



## BC MINES

Mallott: Water quality is key in transboundary rivers

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by - [Margaret Bauman](#)



LT. Gov. Byron Mallott discusses traditional fishing of the Xat'sull people on the Fraser River with Jacinda Mack of the Northern Shuswap Tribal Council, who told Mallott about how the Mount Polley mine tailings breach affected their subsistence lifestyle. Photo courtesy of the Alaska Office of the Governor

Concerns over several British Columbia mines planned along transboundary rivers that flow into Southeast Alaska prompted Alaska Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott to meet in early May with Canadian entities that would be impacted by such development.

The bottom line, said Mallott, during a teleconference call on May 11, is that the mines present a clear and present danger that could affect water quality, and that is the issue that Alaska should focus on.

"Large mine development along those transboundary watersheds cannot be taken casually by the state of Alaska, and any engagement we have with British Columbia cannot be out of courtesy on their part," he said. "They are sovereign. We are sovereign, but Alaska has clear interest in protecting with extreme vigilance the water quality in each of those rivers, so that all of the biological diversity that occurs in them, that produces large salmon run, would be maintained.

"We would expect that British Columbia has as great or greater concern than we have because in most instances, 99 percent of those transboundary river systems exist on the British Columbia side of the border. So Alaska's involvement won't be one of courtesy. It will be one of vigilant involvement in order to protect Alaska's interests on our side of the border."

The state will likely expand involvement of state agencies to include more than just a mining focus, and on the water quality focus, he said.

Meanwhile, the lieutenant governor has begun establishing a working relationship with British Columbia Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett, plus representatives of First Nation tribes who would be impacted, and mining companies who would be involved in such mineral development.

The invitation to come see himself the plans for exploration and mining along transboundary rivers came initially from a First Nations leader who was visiting Juneau months ago, Mallott said.

The trip that resulted May 4-6 also involved meetings with British Columbia officials, and attendance at the Vancouver Board of Trade's annual luncheon for BC Mining Week, with the keynote address delivered by Karina Brino, president and chief executive officer of the Mining Association of British Columbia.

Mallott also met with representatives of the First Nations Energy and Mining Council, the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, and the BC Assembly of First Nations, and travelled with First Nations representatives to Williams Lake to tour the area of the Mount Polley mining dam breach.

The purpose of his travels was mostly fact finding and relationship building, to look at where Alaska can help strengthen environmental safeguards, and we will be working on these issues, he said.

While there were no discussions of shared oversight, Bennett did say in an interview with BC media that the provincial government would be open to Alaska engagement in their mining assessment and permitting processes, he said.

It is important for Alaskans to understand the view of stakeholders on the BC side, including First Nations bands who have formal contractual relationships for mines in the transboundary area, and bands who are skeptical and concerned about one or more of the mine projects, he said.

It is also important to understand the provincial government's position, including revenue sharing incentives, the politics, and environmental assessments of the permitting process, he said.

While there were no discussions during his trip on impact in a future catastrophic event spilling into transboundary waters and over the Alaska border, there will be in the future, he said.

While no dates are set yet for future exchanges, Mallott said Bennett would be visiting Alaska for further talks, and that several BC mining companies had invited him to visit their operations in Alaska.

As discussions progress, "all Alaska stakeholders with interests and concerns will be fully engaged by us," Mallott said. "I would hope we would have the most open and transparent process with the public as possible."

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