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A Year After Mine Disaster, Wrangellites Protest BC Mines

By [Katarina Sostaric, KSTK - Wrangell](#) | August 4, 2015

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A protest in Wrangell on Sunday marked the one-year anniversary of a mining disaster in Canada and sought to bring attention to mines being developed across the border from Southeast Alaska.

About 100 people marched through Wrangell behind a banner that read “Keep the Stikine Clean.”

VmP



Tribal member Apryl Hutchinson arrives at Shakes Island at the end of the march. Photo: Katarina Sostaric/KTSK.

They marked the one-year anniversary of a British Columbia mine disaster with a rally and water blessing to raise awareness for other B.C. mines that could pose a threat to Southeast Alaska’s rivers and salmon.

Wrangell tribal member Apryl Hutchinson said she hopes the community effort will make a difference.

“We don’t want what happened at Mount Polley to happen on the Stikine,” Hutchinson said. “And we just want to make everyone aware—

especially here in Wrangell at the mouth of the river—that we are here, and we’re not going to stand for it.”

“A lot of the perception is that since it’s going on in Canada, we don’t have much of a voice down here,” said Mike Hoyt. “And I think that’s what this is about, is trying to get people motivated and involved and showing them that we do have a voice in this.”

Hoyt helped organize the event with Salmon Beyond Borders and the Wrangell Cooperative Association, the local tribal government.

Last August, the Mount Polley Mine in central B.C. spilled millions of gallons of mine waste into a salmon-bearing watershed. The owner of Mount Polley, Imperial Metals, also owns the Red Chris Mine that opened this summer upriver from Wrangell. Red Chris has the same waste-rock storage system that failed at Mount Polley.

Tlingit and Haida tribal members, other Wrangell residents, conservation organizations and representatives of First Nations in Canada marched to the Chief Shakes Tribal House to sing, dance and learn about B.C. mine issues. There was a strong call for unity between Native tribes of Alaska and First Nations of B.C. in efforts to prevent another mine disaster.

Jacinda Mack is from the First Nation in the vicinity of the Mount Polley spill. She told the crowd this was the first year the community didn’t have fish, and she’s very worried about potential long-term effects on the environment.

“My hope is that my people, the Secwepemc, from where the Mount Polley mining disaster happened, can work together with the different tribes of Alaska,” Mack said. “Because we have so much in common and so much to learn from each other and share with each other to protect our common interest of healthy, clean water.”



A protest in Wrangell on Sunday, August 2, 2015. (Katarina Sostaric/KSTK)

Mack said she wants to help protect Alaska from the same problems.

Oscar Dennis of the Tahltan Nation near the Red Chris Mine talked about his direct action campaigns to expel other resource extractors from that area over the past 10 years. He said the rally was a start, but getting the U.S. and Canada to invoke the Boundary Waters Treaty could take some extra pressure. The treaty is intended to settle disputes about bodies of water shared by the two countries.

“Letter writing is not going to get it done,” said Dennis. “And you can sit here for 10 years and watch it, and by the time everything’s over and destroyed, you wake up and that’s a little bit too late. You have to force your politicians to take action. That’s basically the only way. In my experience, after 10 years on the ground, it’s the only way we’ve ever gotten results.”

But Wrangell Tribal Administrator Aaron Angerman said it is important for everyone to get educated about what could happen.

“If Wrangell could wrap their heads around not having fish for a whole year, possibly longer, maybe it would really open their eyes to see what could happen with this mine up there on the Stikine,” Angerman said.

He plans to host more events like this in Wrangell, and he hopes more Southeast communities will follow suit.

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