

Polls show concern over transboundary mining, desire for action

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Salmon Beyond Borders and SkeenaWild, groups from Alaska and British Columbia that have opposed mining in BC and Alaska's transboundary river watersheds, recently received the results of two polls they say show a clear desire for action on both sides of the border.

The two polls, one in Alaska and one in B.C., were commissioned by the groups and conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. Some highlights from a press release include:

- Nearly three-quarters of Alaska respondents expressed concern about a mining waste spill in B.C. affecting shared watersheds that drain into Alaska, with the number jumping to 86 percent for Southeast Alaska respondents.
- Seventy-six percent of Alaska respondents want Alaska to have a seat at an international table to address concerns about upstream B.C. mining in shared transboundary watersheds. Forty-five percent said their vote for a member of Congress hinges on elected officials pushing for this seat at the table.
- Sixty-five percent of British Columbians polled were less likely to support mines in northwest B.C. that could affect the integrity of Alaska's water quality.
- Alaska (72-90 percent) and B.C. (85-95 percent) respondents emphatically endorsed several specific reforms, including a mandatory, industry-paid clean-up fund, mining no-go zones in sensitive areas such as key salmon watersheds, and the assurance that mines have full funding and plans for clean-up, closure and long-term tailings maintenance and water treatment prior to getting operating approval. The measures had strong support among Republicans, Democrats and Independents, the release said.

These results are a clear call to action for Alaska's leaders, the group spokespeople said.

"I urge leaders in Alaska and Washington, D.C. to take note that three-quarters of Alaskans polled want an equal seat at the table with B.C. to ensure our concerns about upstream B.C.

mining are addressed in shared Alaska/B.C. transboundary watersheds. The involvement of the International Joint Commission, established under the Boundary Waters Treaty, is the obvious choice to provide this table that will assist in developing permanent protections for water quality and fisheries in this region,” said fisherman and Salmon Beyond Borders spokeswoman Heather Hardcastle.

Three-quarters of all B.C. respondents said reforming B.C.’s mining laws would actually protect jobs and revenue by, for example, ensuring a waste spill doesn’t endanger other key industries, like tourism and fishing. Fifty-four percent of B.C. respondents polled said B.C. mining poses real risks to people’s health, the environment and local tourism and fishing industries that outweigh the jobs and economic benefits the mining industry provides; 68 percent of B.C. respondents said conservation should be a higher priority than development. Greg Knox, Executive Director of SkeenaWild, said, “These results show the people of British Columbia are not willing to give mining companies social license to proceed with projects if they believe salmon, water and wildlife on either side of the border could be at risk. The Mount Polley disaster and ongoing acid mine drainage from the Tulsequah Chief mine in the Taku River watershed also confirm the need for much tougher regulations and enforcement in B.C., as well as greater financial assurances to pay for accidents.”

The Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research live-interview survey involved 805 B.C. adults eligible to vote, including an oversample of 200 residents of Northern British Columbia, and was conducted between Aug. 19 and 30. The sample is subject to a margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is higher among subgroups. Its live survey of Alaskans involved 500 registered Alaskan voters during the same period and is considered accurate within a margin of error of +/-4.4, 19 times out of 20.

For additional information on the Alaska poll, see <http://salmonbeyondborders.org/press-releases> and for more information on the British Columbia poll, see <https://skeenawild.org/news>.