

Alaskan Concerns Escalate As British Columbia Government Gives Red Chris Mine Final Operating Permit

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(SitNews) Juneau, Alaska - B.C. Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett recently announced that the Red Chris Mine, owned by Imperial Metals, will soon be in full production, despite environmental concerns from First Nations, environmental groups and Alaskans, who are downstream from the mine site. Red Chris Gold and Copper Mine sits on one of the largest and highest-quality copper and gold deposits in the world.

Concerned Alaskans say this ill-conceived decision by the British Columbia government to issue a final operating permit for Red Chris mine disregards concerns from Alaskans whose clean water, fisheries, tourism, jobs, and traditional ways of life are threatened. Red Chris is owned by Imperial Metals, the same company responsible for the Mount Polley mine disaster last summer, one of Canada's worst environmental catastrophes. Red Chris is one of several B.C. mines proposed for the transboundary region straddling Alaska that have raised the public's ire.



The Red Chris Mine site in northwestern B.C. has received a full operating permit from the provincial government.

Photo by Daniel Henshaw / Courtesy B.C. government

Opponents say B.C. issuing Red Chris its final permits on June 12 is the latest sign Canada is ignoring its obligations under the Boundary Waters Treaty, an international treaty that guards against water pollution by either the U.S. or Canada. Under the treaty, the United States, including Alaska, should play an equal role in evaluating the full range of potential impacts of B.C. mine projects, like Red Chris, in watersheds shared by both countries. B.C. should also agree to assume an equal share of the risks posed by transboundary mines through a legally-binding mechanism that ensures Alaska is appropriately compensated for impacts related to pollution reaching Alaskan waters.

Upstream from the Southeast Alaska communities of Wrangell and nearby Petersburg, in the headwaters of the transboundary Stikine River, Red Chris has the potential to unleash acid mine drainage, heavy metals and other pollutants that will drain into Southeast Alaska's pristine waters say concerned Alaskans. These waters produce more salmon than any other region of the world, as well as support multi-billion dollar fishing and tourism industries, and indigenous cultures of the region.

According to Salmon Beyond Borders and the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group, it is reckless for B.C. to permit a new mine with the same type of tailings technology that failed so catastrophically at Mount Polley in August 2014. Red Chris' permits make clear that B.C. is disregarding the recommendations from the independent panel review of the Mount Polley failure. One of the panel's top recommendations was that new mines stop using tailings dams and move to more modern waste treatment methods like dry-stacking. Canada's full-speed-ahead approach to transboundary mining is why Alaskans need prompt, swift and strong action from the U.S. State Department to ensure Canada honors its obligations under the Boundary Waters Treaty and doesn't harm Alaska's water, fisheries, culture and jobs.

"It's astonishing to me how B.C. is dead set on getting these transboundary mines operating at all costs--even when their own experts say that current mining technology will fail. As I've said before, the B.C. government is ignoring the rights and concerns of those of us who live in Southeast Alaska. This is not okay and we will continue to fight," says Rob Sanderson Jr., Co-chair of the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group.

Alaskans, including Alaska's congressional delegation, have been calling for U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to activate the International Joint Commission (IJC) to review the multitude of mine developments in the transboundary region and how they could impact Alaska's downstream waters. Today's news that Red Chris is open for business should be a loud wake-up call for Sec. Kerry that the time to get the IJC involved is now.

The Red Chris Mine, which will employ 350 workers, including many First Nations people, is located about 18 kilometres southeast of the Tahltan village of Iskut and 80 kilometres south of

Dease Lake and the site occupies around 660 hectares on the Todagin Plateau between Ealue and Kluea Lakes.

Another group which initially opposed the Red Chris Mine is now part of the project. In April of this year, Tahltan Central Council members voted to accept a co-management agreement with Imperial Metals and Red Chris Mine. It is said this unique agreement ensures Tahltan oversight of environmental issues surrounding the mine. It also guarantees training and careers for Tahltan members, and a revenue-sharing agreement.

The tailings storage facility (TSF) at Red Chris Mine has been the subject of three independent reviews - including one commissioned by the Tahltan Central Council - to assess seepage and design considerations. The mine has also done an extensive review of their subsurface hydrogeology and has made adjustments as per third party review recommendations. The mine has successfully demonstrated to the chief inspector of mines that the TSF has performed as designed.

Regarding Red Creek Mine moving to full production, B.C. Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett said, "This is a significant achievement made possible through a tremendous amount of collaboration between Imperial Metals, the Tahltan Central Council and this government. This mine will provide hundreds of good-paying jobs for members of the Tahltan Nation and residents of the nearby communities."

Tahltan Central Council President Chad Day said, "Expanding the mine to its intended capacity will make the jobs, training and other benefits that we are using to build our Nation possible. From here on our environmental oversight role - an important part of our agreement - will also start to expand."

Edited by Mary Kauffman, SitNews

On the Web:

Mount Polley Independent Review Report
<https://www.mountpolleyreviewpanel.ca>

Boundary Waters Treaty
<http://ijc.org/en /BWT>

Source of News:

Salmon Beyond Borders
<http://www.salmonbeyondborders.org>

A campaign driven by Alaska tribes, commercial and sport fishermen, tourism businesses, local governments, elected leaders, and conservation groups united to protect our shared rivers and salmon from upstream development in British Columbia.

The United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group

A group of 13 tribes working to protect Southeast Alaska waters from Canadian mine developments.

British Columbia Minister of Energy
www.gov.bc.ca