



KETCHIKAN DAILY NEWS

A DIVISION OF PIONEER PRINTING CO., INC.

501 Dock St./P.O. Box 7900 • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

(907) 225-3157 • Fax (907) 225-1096 • news@ketchikandailynews.com

Fish effects

By **MATT ARMSTRONG**

Daily News Staff Writer

The planned openings of several large mines in British Columbia could have significant, negative impacts on rivers that flow from Canada to Southeast Alaska and that are critical to the economy in the region, according to several presenters at a Thursday night event in Ketchikan.

More than 50 people came to the Southeast Alaska Discovery Center to hear information from Salmon Beyond Borders, the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Working Group, local residents and scientists about the potential impact of the mining operations on Southeast Alaska.

Several large mines are in various stages of planning and development in northern British Columbia, in the headwaters of some of Southeast Alaska's largest and most productive wild salmon rivers: the Taku, Stikine and Unuk, according to a news release issued Oct. 20 in advance of a series of meetings on the topic held throughout the Southeast.

Some of the presenters used the Aug. 4 incident at the Mount Polley Mine in British Columbia — where a tailings pond failed, spilling millions of cubic liters of water and slurry into Polley Lake, and contaminating the part of the region's water system — as an example of what could happen if any of the planned mines fail.

Carrie James, a member of the Ketchikan Indian Community and a subsistence fisher, said during her prepared remarks that the proposed mines — and the acidic waste materials they would generate — in British Columbia pose serious concerns for all Alaskans and that the "entire state would be under attack" if the mines open.

"We rely on pristine, clean water to subsist off the land," James said about the Native subsistence lifestyle. "I couldn't imagine how we'd be able to carry on our culture if we weren't able to live off our land and sea. ... Our people have been stewards of the land since time immemorial for the last 10,000 years, and now, in the new era of statehood and extracting resources from the ground, we are all under the threat of mining. The commercial fishermen, the subsistence fishermen, the sports fishermen, tourism. We would all be affected if we had mining contamination."

Jill Weitz, with Salmon Beyond Borders, said during the presentation that the effort to put safeguards in place to protect the environment from possible mining contamination is not a campaign against mining or an effort to put one industry ahead of another.

"We're here tonight to discuss a matter that influences each and every one of us as Alaskans, from business owners to traditional and customary (water system) users through all of Southeast Alaska," Weitz said.

She added that the two proposed tailings dams for the proposed KSM mine — located 20 miles upstream from the Misty Fiords National Monument on the Unuk River — would be larger in size than the Hoover Dam in Nevada. The KSM mine would be an underground and open-pit facility.

Geophysicist and mining expert Dave Chambers and fisheries biologist Sarah O'Neal also spoke during the presentation.

Those in attendance had the opportunity to ask questions of the presenters at the end of the program. Questions included what effect the mines would have on underground water that flows to Alaska, who decides what responsible mining practices would be, and what safe ways to store and contain mine waste might be.

U.S. Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Mark Begich, Congressman Don Young, the National Congress of American Indians, local tribes and most major fishing groups in Southeast Alaska are asking the U.S. State Department to get involved. They want to see adequate protections put in place to safeguard Southeast Alaska's lucrative seafood and tourism industries as well as customary and traditional lifestyles dependent on clean water and intact habitat, according to the release from Oct. 20.

Additional information is available online at: www.salmonbeyondborders.org.