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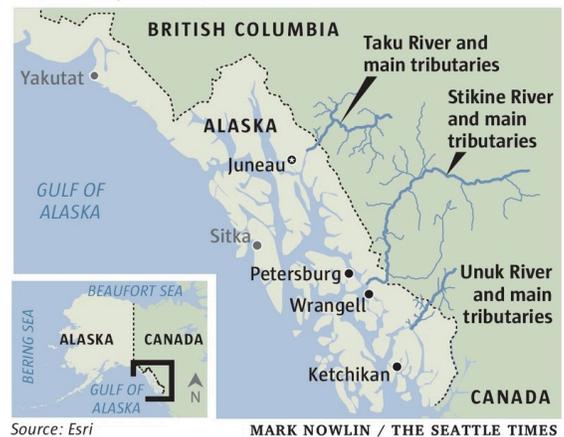
How B.C. mining could hurt Northwest fishermen

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Taku, Stikine and Unuk rivers

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By
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Special to The Times

AS a second-generation commercial fisherman my life has always revolved around salmon. Although a resident of Washington, I have spent summers fishing in Southeast Alaska since I boarded my parents' boat as a 2-week-old.

My livelihood depends on healthy salmon runs, something we have struggled to maintain here in Washington. Now,

Alaska's salmon also face major threats, from unprecedented development proposals across the border in British Columbia.

Though I catch Alaskan salmon a few hundred miles north, I've seen how Western Washington's economy has reflected the strength of Alaska's salmon runs. Fishermen across the Pacific Northwest have cautiously sighed with relief at the delayed, but not dead, Bristol Bay Pebble Mine proposal. In part, we have U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., to thank. She spoke out against the Pebble Mine at a 2014 rally at Seattle's Fishermen's Terminal. But now, an even bigger, quieter storm is brewing in Southeast Alaska.

Sailor, take warning: The headwaters of the Taku, Stikine and Unuk Rivers — Southeast Alaska's major salmon-producing rivers — are in British Columbia, where up to 10 major mining proposals dot the map of these watersheds. One mine is already operational, with nine other projects in various stages of exploration and permitting. I rely on these rivers, flowing from B.C. into Alaska, to provide the clean water and fish habitat for my summer catch.

The scariest part? Alaska and the U.S. currently bear all the risk and none of the reward from these large-scale mines, with no way to protect ourselves from a catastrophic event. It's not if, but when, mine disasters will occur.

I learned of the disaster at [B.C.'s Mount Polley mine](#) during the middle of our fishing season in August 2014. Months later, I saw the horrific footage of the toxic slurry that was released into the Fraser River watershed, just north of my home in Bellingham. The formerly untainted waterways were devastated in an instant. I shuddered imagining a similar scene unfolding in Southeast Alaska.

Last November, I spoke on a panel at Seattle's Pacific Marine Expo — the annual trade-show epicenter of the Pacific fishing industry — about my concerns regarding large-scale mining development in B.C. Of the thousand exhibitors that week, not a single fisherman, seafood processor or marine supplier could avoid negative economic impacts if Southeast Alaska experienced a disaster like Mount Polley. Just weeks before, as if to put a finer point on it, Brazil experienced a tailings dam (an embankment used to store byproducts of mining operations) failure that devastated not only an entire town, but 400 miles of river before mine waste reached the Atlantic Ocean.

Given the widespread concern as B.C. mines continue to be rapidly developed, we seek action. We need Cantwell — this time joined by her Washington state congressional colleagues — to once again stand up for Washington jobs and Alaskan fishermen in the face of this unprecedented development in British Columbia. We need to establish guaranteed protections that B.C. mines will not impact Alaskan waters and need financial guarantees that, if they do, fishermen and American taxpayers aren't left with the daunting cleanup bill.

As Cantwell and Alaska Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski recently noted in their joint keynote at the January Arctic Encounter Symposium in Seattle, "What's good for Alaska is good for Washington."

Let's also remember: What's bad for Alaska is bad for Washington.

Thousands of Alaskans are calling on Murkowski to bring this issue to the U.S. State Department to enforce the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909 and to receive a federal

review of the region from the International Joint Commission.

I support this call from Alaskans and I ask our state's elected officials to support Murkowski in maintaining the integrity of our Pacific salmon states.

Joel Brady-Power went to sea aboard his parents' boat as an infant. At 22, he purchased the F/V Nerka from them and direct-markets salmon in Western Washington.