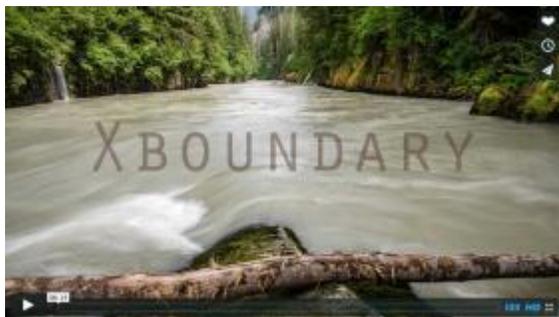


Mack: Safety before profits, when it comes to transboundary mines

Evening event at UAS tonight will share real-life stories, feature expert panel, Xboundary video

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Courtesy image

A screenshot from the beginning of Xboundary, created by filmmaker Ryan Peterson. This film will be shown at "Stories and Science of our Transboundary Rivers," from 7-9 p.m. tonight at the University of Alaska Southeast's Egan Lecture Hall.

By [MARY CATHARINE MARTIN](#)

JUNEAU EMPIRE

Eight months ago, Jacinda Mack watched as the Mount Polley dam failure released a flood of toxic water and tailings into the Fraser River. That year, for the first time in their people's history, many Secwepemc people couldn't fish for the salmon that fought their way upstream. Today, they still don't drink the water. And though the fish have been declared safe to eat, she's not sure when they'll feel comfortable doing so again.

Today Mack, who is the Northern Shuswap Tribal Council Mining Coordinator, will speak at the University of Alaska Southeast about the possibility of the same thing happening to rivers that flow into Alaska.

"Part of this is to help share that story, and to make a connection directly between what's happening in B.C. mines and here in Alaska," she said.

British Columbia has been pushing development of its natural resources, and is opening or pursuing several mines that lie in the headwaters of several rivers — the Stikine, the Unuk and the Taku — that flow from Canada into Alaska. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources has been in communication with the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office and officials, and offers comments on mines on an individual basis. Large Mine Project Manager Kyle Moselle has said any concerns the department does have with individual mines are responded to and addressed. Many Southeast Alaskans disagree, citing deregulation and the Mount Polley disaster. A panel that reviewed the Mount Polley tailings dam failure said many of B.C.'s tailings facilities do not follow best practices.

“When the Mount Polley disaster happened, it became very clear that there were a lot of things that needed to change,” Mack said. “It could no longer be denied that mining reform has to happen in B.C., for health and safety. Safety before profits.”

Dave Chambers, a mining expert, is the president of the Center for Science in Public Participation. He'll be participating in the event as a panelist.

“I've been criticized for describing the possibility of such an accident,” he said. “I have been told to my face that that couldn't happen, but it did. It says things aren't like they should be.”

B.C.'s Minister of Energy and Mines, Bill Bennett, has said B.C. will be following the panel's recommendations. But Chambers points out that with the Red Chris mine, which received an interim permit to operate in the Stikine River watershed just three days after the report's release, “there are several aspects of that project that fly in the face of the recommendations of the panel.”

To spread the word in Southeast Alaska and outside it, filmmaker Ryan Peterson will show a six-minute film — titled “Xboundary” — at tonight's event he made on transboundary mines. Over the course of the filming, he floated the Unuk River, on which the giant open pit and underground Kerr-Sulphurets-Mitchell mine is planned, “from source to sea.” He also interviewed commercial fishermen, tribal representatives and others in several Southeast communities.

“It's intended to bring to light an issue that's not as widely understood in Southeast Alaska as many feel it needs to be,” he said. “You don't see it, because our topography is so dramatic here (transboundary mining issues are) hidden.”

Meanwhile, the fear in the community of Likely and the Shuswap First Nation lingers, Mack said.

“I think people are still very afraid because the effects are cumulative and it will be several years before we know the full effects,” Mack said. “Think of the complexity of a habitat - how many years it took to get that complex. They (salmon, trout, and other fish) are basically starting from ground zero. It's going to be long time before the area recovers, if it ever does.”

The talk, "Stories and Science of our Transboundary Rivers," is from 7-9 p.m. tonight at the University of Alaska Southeast's Egan Lecture Hall. There's a \$5 suggested donation; students attend for free.

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