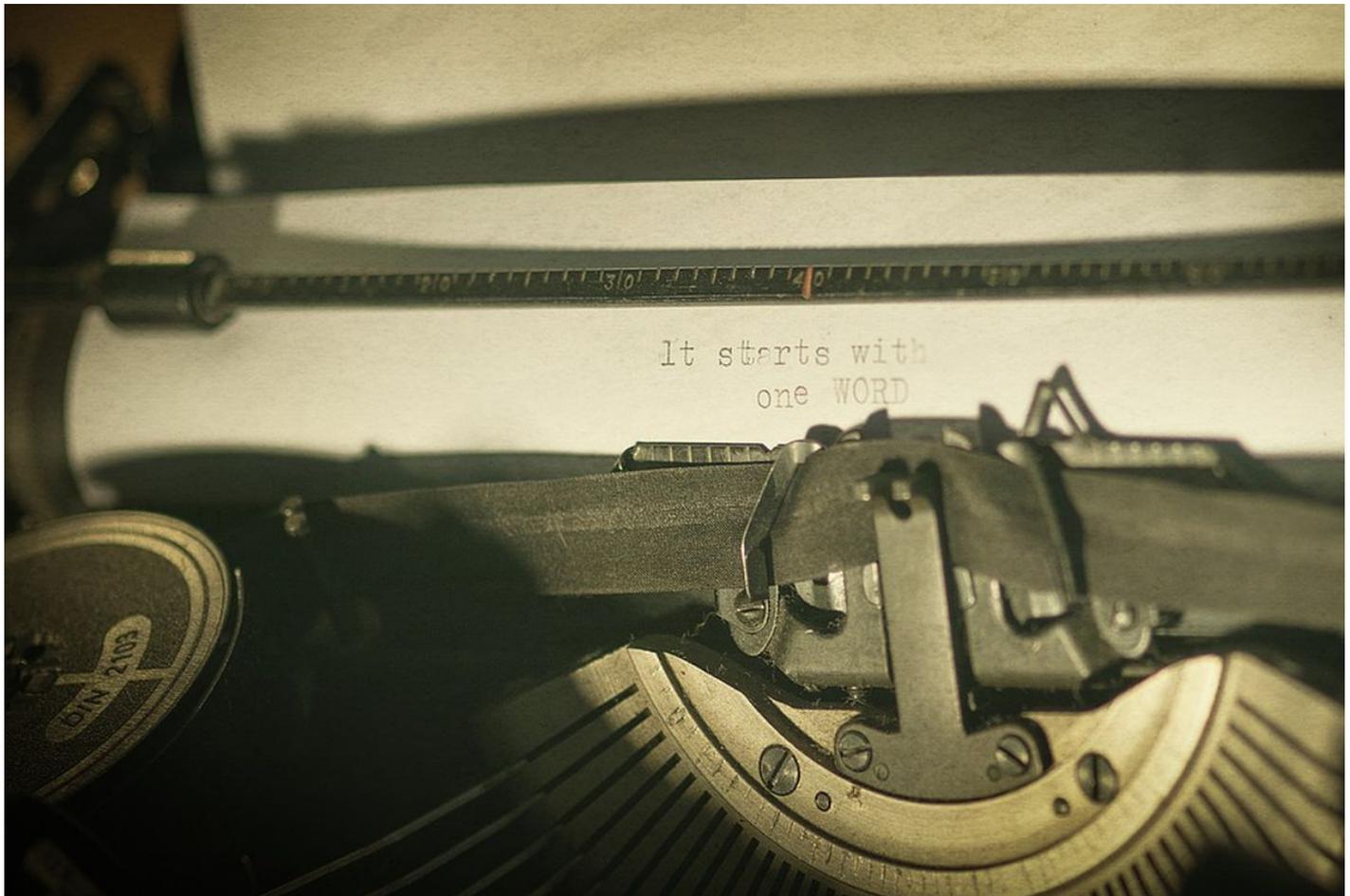


Alaska Dispatch News

Letters to the Editor

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(Pixabay)

Share your ideas with the state on transboundary mining

Last month, I had the opportunity to attend a Transboundary Workshop hosted by Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott. A variety of people attended, including Native leaders, NGO leaders, fishing leaders and interested residents. State Departments of Environmental Conservation, Fish & Game, and Natural Resources presented. I recognized most faces and have had the pleasure to work with many of them through the HJR9 process, "Canadian Mines on Transboundary Waters."

The workshop focused on reporting and receiving feedback on the implementation of the Statement of Cooperation. The statement was signed by Mallott, British Columbia Minister of Environment Mary Polak, and BC Minister of Energy & Mines Bill Bennett in October of 2016 to enhance communication and transparency between Alaska and British Columbia, primarily in regards to the operation, maintenance, closure and potential development of Canadian mines.

The meeting was a helpful status update: The state of Alaska has created online web tools — including an interactive map — and a two-year work plan for implementing a Joint Monitoring Program. Although the cooperation statement is a huge step forward and beneficial in many ways, it also has its weaknesses. It is nonbinding and nonfunded.

As is frequently the case, funding and money are a primary concern. Canadian mines have different permitting processes than Alaska mines; they have lower standards and more risky outcomes. The 2014 tailings disaster at Mount Polley mine speaks volumes. If another catastrophe similar to Mount Polley occurs in the Alaska-BC transboundary watersheds, we currently have no monetary assurances. The leniency of Canadian mine permitting could wipe out our watershed ecosystems and leave us with no way to recover.

I am not anti-mining; in fact, I'm doing what I can to support the efforts of two potential mining projects on Prince of Wales. However, I am opposed to unsafe mining that could potentially harm one of our biggest economic drivers. I am pro-fishing in every way. Our fishing industry and lifestyle is vital to Southeast Alaska. Canadian mines also do not employ Alaskans and do not provide any economic benefit for our communities.

Our watersheds provide thousands of jobs, millions of dollars, and a way of life that is irreplaceable and must be protected. I am excited to see the cooperation statement grow as a working document, and am actively building off of the statement to find enforceable and funded efforts to protect our pristine and lucrative watersheds.

If you have any ideas for the state on the transboundary mining issue, please contact Barbara Blake or former state Sen. Albert Kookesh in the Lieutenant Governor's Office.

— *Rep. Dan Ortiz*
Ketchikan