



## **Southeast Alaskans deliver transboundary mining letter, MOU comments to State**

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It's a matter of sequence.

Southeast Alaskans involved on the issue of transboundary mines Wednesday delivered a letter to Governor Bill Walker and Lt. Governor Byron Mallott urging them to join municipalities, tribes, fishermen, the Alaska congressional delegation and thousands of Alaskans in asking the U.S. Department of State and the Canadian federal government to work together on stronger international safeguards for water quality, fisheries and communities in shared watersheds, according to a press release from Salmon Beyond Borders. The group is a coalition of tribes, first nations, business owners, fishermen and Southeast Alaska residents concerned about the impact of British Columbian mines in watersheds that flow into Alaska. The letter specifically recommends the State of Alaska seek help before finalizing non-binding negotiations with BC.

The group doesn't want to be critical of the administration - it's grateful Walker and Mallott have gotten involved and sought citizen input - but its primary feedback on the Memorandum of Understanding the state is working on with BC is that sequence is important, Heather Hardcastle, director of Salmon Beyond Borders, said over the phone. The group would first like to see the state work with Alaska's congressional delegation - which Hardcastle said has expressed interest - in bringing the matter to Secretary of State John Kerry, who can recommend it to the International Joint Commission, which handles disputes under the 1909 Boundary Waters Treaty.

"There's no rush for an MOU when that can never be binding," Hardcastle said. The federal government is the only way the state and its residents can get, for example, a financial guarantee should a BC tailings dam breach like that at Mount Polley Mine in 2014 adversely affect Alaska's fisheries or economy, she said.

"It's not that we're opposed to increased communication (outlined in the MOU); it just seems like there's potential to do this backwards," Hardcastle said. "Why wouldn't we use the best tool in the toolbox that we have?"

The letter delivered yesterday was signed by nearly 100 entities across Southeast Alaska and beyond, such as municipalities, tribal citizens, commercial and sport fishermen, seafood processors, and sport fishing and tourism companies, according to the release. The letter

urges the Alaska governor to “...wait to transmit or sign this Statement of Cooperation until Secretary Kerry has communicated to Canada’s new Minister of Foreign Affairs a request for action under the Boundary Waters Treaty.”

Lieutenant Gov. Mallott has reached out to concerned residents and groups, as well as the BC government, hosting BC Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett’s visit to Alaska in August. That visit resulted in the goal of an MOU between the state and the province. The governor’s office in November signed a separate statement of understanding with BC, not the one a citizen’s group was a week earlier asked to comment on.

The governor’s office’s help is “key” to the success of the request for federal involvement, the Salmon Beyond Borders release notes.

“...Local agreements such as the recently renewed Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation (MOU) between Alaska and British Columbia signed by Governor Walker and Premier Clark on November 25th, and the associated, not-yet-finalized draft Statement of Cooperation on Protection of Transboundary Waters (SOC), are inadequate to comprehensively address this transboundary issue,” the press release says.

In addition to Wednesday’s letter, thousands of Alaskans have requested the State of Alaska, Alaska’s congressional delegation and the U.S. State Department secure enforceable protections for the Taku, Stikine and Unuk watersheds through action under the Boundary Waters Treaty and with the involvement of the International Joint Commission (IJC).

“We want the administration to remember (all these people have) asked for IJC involvement – and to please do it now,” Hardcastle said, noting the election of new Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, President Barack Obama’s last year in office, and the fact that Kerry has heard about the issue indicate this is a good time for IJC involvement.