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## After Bennett visit, groups are cautiously optimistic of progress

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**Michael Penn | Juneau Empire -**

Edie Leghorn, with the Sitka Conservation Society and the Inside Passage Waterkeeper, speaks on the steps of the Alaska State Capitol during a rally to highlight the long-term protection of transboundary waters, principally the Taku, Stikine and Unuk watersheds.

By [JAMES BROOKS](#)

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At a joint press conference Wednesday afternoon, environmental, fishing and Native leaders said they were optimistic about the outcome of Juneau meetings between Alaskans and a British Columbia delegation led by provincial Mines and Energy Minister Bill Bennett.

Bennett, in Juneau this week to discuss mining development along Alaska's border with BC, is scheduled to leave Juneau today for Ketchikan before returning to Canada.

"I was encouraged by Minister Bennett saying the status quo cannot continue, and I think everyone's in agreement on that, but the devil's going to be in the details of how we move forward," said Chris Zimmer of Rivers Without Borders, one of the environmental groups that has raised awareness of the transboundary mines issue.

While environmentalists gathered in protest of BC's mine plans Wednesday — even briefly disrupting an afternoon event organized by the state — they said cautiously that this week's trip was productive.

"It was a good meeting, we got a lot of things on the table, but the proof of the pudding is what actions come out of this, and there was no firm plan of action coming out of this," Zimmer said.

Douglas Indian Association member John Morris said some of Bennett's most promising comments addressed work with tribal governments on monitoring the metal content of water downriver of BC mines.

"We see a little bit of cooperation coming out of it, so now maybe the next step will be to work with the First Nations," he said.

Heather Hardcastle of Salmon Beyond Borders, which organized the afternoon press conference, said the bottom line of this week's events is that a long process has started.

"I think we're a long ways off from where we'd like to be, but you've got to start somewhere and we had a good discussion today," she said. "I also think, too, and I'm an optimist ... that if people can see this region and experience it, it changes you. I think Bill Bennett was visibly moved in this place."