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By

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Clean up that damn mine

The Tulsequah Chief mine has been polluting the Taku Watershed with acid mine drainage (AMD) for over 60 years now. This pollution is in violation of British Columbia and Canadian laws and mine permits. The most recent study done by B.C. found “unacceptable risks” from the toxic drainage. Three years ago the B.C. Mines Minister visited Juneau and promised to remedy the problem, yet nothing has been done. So, why is the pollution still happening?

- ▶ Alaska Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott’s efforts to draw attention to the need for B.C. to promptly and completely close and clean up the mine site have been helpful, but more is needed to get B.C. to move beyond promises and to take action. In a February 2017 letter to Senator Denis Egan, Mallott wrote, “During two recent meetings of the SOC Bilateral Workgroup, we were reassured of BC’s efforts to identify and

address any outstanding legacy concerns

relating to the Tulsequah Chief mine." But, as six Alaska legislators wrote to Gov. Bill Walker last June, "We are concerned because B.C. has given such verbal 'assurances' for more than 20 years, yet very little has been done to end the acid runoff."

After the Lt. Gov. and U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan's February visit to, he told the CBC that Canada "... needs to act and act very soon. ... 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." After a follow-up meeting with Canadian officials, Sullivan, R-Alaska, was encouraged by the discussion regarding the cleanup of TCM. I respectfully suggest it is now time to get more aggressive.

Inaction on the part of Canadian provincial and federal governmental agencies to enforce their own laws makes them complicit in the ongoing AMD pollution. They have had more than enough time and opportunities to achieve cleanup of the mine by simply taking enforcement actions for violations of their own mining and environmental laws. The AMD pollution is, and has been in violation of provisions of the Canadian Federal Fisheries Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, the B.C. Environmental Assessment Act and the B.C. Mines Act as well as permits issued under the B.C. Environmental Management Act. Cleanup orders have been issued over the past several years but, despite those orders, no actual AMD cleanup actions were undertaken.

B.C. officials have managed to formulate convenient reasons, no, excuses, why the mine has not been cleaned up and remediated. For years, they claimed it was necessary to find a new mine operator to buy and clean up the AMD. Now that they haven't found a buyer, the bankruptcy process for mine owner Chieftain Metals is the latest reason du jour why the pollution continues unabated. The B.C. and Canadian governments must acknowledge their complicity in the pollution and do whatever is necessary to clean up the mess.

Cleaning up the Tulsequah Chief is a necessary first step in building any sort of trust that Alaskans will have in B.C. and Canada's mining and environmental laws. Prior to the bankruptcies, B.C. had plenty of chances to enforce the laws and cleanup orders against Redfern and Chieftain Metals. Yet, they failed because they were more interested in mine development at any cost than enforcing laws and permits. Opportunities to demand full cleanup and remediation of the mine may present themselves at meetings of the AK-B.C. Bilateral Workgroup, scheduled for later this month, and meetings between U.S. and Canadian federal agencies later this fall. However, Alaska must be uncompromising in demanding that B.C. must now specifically assume responsibility for cleanup and develop a clear plan and obtaining funding and to stop making excuses for why they can't do that.

More verbal assurances not backed up by actual plans to clean up the mine will be as worthless and insulting as the assurances that we have been fed for decades. One would think that 60 years of, what I consider, willful acid mine pollution is enough. Any reasonable deadline for action has passed. The time is now to clean up that worthless damn mine.

- **Brian Lynch of Petersburg is a commercial fisheries biologist retired after a 30 year career with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, a 37 year resident of Petersburg, and currently works in Petersburg for Rivers Without Borders on transboundary mining issues.**

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