

# Conservationists call on new B.C. gov't to act on Tulsequah Chief mine cleanup



*DERRICK PENNER*

[More from Derrick Penner](http://vancouver.sun.com/author/depenner) ([HTTP://VANCOUVERSUN.COM/AUTHOR/DEPENNER](http://vancouver.sun.com/author/depenner))

Published on: July 4, 2017 | Last Updated: July 4, 2017 6:04 PM PDT



The Tulsequah Chief mine site, circa 2010. *RIVERS WITHOUT BORDERS / PNG*

Conservation and indigenous groups in Alaska are pushing B.C.'s new government to act on cleaning up the dormant Tulsequah Chief mine site near the border in Alaska's southeastern panhandle.

The mine site has sat dormant since September 2016, when owner Chieftain Metals Corp. was pushed into receivership. But rather than allow the mine to be sold out of bankruptcy, the Alaskan groups are asking B.C. to just clean it up and shut it down.

Chieftain is now the second company that has fallen into bankruptcy trying to resurrect the Tulsequah Chief since it was shut down in 1957 by its original owner, and Chris Zimmer of the Alaska group Rivers Without Borders doesn't want another replay of the scenario without a serious cleanup of acid-rock drainage that has poured out of the mine and into the Taku River for decades.

"What's changed since the last time the two companies went bankrupt?" Zimmer said. "Are the economics different, do they have a new plan?"

And last week, Rivers Without Borders, along with indigenous organizations and representatives of commercial-fishing groups, issued a statement calling on the new provincial government to take a more direct interest in the cleanup.

"Our hope is (the new government) would look at this as a legacy of the previous administration that's caused a lot of problems," Zimmer said, "and is something they should clean up, close down, and we can move on to bigger and better things."

And a representative of an Alaska First Nation said they're wary of another firm entering the picture.

"Will they clean it up, will the First Nations (have a chance) to get in there and raise concerns?" said John Morris Sr. of the Juneau-headquartered Douglas Indian Association.

The small mine lies 64 kilometres northeast of Juneau, Alaska, and south of Atlin, B.C., on the banks of the Taku River.

In a brief emailed statement, NDP caucus spokeswoman Jen Holmwood said the mine cleanup "is a serious issue we'll be looking into and have to say

more on in the weeks ahead.”

In March, Green party Leader Andrew Weaver raised the question of B.C.’s commitment to clean up the site in the provincial legislature, which he characterized as an “environmental black eye to B.C.”

Then-Energy and Mines Minister Bill Bennett said government was “committed to doing more work on that site.”

Chieftain still holds a permit to build the first phase of a mining operation at Tulsequah Chief, including water treatment of the acid-rock drainage, which is part of the package of assets receiver Grant Thornton LLP wants to sell to help repay creditors, according to documents from the proceedings.

Chieftain did build a water-treatment plant as part of its development, but the facility only operated briefly due to its cost.

An inspection last fall by the Ministry of Environment found the Tulsequah Chief “in non-compliance” with its permit because of acid-rock drainage. In a report, the receiver wrote “locating a purchaser to take over and reopen operations at the Tulsequah project was the optimal ‘win-win’ outcome for all parties.”

However, Zimmer said the Alaskan groups have bigger concerns about bigger proposed mine developments all along the B.C. side of the border with the panhandle, such as Seabridge Gold’s Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell project.

If B.C. can’t deal with the Tulsequah Chief, which is clearly in violation of its permit, “it doesn’t give us a lot of confidence on this side of the border (that) we’re not going to see problems like this at other mines.”

[depenner@postmedia.com](mailto:depenner@postmedia.com) (<mailto:depenner@postmedia.com>)

[twitter.com/derrickpenner](http://twitter.com/derrickpenner) (<http://twitter.com/derrickpenner>)

[CLICK HERE](mailto:vanweb@postmedia.com) (<mailto:vanweb@postmedia.com>) to report a typo.

Is there more to this story? We’d like to hear from you about this or any other stories you think we should know about. Email [vantips@postmedia.com](mailto:vantips@postmedia.com) (<mailto:vantips@postmedia.com>).