



Letter: International agreements needed with B.C.

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The issue of B.C. mining in the transboundary Taku, Stikine and Unuk watersheds has finally gotten some national attention, with the New York Times recently publishing an article demonstrating the threats to Alaska.

Although it is encouraging to see our governor paying more attention to this issue and working on an agreement with B.C., this approach is limited in what it can do. This issue involves an international border, several levels of government, international treaties and resources of great significance to Alaska and the US, so it cannot be solved just by voluntary agreements between Alaska and B.C.

A strong, international agreement is needed to protect our interests. Many Alaskans are urging the use of the Boundary Waters Treaty and its International Joint Commission as the best way to do this. But, although the state isn't opposed to an IJC, it has not really supported its use, nor has the state worked closely with our congressional delegation and State Department to bring more pressure to bear on B.C. and Canada.

The statement is not necessarily bad, but it is surely limited in what it can do. It can't compel best mining practices so that we don't have another Mount Polley disaster; can't provide financial assurances to ensure mines are closed and monitored properly or to ensure that any damage to Alaska's resources are cleaned up and paid for; doesn't give Alaskans an equal seat at the table with B.C. Mining companies and B.C. like this since it won't make them change what they're doing.

This is why there is a near consensus across Southeast Alaska that the involvement of our congressional delegation and State Department is needed to obtain specific, enforceable measures from B.C. and Canada. And, this assistance would help the state eventually negotiate a much better statement with B.C., and would strengthen our negotiation position.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, has so far been supportive of establishing an IJC for the transboundary region. I urge her to take the next step and work with Secretary of State John Kerry to engage with the Canadian federal government to make this happen.

Matt Boline

Fly fishing guide, Juneau