



**CANADIAN
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B.C. government approves permits for controversial Red Chris Mine

Gemma Karstens-Smith, The Canadian Press
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VANCOUVER -- A gold and copper mine in northwestern British Columbia that still faces angry opposition from its neighbours in Alaska has received approval for a full operating permit from the provincial government.

B.C. Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett announced Friday that the Red Chris Mine, owned by Imperial Metals (TSX:III), will soon be in full production, despite environmental concerns from First Nations, environmental groups and Alaskans, who are downstream from the mine site.

Those worries were magnified last summer, when a tailings pond collapsed at the Mount Polley mine, another Imperial Metals-owned mine in interior B.C.

Environmental groups are concerned that a tailings pond collapse at the Red Chris Mine would be worse than the one that happened at the Mount Polley mine last year.

Bennett said he's confident the Red Chris Mine, located about 130 kilometres from the Alaska border, won't experience a similar breach because the tailings storage facility has undergone three independent reviews.

He noted the mine has operated successfully for months on a temporary permit while officials monitored the facility.

"I have no doubt ... that (waste) water is going to be managed carefully, and in such a way that people downstream, including our neighbours in Alaska, can have confidence that we're doing everything that any responsible jurisdiction should do," he said.

Heather Hardcastle, a commercial fisherman and spokeswoman for Alaska-based group Salmon Beyond Borders said she's still worried the mine could unleash heavy metals and acidic drainage into the waters, impacting Alaska's multi-billion dollar fishing and tourism industries.

The problem is that the government of Alaska hasn't been involved in assessing or approving mining projects in northwestern B.C., where mine run-off flows into Alaskan waters, she said.

"We have no voice and B.C. has no accountability. And we're taking on all of the risks and receiving none of the benefits," Hardcastle said.

Alaskans aren't anti-mining, she added, but people are concerned about how many projects are currently underway in the pristine region.

"We're talking about a scale and scope of mining activity that's never been seen before in a place that's this valuable when it comes to salmon and clean water," Hardcastle said.

A representative for Alaska does have a seat at the table when it comes to many meetings on B.C. mining, said Bennett.

The minister noted that there is work to be done between Alaska and B.C., and said he would like to see a memorandum of understanding on mining between the two governments.

Another group which initially opposed the Red Chris Mine is now part of the project.

Members of the Tahltan First Nation set up a blockade at the mine last summer following the Mount Polley tailings pond collapsed, spilling millions of cubic metres of water and mine slurry into local waterways.

The First Nation later instigated an environmental review of the Red Chris Mine, and in April signed on to co-manage it with Imperial Metals.

"From here on our environmental oversight role -- an important part of our agreement -- will also start to expand," Tahltan Central Council President Chad Day said in a news release.

He added that expanding the mine to full capacity will create jobs and bring other benefits to the First Nation.

Bennett, too, said mining in B.C. helps bolster the province's economy.

Getting permits to build mines should be difficult, he said, but the province. needs to be competitive when it comes to attracting mining companies.

"We had Mount Polley, it happened, it was terrible. It happened once in 150 years. We have to make sure it doesn't happen again," he said. 'But I think it would be a serious mistake to think that you can't mine safely in B.C. Because I'm convinced you can."

<http://bc.ctvnews.ca/b-c-government-approves-permits-for-controversial-red-chris-mine-1.2433206>