in 1957. A temporary water treatment plant was constructed in the fall of 2011 and operated between March and June 2012 before being shutdown and bypassed.

Reporting and Editing by Mary Kauffman, SitNews

Source of News:

- Douglas Indian Association
- Organized Village of Kasaan
- Rivers Without Borders
- Children of the Taku
- United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group
- United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters
- Alaska Trollers Association

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