

First Nation elders blockade Taku tributary mine exploration

Posted: August 3, 2015 - 12:02am

By [MARY CATHARINE MARTIN](#)

JUNEAU EMPIRE

Elders from the Tahltan Nation blockaded a mining company's access to a tributary of the Taku River in early July — and after speaking with the protesters, mine officials have promised they will not drill or explore for the rest of the summer, a release from the Tahltan Central Council said. The mining company said the stop is temporary and that it is consulting with its lawyers to figure out the best way to move forward.

Four Tahltan elders — Alice Hamlin, Kitty Brown, August Brown and Nancy McGhee — along with the Tahltan Central Council's vice president, Heather Hawkins, and with the support of President Chad Day, flew to the Sheslay River Valley, a tributary of the Taku River, on July 7 and "confronted Doubleview Capital Corporation and their President/CEO," said a press release from the council.

Doubleview Capital Corporation owns the Hat Prospect, a copper and gold prospect in the Sheslay Valley.

"We all took turns speaking to the company respectfully and made it 100 percent clear that the Tahltan people are not going to support exploration mining activities in Sheslay," said a press release from the council.

Sheslay is a critically important area to Tahltan. It supports our nation's culture and our connection to the land. It is where our people go to hunt, fish, connect with the land and pass on knowledge. And it contains our nation's history — burial sites, traditional-use areas, and cultural sites.

— it is where our people go to hunt, fish, connect with the land and pass on knowledge. And it contains our nation's history — burial sites, traditional-use areas," Day wrote in an email.

Tahltan Nation supports some mining activity on its traditional lands — for example, it supports the Red Chris, an Imperial Metals-owned mine in the Stikine River watershed, which many Southeast Alaskans are aware of. Imperial Metals is the company that owns and operates Mount Cayley Mine, which had a catastrophic tailings dam failure Aug. 4, 2014.

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Tahltan Central Council says otherwise.

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In a press release, Doubleview says that it is now "reviewing all of its options."

The Ministry of Mines and Energy issued the company a five-year exploration and drilling permit, said Doubleview President and CEO Farshad Shirvani in the release. Part of the requirement for that permit was "meeting the requirements for consultation with First Nations."

"Exploration in this district has been carried out for more than half a century and Tahltan Drilling Services has been contracted for all of Doubleview's drilling to date," Shirvani said in the release.

Day said Tahltan Nation Development Corporation, which is in part owned by the Tahltan Central Council, has "terminated its relationship" with Tahltan Drilling Services Corporation, and that the drilling company "has been asked to change its name to remove any confusion that its involvement in a project could indicate Tahltan support."

Day acknowledged that drilling in the valley has happened, but said it has "rarely with Tahltan consent."

"I would like to thank the companies that have stopped work there when requested earlier this year," he added.

"Our aim is to resume drilling as quickly as possible and prove up a world class deposit for our shareholders," Shirvani said.

Shirvani did not return messages by deadline.

“I hope other exploration companies take notice and are more respectful towards the Tahltan Nation in the future,” said the Tahltan Central Council release.

Many Southeast Alaska tribes, fishermen, tour operators and environmental organizations have for the last two years been vocal in their concerns about transboundary mining — British Columbian mines in watersheds that flow into Alaska. Last weekend, residents of Wrangell and Southeast Alaska traveled up the Stikine River for a blessing ceremony around the one-year anniversary of the Mount Polley spill. Salmon Beyond Borders, a coalition of many of those Southeast Alaskans, on Wednesday organized a dinner meant to emphasize transboundary rivers’ importance. A water blessing ceremony took place at noon Sunday on Sandy Beach in honor of the Mount Polley spill anniversary.

- Contact Juneau Empire outdoors writer Mary Catharine Martin at maryc.martin@juneauempire.com.

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