



Southeast depends on its rivers

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Southeast Alaska's livelihood is dependent on its marine ecosystem, especially its salmon runs. As a fishing guide and resident, I know that fishing is Southeast Alaska's livelihood. While the majority of our most productive salmon rivers — such as the Taku, Unuk and Stikine — have their headwaters in British Columbia, we need to ensure BC manages its side of the rivers properly to ensure healthy fish runs across all of Southeast Alaska.

Alaska residents should be extremely concerned about BC's plans for massive industrial development in these headwaters. KSM, Red Chris, Tulsequah Chief, New Polaris, Big Bull, Schaft Creek, Galore Creek and more mines are already proposed or in development. The scale of this development is massive, and despite the implications of Mount Polley, BC is going full-speed ahead. While these mines plan on only being in production for a handful of years, their tailing ponds are immortal and must be controlled for my entire lifetime, my kids' lifetime, my grandkids' lifetime, my great-grandkids' lifetime ... and, well, you can get the point.

I urge Gov. Bill Walker and Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott to act as soon as possible before much of this development becomes a done deal. We need real action from BC to improve its mining practices and long-term guarantees that BC mining won't harm us downstream. We need to know that a Mount Polley-type of disaster won't happen in the Taku, Stikine or Unuk.

I've read BC Mining Minister Bill Bennett's two "My Turns" in the Empire, and his words gave me zero confidence that BC's mines won't harm Southeast Alaska. He continues to believe that the BC mine review and permitting processes will protect Alaska's interests. Aren't these the same processes that have given us continued pollution from the Tulsequah Chief and the Mount Polley tailings dam failure?

I am not surprised by the lack of any real seat at the table for Alaskans as BC moves rapidly ahead with its plans and I appreciate that the new governor of Alaska is taking a different and more educated approach toward these issues than our previous governors. And with very little time Instead of more "dialogue" as Bennett wants, I urge the state of Alaska to protect our state for future generations, as we must act on the Boundary Waters Treaty and assemble the International Joint Commission.

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