



WRANGELL SENTINEL

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Mine 'dots' become lines in B.C.

To the Editor:

As I look east from Southeast Alaska, I see a picturesque, pristine landscape of mountain peaks, often snow covered - Canada. I was shocked to see a B.C. development map and learn that just beyond my view are mining developments – old, new, proposed and some vast, that dot the seemingly untouched land beyond. The mine 'dots' become lines when coupled with other projects across the border. Of course these very watersheds that support B.C.'s mining industry also support our fishing communities and way of life here. Being downstream is not the ideal position. Alaskans are coming together to ask British Columbia and Canada to enhance their mining protections so our watersheds will be the highly productive ecosystems of fish, wildlife, water and scenery that we all cherish and wish for future generations.

Alaska Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott hosted a group of officials and staff from British Columbia recently, which included B.C.'s Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett, who, as I understand, is one of two people that make the final decision on B.C. mine development projects.

As a representative of our regional commercial salmon gillnet group, United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters (USAG), I was invited to meet with the Canadians, where I asked Minister Bennett, "How would our fishing fleet be financially compensated if we experience financial losses due to real or perceived water quality issues?"

Minister Bennett replied, "I don't know."

Although I appreciated his honesty, his answer does not make me feel better about being downstream.

We need assurance that our waters will be protected and that if, in the tragic event something unforeseen does happen in B.C. that affects us downstream, Alaskans will be compensated. No amount of financial compensation would erase or make up for severe habitat losses but we need to have some assurances in place.

Many folks around SE Alaska are not shocked by the 'dots that turn into lines' on B.C.'s development map because they've been watching these changes for years, even decades. I sincerely appreciate their dedication and the efforts of Alaska and BC officials to come together to talk about our concerns. We now understand that this transboundary waters issue is an international one that needs to be handled by the federal governments of America and Canada. In order for our federal government to take this on, they need to hear from us. If you are concerned about these mines and our water quality, I encourage you to write our federal delegation and tell them. Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan and Representative Don Young each have a contact form on their website that's fairly easy to use. If they hear from us, they will have more backing to take to Secretary Kerry and others who can help make needed assurances with Canada. I too will be writing them along with other regional groups who are actively working to keep us all fishing and eating.

Cynthia Wallesz

Executive Director, United Southeast Alaska Gillnetters