

# Transboundary mine issues still a work in progress

*Mallott/Sullivan: Clean up Tulsequah Chief site leaking acid mine drainage*

By **Margaret Bauman** - August 27, 2018

Months after meeting with Canadian government officials in Ottawa, Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott and Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, have raised five issues they say need to be addressed as talks move forward on potential damage to salmon habitat from transboundary mines.

At the top of the list is cleaning up the Tulsequah Chief Mine site on the Tulsequah River southwest of Atlin, British Columbia. The site has been leaking acid mine drainage into the Tulsequah River since it was shut down in 1957.

The site was operated as a copper/lead/zinc, silver and gold deposit from 1950 to 1957. The mine site is about 10 kilometers upstream from its confluence with the Taku River, which drains into Taku Inlet near Juneau, Alaska.

The current owner of the mine, Chieftain Metals, declared bankruptcy in September of 2016, and the mine is in receivership with Grant Thornton LLP. As the bankruptcy trustee, Grant Thornton's job was to get some kind of value out of the mine for creditors. Efforts to sell the mine have so far failed, and the British Columbia government has yet to take actual steps to stop the ongoing acid drainage from the mine site.

Mallott and Sullivan sent a letter to Canadian government officials on July 31 that identified specific issues they want addressed going forward, the first of which is reclaiming the Tulsequah Chief mine site. They also called for agreement on a definition of a scientific protocol for three to five years of independent studies, focused on water quality and fish and wildlife populations in transboundary watersheds.

They urged funding of a joint water quality monitoring program for these transboundary rivers, and that the Canadian government consider conducting a review of the existing legacy, proposed, permitted and operating mines in the transboundary watersheds under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. A final point was consideration of an analysis developed by the United States to identify gaps in the regulatory structures of the two nations and to address these issues at the next meeting of the State Department and Global Affairs Canada.

Salmon Without Borders, in Juneau, issued a statement on Aug, 21 thanking Mallott and Sullivan for their letter to the Canadian government. Still what is lacking, wrote Jill Weitz, campaign director for the group, is actual binding international agreements and financial assurances to protect shared waters.

Weitz cited two examples of lax requirements by British Columbia's government.

“Teck Resources has been required to post more money in financial assurances for its one Alaska mine than for all five of its B,C, coal mine that drain into Montana, despite the fact they are actively killing fish in downstream U.S. rivers – and Canadian taxpayers ended up paying for \$40 million of the cleanup after Imperial Metals Mount Polley disaster in the Fraser River watershed, which flows into the ocean just north of the Washington state line,” she said.

Salmon Beyond Borders is a united effort of sport and commercial fishermen who have collaborated with Alaska tribes and First Nations to find solutions of these rivers.

On the U.S. side this includes support from the National Congress of American Indians, Metlakatla Indian Community, Klawock Cooperative Association, Hydaburg Cooperative Association, Craig Tribal Association, Organized Village of Kasaan, Alaska Native Brotherhood, Alaska Native Sisterhood, Alaska Federation of Natives, Petersburg Indian Association and the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska.

### **Margaret Bauman**

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